

National Families Week: AASW calls on increased focus on family violence during COVID-19, and for a separate Medicare item

The AASW calls for an increased focus on family violence during this Family Violence Awareness Month, with the increased incidence of FV during COVID-19. In addition May 15-21 is National Families Week, and while this is a week to celebrate the protective and nurturing capacity of families, we also need to recognise the threats to families from gender-based violence and the added pressures caused by the current COVID-19 environment. AASW National President Christine Craik said, "We welcome the extra \$48.1 million announced on Friday, 15 May to address mental health during the current pandemic. , however, it is quite clear that more resources also need to be allocated to family violence, which we know increases during times of crisis. "There has been a rise across the globe in the incidence of family violence during this pandemic, and Australia has not been so lucky with this deadly and destructive toll. In the past month, family violence related hospital visits, increases in calls to emergency departments and increases in victims needing surgery for family violence related injuries have spiked across the country. This increase has been also seen in calls to women's legal services, calls to police, calls to men's help lines, family law court cases and frontline family violence services. In the past 10 days, we know of four women who have been murdered in family violence incidents, however there is still no official government death count for family violence deaths across the country as is the case for deaths related to road accidents or COVID-19. "We know that family violence results from attitudes and behaviours based on a belief that the genders are not equal, and from this, a sense of entitlement and control to use power over partners and children. For those who perpetrate abuse we know that during times of crisis, that sense of needing to control becomes focussed on those closest to them, with devastating results. We are seeing risk escalate, and opportunities for victims to escape that risk, decrease. "We call on the federal government to do much more for victim/survivors of family violence. We desperately need services and funding for long term recovery. We need additional funding for therapeutic services that have the ability to work longer term through family court and recovery. These services need to be provided by social workers and counsellors who are family violence accredited. Victim survivors need specialist assistance and are often further abuse by the system if the worker supporting them does not understand the nuances of family violence and control. "We also call on the government to consider a Medicare item number for family violence counselling and therapeutic services distinct from a general practitioner mental health treatment plan. There will be an increase in family violence related cases going through the family court as a result of this pandemic and we need to ensure that perpetrators can no longer use the presence of mental health plans to continue to abuse their victims as is the current situation in the family court." Christine will be hosting a discussion on COVID-19 and Family Violence for AASW members on Thursday, 28 May 2020 at 6.30pm AEST. AASW's credentialing program recognises specialised social work skills in family violence with its Accredited Family Violence Social Worker credential.

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