

CHO RESPONSE TO DFV – TOOLKIT

SUPPORTING COMMUNITY HOUSING ORGANISATION STAFF

MODULE THREE



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As we grow our understanding of the widespread social prevalence of domestic and family violence, it is important for community housing organisations to consider their duty of care to maintain the health, safety and wellbeing of their staff.

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BUILDING UNDERSTANDING AND AWARENESS OF DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE

It is important that community housing organisations provide foundation knowledge on domestic and family violence to all staff as part of the induction process. This includes the causes, impacts and indicators of domestic and family violence.

Depending on their role, staff may also be trained on:

- Identification and screening to strengthen understanding in how to appropriately identify and respond to a disclosure of domestic and family violence
- How to work collaboratively with support services to manage domestic and family violence risks
- Supporting employees who identify they are experiencing domestic and family violence, including development of safety plans and reviewing safe work environments

SUPPORTING THE WORKFORCE

It is important to have policies and procedures in place to support the workforce when employees are responding to domestic and family violence. Staff members may experience vicarious trauma when responding to people experiencing crisis or trauma.

Community housing organisations can support staff through:

- **Debriefing** – staff should be encouraged to participate in debriefing. This should be timely and can be done with a colleague, the team or service manager.
- **Supervision** – staff should be provided with formal supervision that provides opportunities to discuss and reflect on practice when responding to domestic and family violence. This can be with a team leader or manager, as part of group supervision or with an external provider.
- **Employee Assistance program (EAP)** – staff should be aware of the EAP available to them to support them explore issues that may arise for them as they respond to domestic and family violence. All staff should be made aware of how to access the EAP.

RESPONDING TO STAFF WHO DISCLOSE DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE

Domestic violence is not a private issue, and it is the responsibility of community housing organisations to, wherever possible, prevent it by providing a safe and supportive workplace for all employees.

Domestic and family violence occurs in every part of the community and may affect employees both directly and indirectly in the workplace. Domestic and family violence becomes a workplace issue when it impacts on the safety, health and well-being of an employee or their co-workers.

As an employer, the community housing organisation response to employees experiencing domestic violence should be aimed at protecting confidentiality, providing appropriate support, challenging the isolating nature of domestic and family violence and preventing further violence.

The experience of violence or abuse in an employee’s personal life may affect their attendance or performance at work. Responding to these issues will require sensitivity to ensure the employee’s experience of domestic and family violence and the impact this may have on performance is taken into consideration when addressing attendance and/or performance issues.

- **Victim-survivor disclosures:** Disclosing experiences of domestic and family violence can be difficult. It is essential that staff who disclose their experience of domestic and family violence are listened to, believed and given control over how to manage their situation. This includes being able to access the support options available to them. Any disclosure must be managed sensitively and confidentiality maintained.
- **Perpetrator disclosures:** engaging with perpetrators on their use of violence can be complex and fraught with risks if not approached in a skilled and appropriate way. Community housing organisations are encouraged to contact the Men’s Referral Service on 1300 766 491 or 1800 RESPECT on 1800 737 732 for advice and support.

RESPONDING TO DISCLOSURES

In addition to providing a safe and supportive environment, community housing organisations should ensure that managers and people likely to receive disclosures of family violence receive appropriate training and guidance.

Staff receiving those disclosures can support staff in the following ways:

- Provide information on the EAP
- Provide information on external family violence resources and support services
- Provide information on domestic and family violence leave options and support employees to access them
- Support changes to duties and responsibilities when requested
- Support changes to work arrangements to enhance the staff member’s safety
- Support the employee to develop a workplace safety plan



A template workplace safety plan is included in the tools folder of Module 3.

DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE LEAVE POLICY

Most people who experience family and domestic violence in Australia are in paid employment¹.

Family and domestic violence can affect workplaces in a number of ways.

- It is a workplace health and safety issue. If a perpetrator harasses or stalks a person at their workplace, it can put the employee and their co-workers in danger.
- Workplaces can be a place of refuge for employees. Employees experiencing family or domestic violence often rely on their workplaces to be a safe place to escape violence and a crucial source of social and economic support.
- It is a workplace productivity issue. Employees experiencing family or domestic violence might be more likely to take unplanned days off, arrive late or finish early. When they’re at work, they might also be less effective carrying out their work because they’re distracted, anxious or lack energy. Workplaces could also experience higher staff turnover rates.

1. ABS 2018 Labour Force Survey: Australian workforce participation rate is 65.7%.

The total business and productivity costs related to the impact of domestic and family violence was identified as \$1.9 billion² (\$860 million due to absenteeism of those experiencing violence, \$443 million due to perpetrator absenteeism and \$96 million in management costs).

All employees (including part time and casual employees) are entitled to 5 days unpaid domestic and family violence leave each year. The entitlement to unpaid domestic and family violence leave comes from the National Employment Standards³.

From 1 February 2023, employees of non-small business employers (employers with 15 or more employees on 1 February 2023) can access 10 days of paid family domestic violence leave. This includes part-time and casual employees.

Employees employed by small business employers (employers with less than 15 employees on 1 February 2023) can access paid leave from 1 August 2023. Until then, they can continue to take unpaid family and domestic violence leave.

2. <https://championsofchangecoalition.org/resource/playing-our-part-on-domestic-and-family-violence-taking-action-in-the-workplace>

3. <https://www.fairwork.gov.au/leave/family-and-domestic-violence-leave>

