

the need for their staff to access childcare alone. A significant proportion of staff are off sick or needing to self-isolate, requiring organisations to cover the costs of back-filling staff. Many have incurred significant costs in shifting to remote working which they don't have funding for. Services are concerned about safety and wellbeing for their staff, with the majority of refuges unable to access the PPE they need and many homes not set up to enable staff to have confidential conversations with women and children.

Women's Aid makes four immediate recommendations to government to ensure specialist domestic abuse services can cope with the challenge of COVID 19.

## **1. AN EMERGENCY CASH INJECTION OF AT LEAST £48.2 MILLION TO ENSURE ALL SPECIALIST DOMESTIC ABUSE SERVICES CAN COPE WITH COVID 19.**

This funding would be for specialist domestic abuse services in England, and therefore must be delivered alongside equivalent funding for Wales and wider VAWG services too.

We do not suggest a model for how this funding would be allocated, but this must be **designed and delivered in partnership with the specialist sector** to ensure it was equitable. As the scale of services differs so greatly, a fair funding allocation system - which recognizes the fact that smaller services have less resource and capacity to cope with shocks and face the greatest challenges in adapting to remote working - is crucial. Distributing funds by service size, income or turnover alone would fail to account for these challenges, so the allocation system must be designed and developed in partnership with the specialist sector in order to ensure it is flexible.

In recent years previous rounds of central government funding - including MHCLG emergency funding for safe and accommodation and the VAWG Transformation Fund - have been open to PCCs and local authorities to bid for in 'partnership' with local specialist services. Whilst the sector has seen examples of excellent local partnership working, we have also presented evidence to government of extremely poor practice - including specialist services (particularly those led 'by and for' BME women) excluded in partnerships and local authorities tendering out funds which were won in partnership bids with specialist services. It is therefore critical that government learns the lessons of previous funding rounds and **delivers an emergency cash injection directly to specialist services, and not through another tier of local authorities or PCCs** which risks additional bureaucracy and delay. It is also likely to exclude the smallest and most specialist services who already face severe challenges in responding to requests for data on demand, need and impact resulting from COVID 19 and may not have the capacity to participate in complex bidding processes.

Within a flexible and central fund, ring-fenced funding is required for services led 'by and for' black and minoritised women, migrant women, disabled women and LGBT survivors. Ring-fenced funding is essential for fulfilling duties under the Equality Act and Public Sector Equality Duty, which require public authorities to remove or reduce disadvantages experienced by people because of a protected characteristic and meet the needs of people with protected characteristics. Services led 'by and for' survivors with protected characteristics, such as BME and migrant women, are expert in meeting such specific support needs. However these services are often small, highly specialist and over the past decade have suffered disproportionately from budget cuts or competitive tendering practices which fail to value their unique expertise.<sup>3</sup> **Specialist 'by and for' organisations are often excluded within statutory funding processes. Their inclusion within the design of the funding allocation and the ring-fence is crucial to ensure emergency funding does not entrench social injustice further.** A complete ban on local authorities' competitive tendering for domestic abuse and VAWG services during COVID 19 will also be essential to deliver alongside the emergency funding settlement.

The estimate of £48.2 million is based on estimated costs for the 374 local domestic abuse service entries in England on Routes to Support, the UK wide VAWG service directory. The estimate consists of the following costs over a 6 month period: additional staffing costs for

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<sup>3</sup> Imkaan (2018) From Survival to Sustainability