

27 July 2020

Fortnightly Update from the Domestic Abuse Sector

Background

1. Every fortnight, Nicole Jacobs chairs a conference call with national helpline providers, second tier organisations, and Government Departments to share emerging trends, facilitate cross-sector working, and to escalate issues as required.

Service provision

2. **Call volumes into national helplines continue to far exceed pre-covid levels, with the National Domestic Abuse helpline run by Refuge reporting a 77% increase in calls in the month of June compared to the same period last year.** Calls remain complex, with low numbers of survivors calling helplines who currently live with their perpetrators, although this is starting to increase.
3. **Calls from women seeking refuge have also increased significantly in recent weeks, which is reflected in the paucity of available refuge spaces across England and Wales.** Pre-Covid, around 75% of referrals into refuge were declined, and it is anticipated to be even higher over this period, although data is not yet available.
4. **A phased return of face-to-face services is being progressed.** Safety measures are being established and there is an emphasis on survivor choice, with the option of remote support being kept available.

Funding and future policy

5. **Concerns persist about medium and long-term funding, and there are particular concerns about the availability of additional bed spaces beyond October when demand for refuge has been increasing in recent weeks.** Any update from Government on flexibility to this deadline would be strongly welcomed.
6. **The sector expressed strong concerns at the prospect of a separate domestic abuse strategy (proposed by the Home Office), as distinct from any new Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy.** The consensus from the domestic abuse sector was that a separate strategy would undermine the understanding of domestic abuse as a gendered issue, and one that needs a gendered approach. The current Strategy incorporates male victims and a separate Male Victims Position Statement still allows male victims and survivors to be recognised.
7. **There is significant work across Government which sector partners will need to contribute to, including the Comprehensive Spending Review, the new Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy, and a new Victims Funding Strategy.** Sector partners asked that requests are managed effectively between Departments given the huge strain they are currently under, and that appropriate links made between all these parallel pieces of work.
8. **The next DAC Covid-19 meeting will take place on 3 August**