



Media Release

Green light for pilot program to keep victims of violence safe at home

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McAuley Community Services for Women (McAuley) believe the Victorian Premier's announcement of \$6 million funding toward the pilot of a new initiative, co-designed by victims of violence and some men who have used violence is a significant first step toward real systemic change.

Safe at Home is an EARLY INTERVENTION model that shifts the default system of helping women 'escape' violence to enabling them to stay in their home while actively disrupting the pattern of abuse.

Family violence is the single largest driver of homelessness for women in Victoria. In 2022-23, over 23,000 women and 13,000 children who had experienced family violence were assisted by homelessness services (AIHW, 2023). Each year in Australia, **7960** women are returning to live with people who use violence because they have nowhere affordable to live (Equity Economics, 2021).

Minister for Housing, Harriet Shing visited McAuley today and said, "We're continuing our work to provide housing, care and services to people most in need, in particular survivors of family violence."

The commitment from government is welcomed by McAuley, who have been advocating for the systemic change for several years and have been working closely with sector colleagues, victim-survivors and people who have used violence to codesign the pilot of Safe at Home.

McAuley currently operates refuge accommodation and provides outreach support after violence and CEO Jocelyn Bignold OAM is adamant that it's time for a broader conversation.

"Safety is always a priority but triaging women and children into over-burdened emergency accommodation away from their homes, schools and community support is not working. Family violence of all kinds is rarely a single event, it is often multi-generational and there are early warning signs. We need education to spot the red flags, intervene before safety becomes an issue and provide support and accountability for everyone at risk - including those who use violence."

Ms Bignold says input from those with lived experience was integral to the design of the Safe at Home initiative. "We have consulted extensively with our teams and women who have used family violence services to find out what works and what doesn't. It was important to include people who have used violence in those conversations too. They provided valuable insight into what support would help them to stop using violence which helped develop new whole of household approach aimed at breaking the cycle of abuse before their family is at risk."



Safe at Home could be activated within 48 hours of referral and will include a single case manager for each family member to establish a safety plan identify a priority of immediate and ongoing needs. If required short- or medium-term accommodation options for the person using violence will be arranged with Police and Court Services integration to keep them in view.

Implemented by Meli in Geelong, the three year trial would provide survivors and people who use violence with access to a large team of legal and financial experts along with wider support specialists in housing, child, and cultural workers.

Minister for Prevention of Family Violence Vicki Ward said, “We are proud to be involved in this project, which will provide women and their children with the support they need and enable them to stay safely in their home and community.”

Media information:

More information on Safe at Home can be found here:

<https://www.mcauley.org.au/about/advocacy/safe-at-home/>

About McAuley Community Services for Women:

McAuley supports women and children who have faced family violence and homelessness to take control of their lives.

Starting with accommodation and meeting immediate needs, we support women and their children to be safe. We provide 24/7 crisis support and temporary accommodation, independent housing and supported community care.

McAuley House, Footscray and Ballarat, provide inhouse support to women who are homeless, many of whom have also experienced family violence. It is a place for rest, recovery and reconnection, as well as being a welcoming hub for women and children who have moved into the surrounding community.

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