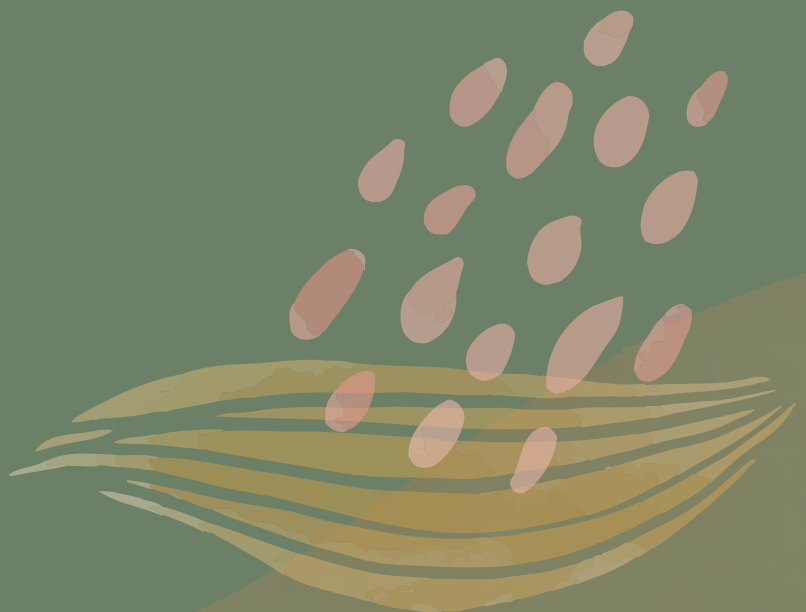


CHO RESPONSE TO DFV – TOOLKIT

STRENGTHENING THE RESPONSE OF COMMUNITY HOUSING ORGANISATIONS TO DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE

MODULE TWO



STRENGTHENING THE RESPONSE OF COMMUNITY HOUSING ORGANISATIONS TO DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE

MODULE TWO

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THE RESPONSE TO DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE BY COMMUNITY HOUSING ORGANISATIONS

Community housing organisations are in a unique position to identify and respond to domestic and family violence across their tenancies. Community housing organisations have a responsibility as social housing providers to support their renters to sustain their tenancies, prevent homelessness from occurring and have a duty of care to respond in a way that promotes safe and secure tenancies.

Access to affordable, safe and secure housing is a key step towards recovering from the experience of family violence. Community housing organisations are uniquely placed to support safe housing for victim-survivors. They may be one of the first organisations to become aware of a domestic and family violence situation and are well placed to identify risk and refer adult and child victim-survivors to appropriate support services.

Community housing organisations have a critical role to play in working with the victim-survivor and their domestic and family violence support services to maximise safety through considering key aspects of safety that could be supported through skilled housing management. Ensuring that the victim-survivor is supported to make informed choices and decisions is an empowering approach at a time when they might feel that life is spinning out of their control.



A policy template on domestic and family violence is included in the tools section of Module 2.

Image elements by pikisupersta on Freepik

WORKING AS PART OF AN INTEGRATED SERVICE SUPPORT SYSTEM

Women and children experiencing domestic and family violence benefit when services are integrated across all sectors. This is especially true for women in rural and regional areas, women with disability, women from a culturally and linguistically diverse background and Aboriginal women, all who face additional barriers to accessing services.

On the ground, integrated service delivery can take on many forms, including formal or informal networking, collaboration, communication and partnerships between key services across sectors (e.g. law, welfare and health). Models can range from co-location of services, to referral pathways, to loose liaison arrangements between services.

The model established in Victoria is the only example in Australia of a government designed framework aimed at supporting workers across the service system to better understand their responsibilities to undertake risk assessment and management, including information sharing and working collaboratively.¹

It is acknowledged the core business of community housing organisations is to provide safe affordable social housing by successfully sustaining and managing tenancies. While community housing organisations are committed to preventing (where possible) and responding to domestic and family violence, it is important that the separation between tenancy management and support is maintained. All community housing organisations must understand the domestic and family violence provisions established within their Residential Tenancies Act. This toolkit has developed a factsheet that identifies each state and territory’s provisions.

In developing this Toolkit, it is hoped the tools will enhance the capabilities of community housing providers to recognise and respond to domestic and family violence. However, effective responses will require efficient collaborative arrangements and partnerships between community housing organisations and domestic and family violence support providers.

While there are existing partnership arrangements; it is critical for community housing organisations to continue to forge new relationships in order to refer tenants / applicants when domestic and family violence is recognised. An appropriate response may require a range of partnerships, such as:

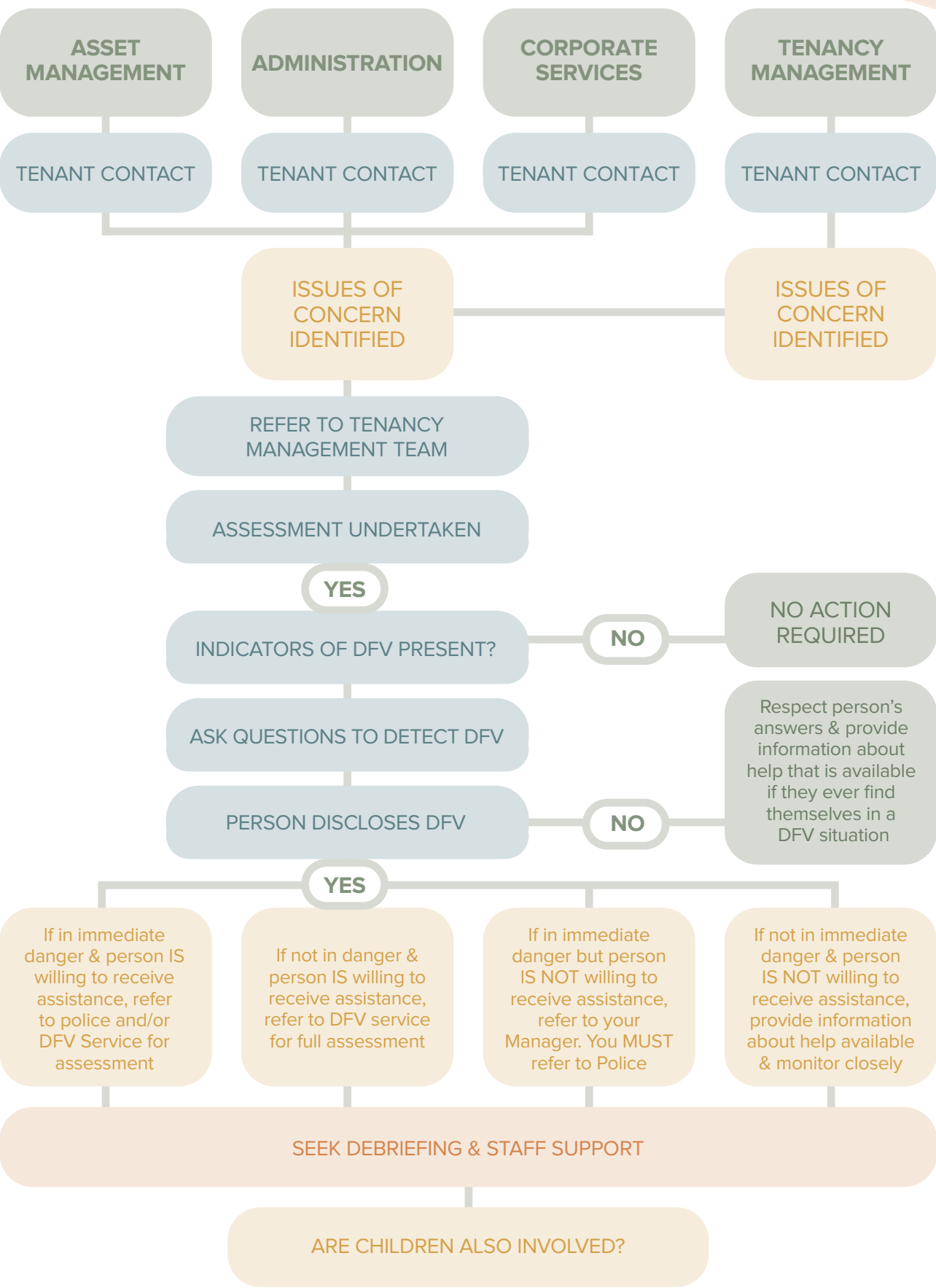
- referral to outreach services
- specialist homelessness services
- pathways between transitional housing and community housing organisations
- facilitating priority transfers when domestic and family violence is identified
- referral pathways to government mainstream organisations

Community housing organisations will also need to have knowledge of a range of health, finance and legal services that are sensitive to the needs of victim-survivors of domestic and family violence.

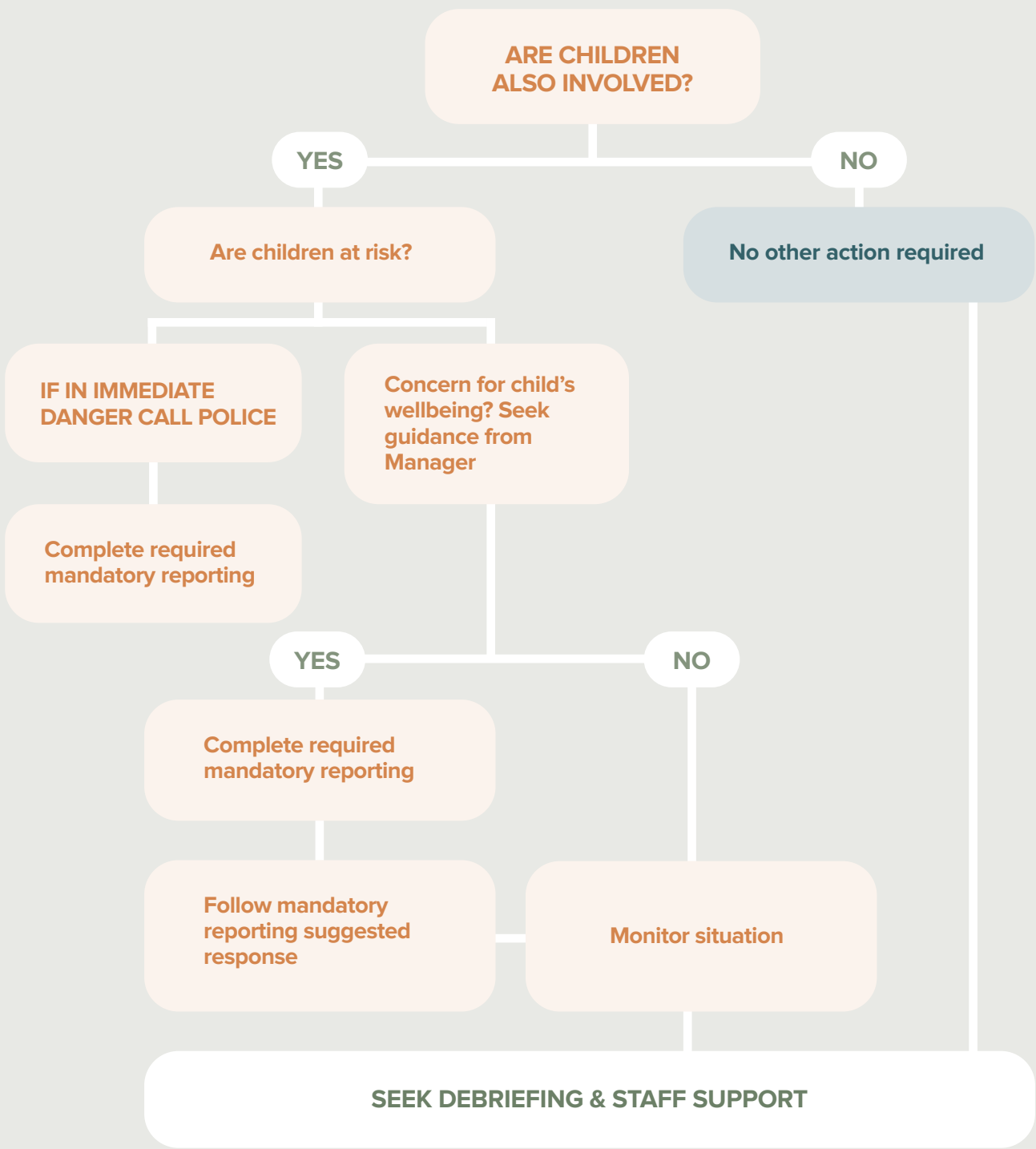
The following flowcharts highlight one approach that can be implemented as a community housing organisation endeavours to build an integrated model of service delivery with domestic and family violence services and victim-survivors.

1. <https://www.vic.gov.au/maram-practice-guides-and-resources>

RESPONDING TO TENANTS IDENTIFIED AT RISK OF EXPERIENCING DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE (DFV) WITHIN COMMUNITY HOUSING

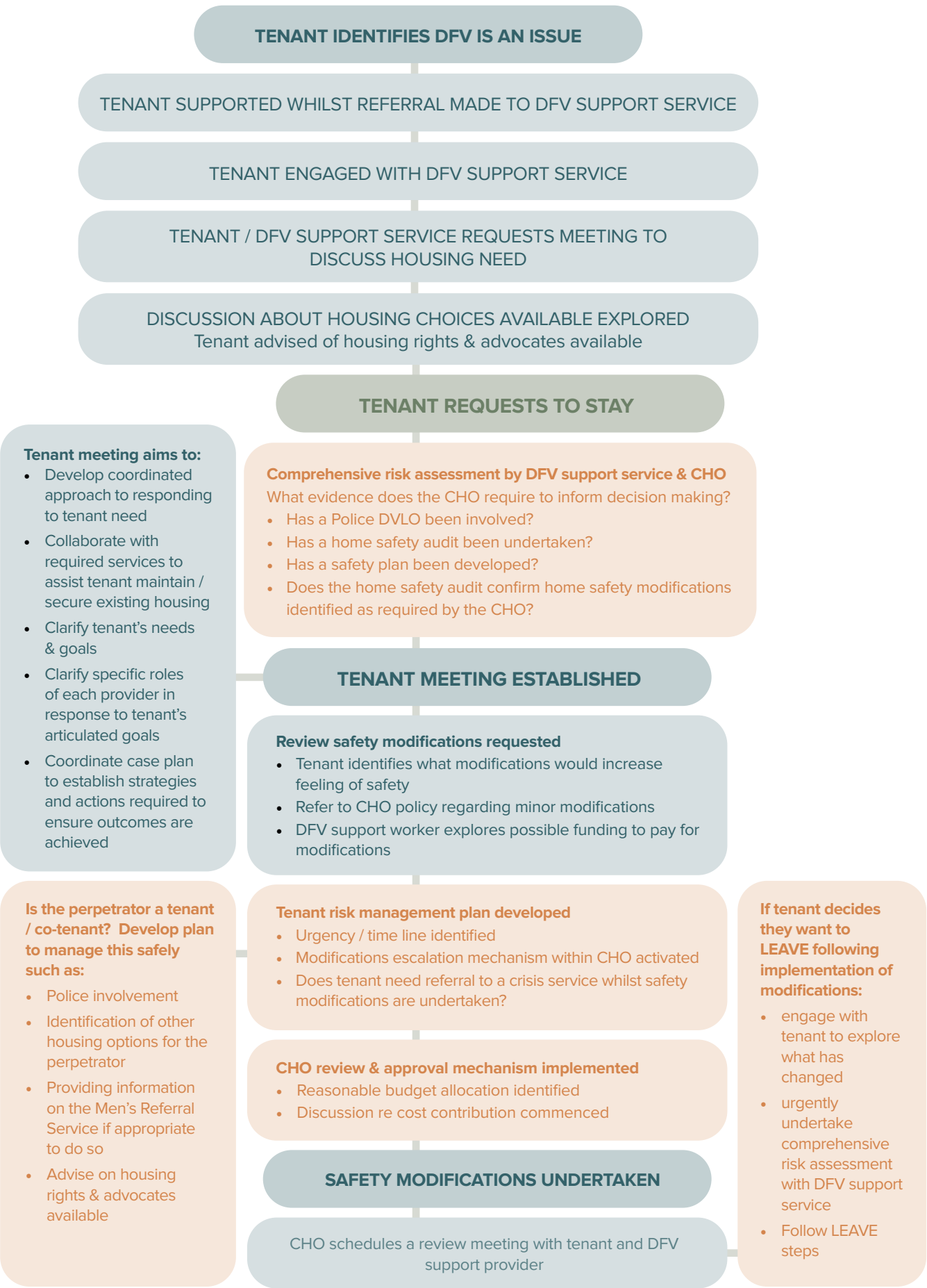


RESPONDING TO DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE WHEN CHILDREN ARE IDENTIFIED AS LIVING WITH A TENANT



NB: Community housing organisations must follow the legislated child protection policies and practice in their state. This documented approach is just one example of how to respond to concerns for child safety.

SUPPORTING DECISION MAKING ABOUT HOUSING CHOICES BY TENANTS EXPERIENCING DOMESTIC & FAMILY (DFV): TENANT REQUESTS TO STAY





UTILISING A TRAUMA INFORMED APPROACH

Having a trauma informed lens is essential when engaging with victim-survivors. Domestic and family violence can lead to significant trauma. Community housing organisations must look for ways to minimise the impact of this through their service delivery approaches.

Community housing organisations can work from a framework of not “what is wrong with you”, but “what happened to you?” By keeping this principle at the forefront of the service response as staff communicate and work with women, it supports them as they respond to behaviours that may be challenging and, in many circumstances, different from what might be expected.

WHAT IS TRAUMA INFORMED CARE?

Trauma-informed services do no harm i.e. they do not re-traumatise or blame victims for their efforts to manage their traumatic reactions or behaviours. They also focus on communicating a message of hope and optimism that recovery is possible.

An underlying principle of trauma-informed care is that the prevalence of trauma means that the possibility of it in applicants and tenants needs to be considered including when trauma has not been acknowledged or reported. A trauma-informed approach is an important framework for engaging with all clients because in prioritising the values of safety, trustworthiness and empowerment, the principles of trauma-informed care also foster optimal service delivery more broadly.²

So what is a trauma-informed care response? Sweeney and Taggart describe trauma-informed approaches as ‘an organisational change process, focussed on preventing re-traumatisation within services.’³

Trauma-informed care and practice:

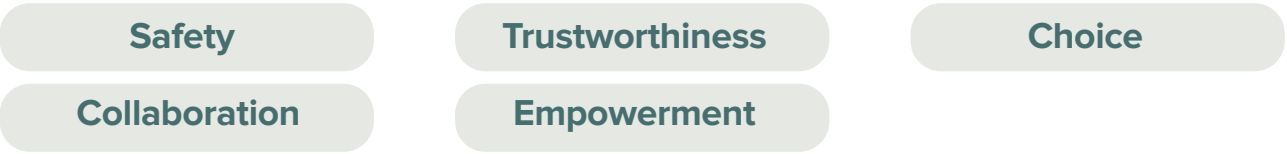
- Is not clinical treatment
- Recognises that many problems, disorders and conditions are trauma-related
- Requires staff training to act appropriately on this awareness
- Rests on the foundational principle of ‘do no harm’
- Understands the effects of stress, anxiety and violence on the brain and body
- Considers what has happened to a person rather than what is ‘wrong’ with a person
- Regards ‘symptoms’ as outgrowths of coping strategies
- Is sensitive to the client’s engagement levels and to the way in which a service is delivered (not just what the service is
- Works with (rather than ‘doing to’ or ‘for’) the client
- Understands safety from the perspective of the client’s experience of trauma and supports safety planning from the experiences and skills of the client

A trauma informed care response is about a ‘whole of society’ approach in which we all have a basic sense of ‘how not to make things worse’.

2. Blue Knot Foundation 2020 Organisational Guidelines for Trauma Informed Service Delivery: Authors Kezelman C. A. & Stavropoulos P. A. p 8
3. Sweeney, A. & Taggart, D. (2018). (Mis)understanding Trauma-informed Approaches in Mental Health, Journal of Mental Health (25:5), pp. 383-387

CORE TRAUMA–INFORMED PRINCIPLES

The core trauma-informed principles on which all interactions with trauma survivors are based are:



The principle of safety relates to emotional as well as physical safety. This means that it requires the physical space to be welcoming as well as functional.

The principle of trustworthiness requires service sensitivity to client needs at all levels of contact. This requires being attentive to the ways services consistently communicate their reliability to clients.

The principle of choice means that services should provide choice to clients at all levels at which this is possible. This means that the service needs to be receptive to client choice and communicate this to clients, even when there seem to be minimal possibilities for choice.

The principle of collaboration requires consistently communicating a sense of ‘doing with’ rather than ‘to’ or ‘for’ a client.

Services and programs need to enable the principle of client empowerment. Working to embed client empowerment across a service or program requires a ‘trauma lens’ being applied to all aspects of the service to ensure that all policies and procedures foster client empowerment.

OBLIGATIONS UNDER THE RESIDENTIAL TENANCIES ACT

All states and territories have some provisions with their Residential Tenancies Acts to drive the housing response to domestic and family violence.

It is crucial that community housing organisations understand the provisions in operation in their state or territory to ensure that they maximise opportunities to support and protect the tenancies of victim-survivors. A template policy on domestic and family violence is included in the tools folder of Module 2 for modification to meet specific state or territory requirements.

A Template policy on domestic and family violence is included in the tools folder of Module 2 for your modification to meet specific state or territory requirements.

CASE STUDY

WHAT WAS YOUR EXPERIENCE TRYING TO ACCESS HOUSING SUPPORT?

“I really struggled to get the help I needed as I didn’t fit within any of the requirements. I presented well and was able to say what I needed. My problem was that I had an investment property with my ex-husband that we had on the market. This asset meant I didn’t meet eligibility criteria for government assistance. I was advised that until I was eligible for Centrelink payments, I was not able to apply for social housing, even though the investment property was untenanted and was generating no income for me and my children. We were couch surfing for 12 months as there were no affordable private rentals in the area. I wanted to stay put as this is where the kids had friends and school. It was also where I had friends.

When my ex-husband finally stopped making mortgage payments and the bank acted, I was able to access Centrelink which changed what I was able to access. I could finally apply for social housing - I was eligible for rental assistance. It was hard to find a property as so many properties in the region had been rented by people moving to the country as part of COVID-19 which has really put the price of rent up. I finally managed to find a property to rent and me and kids have been doing well. When I reflect on what happened, it was a really traumatic time finding I was not eligible for much support and had to constantly fight for what I needed to keep me and the children safe.”



ISSUES THAT COULD INDICATE DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE IS OCCURRING WITHIN A TENANCY

UNDERSTANDING TACTICS OF CONTROL

Domestic and family violence involves a pattern of abusive behaviour that aims to scare and control victims. The words ‘pattern of control’ are often used to describe this kind of violence. Patterns of control can take different forms in different relationships.⁴

Coercive control is a term developed by Evan Stark to help us understand domestic violence as more than a ‘fight’. It is a pattern of behaviour which seeks to take away the victim’s freedom, to strip away their sense of self. It is not just women’s bodily integrity which is violated but also their human rights.⁵

While all forms of abuse are about power and control, coercive control is a strategic form of ongoing oppression that can affect many areas of a women’s activity by limiting access to money and other basic resources.⁶

Coercive control is a violation of ‘rights and liberties’ such as right to physical security, to live without fear, to dignity and respect, to social engagement and personal autonomy.

4. <https://www.1800respect.org.au/violence-and-abuse/domestic-and-family-violence>

5. <https://www.cedarnetwork.org.uk/about/supporting-recovery/what-is-domestic-abuse/what-is-coercive-control/>

6. Stark, E (2007). Coercive Control: How Men Entrap Women in Personal Life. By Evan Stark. New York, New York, Oxford University Press, Inc.

HOW CAN COERCIVE CONTROL PLACE A TENANCY AT RISK?

While it is understood the effects of coercive control can have a lasting negative impact on the psychological and emotional well-being of victims, it can also impact in the short-term by potentially placing a victims’ tenancy at risk.

The following information highlights some of the tenancy difficulties domestic and family violence victim-survivors might experience in sustaining their tenancy as a result of coercive control. In understanding the complexity of such a coercive dynamic, it is anticipated that community housing organisations will be able to consider a flexible approach by adapting their policies and procedure to respond to the needs of a tenants’ circumstances.

Regardless of the nature and cause of the breach, sensitivity in responding to breaches should always be used. However, in instances where you are aware or suspect that domestic and family violence may be a factor, particular consideration should be made in relation to such a sensitive approach, being mindful to ensure that your organisation’s response does not revictimize the victim. Involving a support worker to assist in determining how to respond to the breach would be appropriate. If the tenant/s aren’t linked with supports, it would still be appropriate to seek advice from your local domestic and family violence service. Information can be shared in a generic manner if the tenant/s have not given consent to share their information.

RENT ARREARS

Exerting control over household or family income by preventing and/or withholding the victim’s access to her income may result in accumulated rent arrears and potentially place the tenancy at risk. Tactic of intimidation, blame and guilt place the victim into a position of vulnerability and dependency on the perpetrator. This indicator of domestic and family violence can be particularly difficult to identify and understand if the victim is the sole occupant of the tenancy and the community housing organisation isn’t aware of an existing partnership. It is important to be aware that the perpetrator does not need to be residing in the property in order to exert control over the victim’s finances.

INABILITY TO ATTEND APPOINTMENT

One of the consequences of controlling a victims’ income is the persons reduced ability to attend appointments due to not being able to pay for transport or being prevented from leaving the house by the perpetrator. Such non-attendance can signal disinterest and service providers may begin to question the tenants’ commitment to sustaining their tenancy and maintaining positive relations. It is important that community housing organisations consider the range of possibilities a tenant might be experiencing that reduces their ability to attend appointments. If non-attendance becomes an issue, and if it is safe to do so, it is recommended to attempt to engage with tenants in an easily accessible location.

DAMAGE TO PROPERTY

Damage to property is often used as a threatening and intimidation tactic by the perpetrator. It is necessary to be mindful that damage to property can be an indicator of domestic and family violence. This indicator can be reported to tenancy staff by contractors and asset staff to further investigate. It can be difficult to determine whether damage to property has been caused by domestic and family violence or other means. The nature of the damage will be a good indicator of the cause. This toolkit gives some guidance on the types of damage that are typically caused by domestic and family violence behaviour.

NOT REPORTING MAINTENANCE AND REPAIRS

An additional issue relative to property management is a tenants’ potential reluctance to report repairs and maintenance. Such a reluctance can be the result of the victim being fearful to engage external services in the family home through fear of being questioned about how the damage was initiated resulting in potential disclosure of the existence of domestic and family violence.

RESTRICTIONS ON EXTERNAL CONTACT

Similar to the above, the perpetrator may prevent the victim from contact with external services as a tactic to reinforce isolation and to maintain the dynamic of domestic and family violence as a private issue. Fear of possible disclosure and the perpetrators potential reprisal intensifies the victims’ isolation and exacerbates their limited sense of control.

NOISE DISTURBANCES

Reporting of regular noise disturbances can be an indicator of domestic and family violence. During a community housing organisation’s investigation, it is not uncommon for victims to deny the existence of domestic and family violence or that they are at risk of harm due to the fear of perpetrator retaliation. In such a situation the victims’ future tenancy may be at risk. Wherever possible it is important to encourage and facilitate the process of referral to a support service.

Other important factors to consider are the following:

CHILD PROTECTION

The power and control wheel describes how children are often used to coerce, threaten and intimidate the victim into submission. Such tactics can prevent victims from seeking assistance through fear of safety for their children and/or fear that the children may be removed from her care. As a mandatory reporter, community housing organisations are required to respond to child protection by making a mandatory report to the child protection agency where a child is at significant risk of harm. While this action may be in contrast to the tenants’ decision, it can be a catalyst for intervening in domestic and family violence and assisting the victim to safety.

GUILT AND SHAME

A lack of family, friends and broader social networks impacts a victims’ ability to engage and seek assistance. Understanding the immobilising effects of guilt and shame can assist community housing organisations to respond in a flexible way to the needs of tenants and operationalise the victims/survivors process to address domestic and family violence.

TENANT REPAIRS THAT MIGHT INDICATE DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE IS OCCURRING WITHIN A TENANCY

The following list of repairs might indicate domestic and family violence is occurring within the tenancy:

- broken door
- broken lock
- smashed lights
- hole punched in the wall
- lost keys
- damage to bathroom door / lock
- broken windows
- any other damage that appears to have been caused by violence

ACTION

If any of these repairs are notified, a referral should be made to the Tenancy Manager for investigation with the tenant to explore and undertake any further planning.

A victim-survivor may be reluctant to report repairs and maintenance due to fear, guilt and shame of being questioned about how the damage was caused, or by the perpetrator preventing external people from entering the property. Scheduled property inspections and rent reviews provide an opportunity to check in with the tenant about maintenance, repairs and their safety.

TENANT COMPLAINTS OR CONCERNS THAT MIGHT INDICATE DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE

The following tenant complaints or concerns might indicate domestic and family violence is occurring within a tenancy:

- nuisance and annoyance complaints
- general phone calls received expressing concern about tenant safety or some other issue indicating a potential domestic and family violence issue

ACTION

If one of these complaints or concerns is notified, make a referral to the Tenancy Manager for investigation with the tenant and further planning.

HOUSING PROFESSIONAL OBSERVATION

The following observations might indicate domestic and family violence is occurring within the tenancy

- obvious signs of trauma in adults, including bruising such as on the face or arms
- signs of trauma in children or young people, including wariness or distrust of adults, bruises / burns / fractured bones, excessive clinginess, excessive wariness
- rent arrears, missed appointments, property damage, failure to report property damage and noise disturbances
- other recurring tenancy issues

ACTION

If one of these complaints or concerns is notified, make a referral to the Tenancy Manager for investigation with the tenant and further planning.

CASE STUDY

DID YOUR CHO APPEAR TO UNDERSTAND DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE AND WHAT WAS HAPPENING FOR YOU?

No they had absolutely no understanding what so ever. They only seemed to understand domestic and family violence if I was getting beaten. I was new to the country and didn't have great English. I came to Australia on an arranged marriage and didn't understand anything about the housing system. My husband had sponsored me to come into Australia. My husband had shown my family pictures of a really great house that he said he owned that we would be living in.

When I arrived in Australia, he said his business was struggling so he had to rent "this place" for a while. I found it very hard. I spoke to the community housing staff a couple of times, saying that my husband was "pestering me" too much. The housing worker just laughed at me, saying she wished this was "happening in her marriage".

They showed no awareness of what I was trying to say. They seemed to have no understanding of culture, gender roles or religion within non- anglo relationships and what this might mean. They didn't pick up on any of the clues that I was giving them. I had also asked them where I might be able to get access to a computer and internet, telling them that my husband changed the wifi password each morning so that I had no access to the internet. They didn't ask me any questions about this and clearly weren't concerned by what I had told them. They suggested I could go to the library to access the internet. They finally understood I was experiencing domestic violence when I presented to them with a black eye.



EFFECTIVELY COMMUNICATING THE COMMUNITY HOUSING ORGANISATION RESPONSE TO DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE

It is important that victim-survivors are aware of and understand the position that a community housing organisation holds on domestic and family violence and the role that it will take in supporting victim-survivors to be safe and sustain their tenancy.

One way to do this systemically is to include information in all tenant sign up packs that provides information and advice on domestic and family violence, the community housing response, and information on a range of support services. As this information is included in all tenant sign up packs, it minimises the risk to victim-survivors having this information as all tenants receive it. It also identifies that community housing staff have a level of awareness and understanding of domestic and family violence and knowledge of a range of support services.

Information should also be included on the range of support services available to perpetrators of domestic and family violence so that they are aware of the supports available to them should they choose to seek assistance in changing their behaviour.



A factsheet: Tenant information and advice – domestic and family violence is included in the tools folder of Module 2.

CASE STUDY

ENGAGING IN RESPECTFUL CONVERSATIONS

Community housing organisations play an important role in supporting victim-survivors talk through their housing needs as a result of domestic and family violence. It is important to remember that every interaction with a tenant is an opportunity to identify domestic and family violence. This includes tenancy sign-up, property inspections and rent reviews.

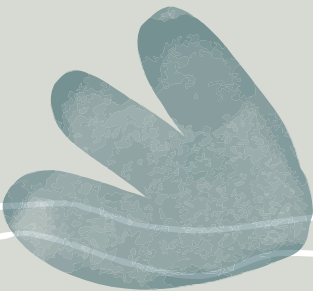
It is important to understand the intensely emotional nature of domestic and family violence and the impact that this can have on communication. It is helpful wherever possible to build a sense of rapport with person. While this may be difficult to achieve due to limited opportunity, the following questions can assist to create a space for dialogue.

It is also really important that community housing staff do not ask about domestic and family violence in the presence of a perpetrator. Doing so could increase risk. Opportunity could be sought to meet with the tenant separately. If this is difficult, you could state that it is policy to see people privately in the office or another safe location.

It is important to think through how a community housing organisation approaches tenant communication and connection during periods of lockdown as has been experienced with the COVID-19 pandemic. Whilst lockdowns may be increasingly less likely to happen moving forward, it is likely that community housing organisations may continue to modify their work approach with reduced face to face contact for a period of time.



Guidelines how to check in safely with tenants during periods of lockdown is included in the tools section of Module 2



The following provides some ideas about how you might explore with the tenant what could be happening and the supports that they might need.

ASK

Sometimes asking a simple question can provide an opportunity for the person to talk about the situation.

- *Are you ok?*
- *Has anyone in your family done something to make you or your children feel unsafe or afraid?*

LISTEN

Listen and show empathy without judgment. Acknowledge the courage it has taken to share this information and let them know they are believed.

- *Thank you for telling me. I know it can be really difficult to share. I believe you.*

NAME IT

Acknowledge what they have said and name it. Reinforce that it is not the victim-survivor’s fault. Place the responsibility for the violence on the perpetrator. Perpetrators often lead victim-survivors to believe they caused or provoked the violence.

- *No one should be made to feel afraid. It is not your fault – using violence is a choice.*
- *You and your children have a right to safety*
- *What you have just described is domestic and family violence and support is available.*

If it looks like domestic and family violence is occurring within the tenancy, the community housing organisation should:

1. Reassure the person that you believe them and state clearly that the violence is not their fault and all people have the right to be safe.
2. Acknowledge any challenges and difficulties they have spoken of and validate their efforts to protect themselves and their family members.
3. Let them know that there are different services and options for people who experience domestic and family violence
4. Ask if they would like your help

EXPLORE THE USE OF TENANT TRANSFERS

It is important to explore with the victim-survivor the housing options available to them to enable them to make informed decisions about their housing situation. Tenant transfer is one option that could be considered with the victim-survivor.

With the domestic and family violence support service working with the community housing organisation and victim-survivor, exploration can be undertaken to identify risks and safety planning. The meeting would aim to:

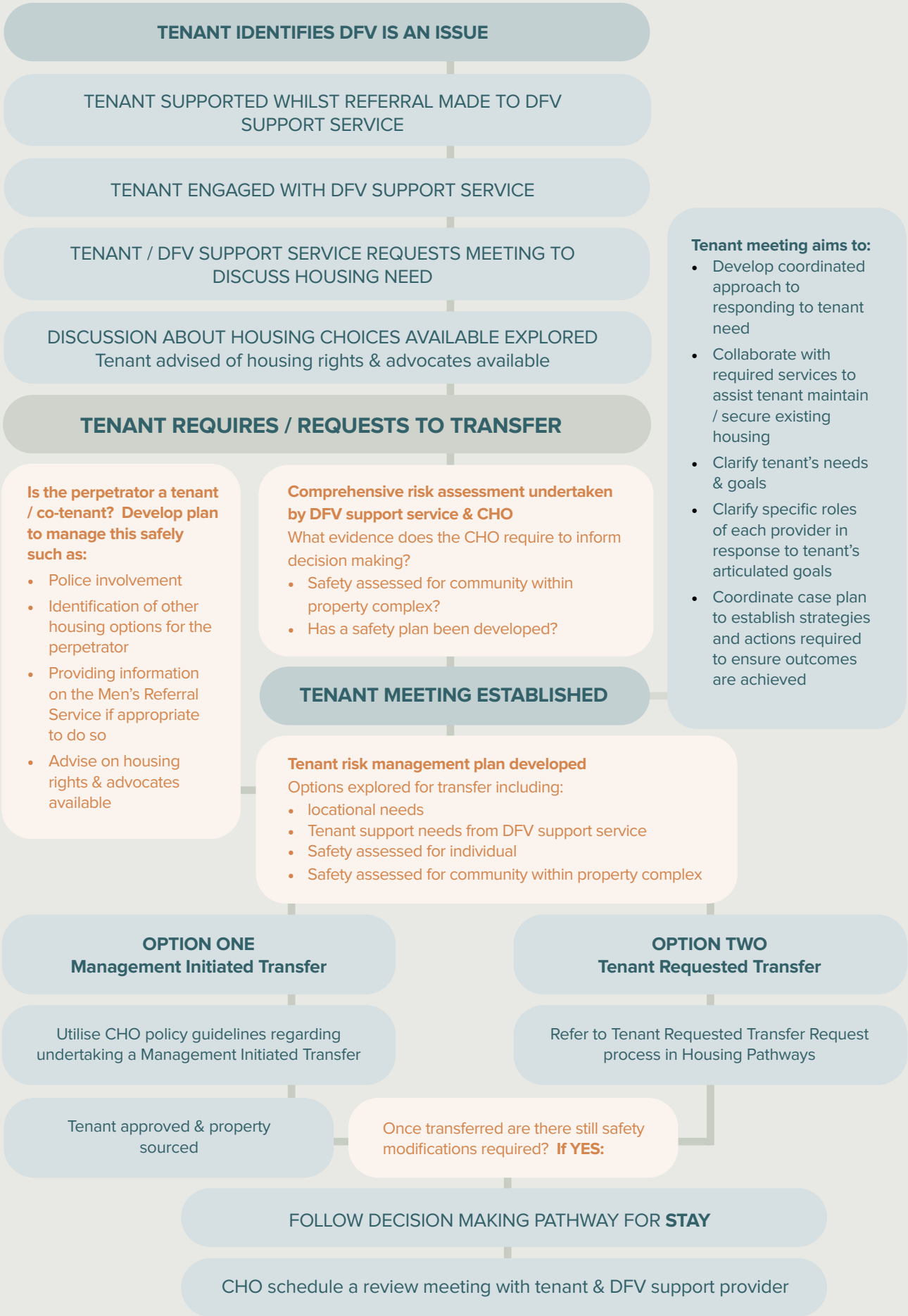
- **Develop** a coordinated approach to responding to tenant need
- **Collaborate** with required services to assist the tenant to maintain / secure housing
- **Clarify** the tenant’s needs and goals
- **Clarify** the specific roles of each provider in response to the tenant’s articulated goals

Key aspects to explore when considering a tenant transfer include:

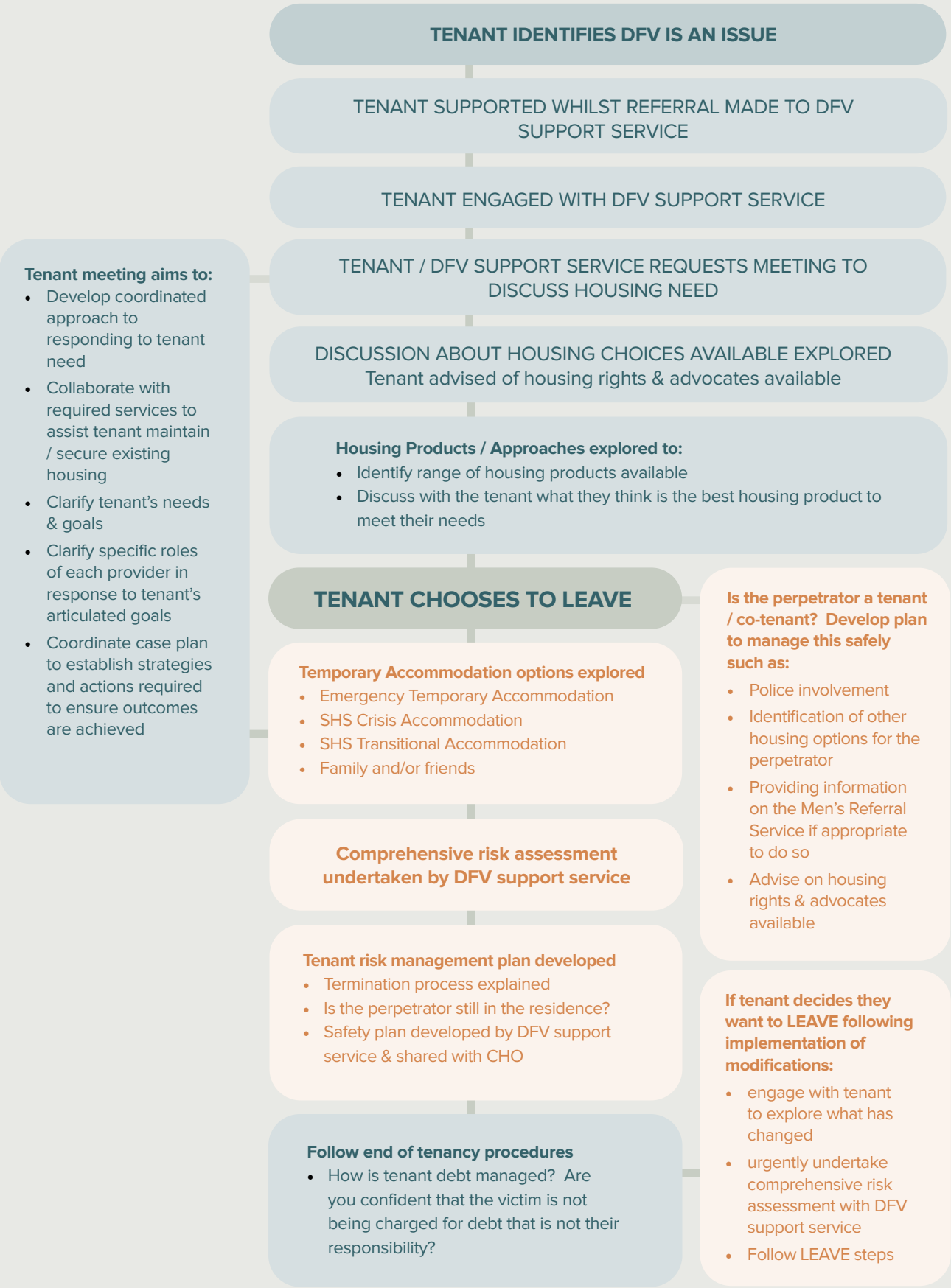
- **Locational** needs
- **Access** to support from a domestic and family violence support service
- **Safety aspects** assessed with victim-survivor
- **Safety assessed** for community within the property complex

The following flowcharts provide an example of an approach that might be taken as a community housing provider explores options to transfer properties with a victim-survivor. The flowchart that explores the response if a tenant chooses to leave also provide guidance on how to respond if the victim-survivor decides that they want to stay in their property after they have given notice to terminate their tenancy.

SUPPORTING DECISION MAKING ABOUT HOUSING CHOICES MADE BY TENANTS EXPERIENCING DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE (DFV): TENANT REQUIRES/REQUESTS TO TRANSFER



SUPPORTING DECISION MAKING ABOUT HOUSING CHOICES MADE BY TENANTS EXPERIENCING DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE (DFV): TENANT CHOOSES TO LEAVE



WORKING WITH PERPETRATORS OF DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE

It is important to be aware of the possibility that a tenant could be using violence. The identification of perpetrators can be complex.

Community housing organisation staff will come into contact with people who they believe may be perpetrating family violence because of:

- The person's words or actions or behaviour towards family members, for example, speaking or answering for the family member, preventing access to an interpreter, blaming or undermining, property damage particularly to doors and locks
- Disclosures from family members, for example adult or child victim-survivors sharing that they are fearful and/ or have experienced domestic and family violence from the perpetrator
- Reports through another source of information, such as reports of noise disturbances or concerns from neighbours, or information from other service providers

In any circumstances, a community housing organisation worker's objective is to identify behaviour that may present a risk to victim-survivors, and to contribute to their safety and risk management.

A community housing organisation worker should:

- **Recognise** the presence of observable signs and indicators of family violence. For example, violence-supporting attitudes or narratives.
- **Practice** in a way that provides consistent information and messages to indicate violence will not be tolerated or accepted. This should be a principle guiding practice rather than influencing direct conversation with perpetrators about violence being unacceptable, which may escalate the risk for a victim-survivor.
- **Engage** the perpetrator in a manner that does not escalate risk to a victim-survivor (which requires specific training) or support collusion, including by using appropriate language and skills to provide information about supports available for the perpetrator and not disclosing information from the victim-survivor or another source. Consider speaking to the perpetrator when the victim-survivor is not present.
- **Monitor** a perpetrator's use of violence.
- **Seek** secondary consultation and share risk-relevant information with a service that specialises in risk assessment and management, including services that work with perpetrators of violence (for example, the Men's Referral Service).
- **Report** concerns about the impact of the perpetrator's violence on any children to Child Protection or other relevant authorities.

It is possible that a renter may disclose that they are perpetrating or using family violence against others. It is important to not ignore a disclosure from a perpetrator, but it is not recommended that workers challenge perpetrators about their use of violence without the appropriate training and expertise as this could increase risk to the victim-survivor/s.

Acknowledge what has been discussed and offer to make a referral to an appropriate service such as the Men's Referral Service. If a person is in immediate danger, call 000.

CONSIDER PROVIDING HOUSING TO ELIGIBLE PERPETRATORS OF DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE

In many cases, community housing organisations may house perpetrators of domestic and family violence.

Providing housing to perpetrators of domestic and family violence is an important component of risk management as homelessness is a risk factor that may lead to further harm towards victim-survivors. It is acknowledged that for change to happen, men need to have physiological needs (air, food, drink and shelter) and safety needs (protection from the elements, security, law, stability, freedom from fear) met to enable them to be in a position to seek to change their beliefs and behaviours.

Housing perpetrators of domestic and family violence also presents an opportunity to ensure they are visible and monitored within the service system. However, it is important to avoid acting in a way that removes perpetrator accountability, such as victim-blaming, punitive approaches to the victim-survivor, colluding with violence supporting narratives and attitudes or obscuring perpetrator responsibility.

SAFETY MODIFICATIONS TO A PROPERTY

All community housing organisations have a focus and commitment to minimising the risk of homelessness for tenants. Data tells us that women and children escaping domestic and family violence are the largest group of individuals seeking assistance through the homeless service system.¹

Supporting a victim-survivor to stay in their own home minimises the risk of disadvantage, discrimination and poverty that can result from homelessness.

If domestic and family violence is identified, a safety upgrade to the property might be appropriate to support the victim-survivor to stay safely in the property. Victim-survivors may be able to access home safety upgrades through a domestic and family violence service such as changing locks and keys, installing security screens and sensor lights and CCTV cameras.

1. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/homelessness-services/specialist-homelessness-services-annual-report/contents/about>

PRACTICE REFLECTION: EXPLAINING DECISIONS MADE

A client of a tenancy support legal service shared their story. They talked about the fact that their ex-partner had been convicted of stalking them and they wanted to feel safer at home. They lived in an apartment managed by a community housing organisation and approached their tenancy manager to see if they could extend fencing on the balcony to give more privacy and protection. The CHO response was prompt, and the answer was no, this was not possible. As the client had a lot of legal matters underway relating to domestic and family violence, she did not feel as though she had the energy to fight this decision legally and so continued to live, feeling threatened.

A better practice response would have seen the CHO engage in a conversation, exploring what might be possible to increase a feeling of safety. They should have explained if there were occupational safety issues impacting their ability to install fencing.



A home safety assessment checklist is included in the tools section of Module 2.

This checklist enables the community housing organisation to review the safety of a home’s layout, accessibility and security features to help inform tenancy planning.

When a request has also been made to the community housing organisation to increase safety in the property by a domestic and family violence support service, there are a range of questions that might be explored with the support service and tenant.



A checklist has been developed to help explore the request and is included in the tools section of Module 2.

It is important that community housing organisations act promptly to enable safety planning and modifications to happen as quickly as possible.

FACILITATING ACCESS TO SUPPORT SERVICES

To support good practice, it is important to find out who your local support services are to enable strong service partnerships to be established. Community housing organisations will routinely have working relationships established with a range of support services as part of provision of quality housing management services. It is important to ensure a strong relationship is established with a local domestic and family violence support service to support collaborative practice.

Community housing organisations can also have posters displayed in reception areas of housing offices that provide information on support services for both victim-survivors and perpetrators of domestic and family violence.

They can order promotional materials for display <https://shout.finsbury.com.au/ustore/74/Home> and https://ntv.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/NTV1922_MRS-campaign-A4-posters_print-ready_FA.pdf

It is also important for community housing organisations to be aware of the response to domestic and family violence through other services such as financial institutions. The Australian Banking Association has developed an **Industry Guideline: Preventing and responding to financial abuse (including elder abuse)**. This explains to the banking industry what financial abuse can look like and how it can impact customers and sets out standards for how the banking industry might respond to customers impacted by domestic and family violence. A community housing organisation might suggest to the victim-survivor that they talk to their bank about their situation to explore support available to them to help manage financial abuse that they have been experiencing.

MONITORING PROGRESS IN BUILDING CHO RESPONSE TO DOMESTIC & FAMILY VIOLENCE

Community housing organisations have a strong commitment to strengthening their practice to deliver high quality and responsive housing services to their community. As such, building their evidence base to enable them to understand both the strengths and weaknesses in their practice response requires some planning around how to monitor practice and service effectiveness in responding to domestic and family violence.

Domestic and family violence is inclusive of any behaviour, in an intimate or family relationship, which is violent, threatening, coercive or controlling, causing a person to live in fear. It is usually manifested as a pattern of control or coercive behaviour. It can include but is not limited to physical abuse, emotional abuse, verbal abuse, social abuse, economic abuse, psychological abuse, technology facilitated abuse, cultural and or religious practices abuse.

Exploring business systems and practices that can be established to increase monitoring and reporting on the incidence of domestic and family violence across a community housing organisation to provide a benchmark for reviewing practice is important. The National Community Housing Standard on responding to domestic and family violence provides a road map to help guide community housing organisations in the development of monitoring approaches.



A checklist, available in the Tools section of Module 2 has been developed to provide some guidance on areas to consider as part of a review of data collection options as community housing organisations monitor their impact in identifying and responding to domestic and family violence across their housing portfolio.



A checklist outlining potential data fields that a community housing organisation might want to consider collecting as it builds its data capture regarding domestic and family violence is available in the Tools section of Module 2.

MAINTAINING TENANT CONFIDENTIALITY

Community housing organisations are committed to protecting their tenant’s right to privacy and confidentiality. Data collected through this tool and its storage should comply with principles expressed in the Privacy Act 1988 (Cth) and organisational confidentiality and privacy policies.

FOLLOW UP

Follow up should be undertaken by the community housing organisation after each incident of domestic and family violence. This is to follow up on the victim-survivor’s safety and to monitor outcomes to assist the community housing provider to deliver appropriate good practice housing services. Sensitivity should be used during any follow up action or discussion.

OUTCOME MEASUREMENTS

Outcome measures that could be used to track and monitor the practice response could be:

Quantitative measures

- How often domestic and family violence has been identified (i.e. through damage to property, rental arrears, neighbours complaining about noise or other issues)
- How often appropriate action is taken in response to domestic and family violence incidents. Such actions might include:
 - The number of reports made to police
 - The number of reports made to domestic and family violence services
 - The number of referrals made for medical treatment
- The number of tenancies sustained post domestic and family violence incident
- No further physical injuries have been sustained by the victim

Qualitative measures

- Does the victim feel safe in seeking assistance from the community housing provider?
- Was the victim satisfied with the level of knowledge and understanding from the community housing organisation about their situation

