

The Domestic Abuse Report 2024

The Annual Audit: Summary

The 2024 edition of the annual publication from Women's Aid on the provision and uptake of domestic abuse services in England is presented within the context of our 50-year anniversary as a federation. Emerging in the 1970s as part of a grassroots feminist movement to support women facing abuse, domestic abuse services have evolved through the years into an established national network of expert providers. With this report, we use data from On Track, Routes to Support, the Women's Aid Annual Survey 2023, Freedom of Information requests and six key informant interviews, to understand the distinct value of specialist domestic abuse services in serving the needs of survivors and wider society.

The emergence of new challenges over the past year, such as the increased cost of living, the strains on local government budgets – in the most severe cases leading to section 114 notices being served – as well as a deteriorating housing landscape, have served to further destabilise our national network of lifesaving services. We accompany our 2024 report with a summary of its findings and a set of policy recommendations, to each relevant stakeholder group – all with distinct responsibilities, and yet all are equally important and are responsible for driving a whole-system response to end domestic abuse.



Policy Recommendations

What is needed to support services with the challenges they face?
Which good practices should be replicated and expanded upon?

For the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC):

1. Continue to ensure that sufficient, ring-fenced and multi-year funding accompanies the duty. This should reflect the estimated minimum of £189 million required annually for refuge services alone, as well as inflationary increases and population change.¹ In addition, this should include ring-fenced funding for 'by and for' refuge services for Black and minoritised women, d/Deaf and disabled women and LGBT+ survivors, and refuge services for those with No Recourse to Public Funds.
2. Ensure that accountability for the implementation of the statutory duty is urgently improved, including by strengthening the measures available to the National Expert Steering Group (NESG) to monitor and intervene where local authorities not delivering their Part 4 duties under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.
3. Develop legal guidance in partnership with specialist domestic abuse organisations on the alternatives to procurement for local authorities, which produce better outcomes for local commissioning of vital public services like specialist domestic abuse services and 'by and for' services.
4. Ensure all analyses of the statutory duty's impact include data on non-commissioned services, to gather insights and impacts from services unaided or overlooked.
5. To improve the move-on pathway, update the Code of Guidance, accompanying the Housing Act 1996, to state that refuge accommodation is included within the definition of 'homeless' and therefore a homeless reasonable preference category should be awarded to those living in refuge.

For the Ministry of Justice, to strengthen the Victim & Prisoners Bill:

1. Ensure that when delivering the 'duty to collaborate', lessons are learned from the Part 4 statutory duty in the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and robust, effective monitoring and accountability mechanisms for local commissioners are established.
2. In the Bill and associated guidance, include accurate definitions of the types of services, and the difference between generic, specialist, 'by and for', are essential alongside guidance which sets out their value. These definitions must be used in analyses and evaluation of the duty.
3. Oversight mechanisms for the 'duty to collaborate' should adhere to a clear escalation process whereby agencies unable to perform their duties are both supported and held to account.
4. Ensure that guidance on the 'duty to collaborate' specifies an obligation for Commissioners to engage with both non-commissioned and commissioned services.

¹ An annual investment of £427m is required to fund refuge and community-based support services to meet the needs of women and children affected by domestic abuse. Women's Aid (2023) Investing to save: The economic case for funding specialist domestic abuse support. Bristol: Women's Aid. Available [online](#).

For the Treasury:

1. Invest £427 million per year, as a minimum, to fund specialist women-led domestic abuse services in England.
2. Work with the specialist 'by and for' sector to identify an additional, sustainable funding solution for 'by and for' services and thereby address the unlevel 'playing field' in current funding and commissioning.
3. Allocate adequate funding to Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) to fulfil their new duties to address the needs of survivors in Joint Forward Plans and collaborate in the planning and delivery of domestic abuse services.

For all local commissioners (local authorities, Police and Crime Commissioners and Integrated Care Boards):

1. Ensure that staff in respective statutory agencies are prepared to deliver their 'duty to collaborate'; that the process and ways of working collaboratively are scoped out; and that this work is resourced.
2. Ensure Local Partnership Boards are inclusive of a range of specialist domestic abuse services, 'by & for' services (both commissioned and non-commissioned), survivors, statutory and other agencies (including health), that meetings are regular and publicly minuted, and decisions made are transparent.
3. Ensure engagement with a variety of key stakeholder groups when delivering statutory duties, including non-commissioned, specialist 'by and for' organisations, and survivors.
4. When commissioning services use proportionate processes, ending competitive tendering where it is not required.
5. Adopt long-term funding strategies and ensure commissioned services are contracted for a minimum of 3-5 years, and include inflationary increases (including for staff costs).
6. Follow best practice on conducting needs assessments, developing strategies and commissioning domestic abuse services. Further guidance and bespoke resources are available from Women's Aid's local engagement team.²
7. Use established quality standards, including the Women's Aid National Quality Standards (NQS) and Imkaan standards, as benchmarks for quality, expert service provision for women and children.
8. Ensure that children are recognised as victims in their own right through the provision of dedicated funding for children and young people's services.
9. Ensure greater support for data collection and monitoring by funding them in contracts.
10. Fund research posts in services to support capacity for data collection requirements.
11. Fund the use of On Track to make data collection and reporting easier for services.

² You can request a copy with our team at policy@womensaid.org.uk

For Integrated Care Boards:

1. The health needs of survivors should be central to the design of local service provision. Fund evidence-based domestic abuse interventions in health settings, including Identification and Referral to Improve Safety (IRIS) in GPs, and independent domestic violence advisors (IDVAs) or other specialist advocates in acute hospital or maternity services. And commission needs-led mental health support for survivors delivered by local, specialist domestic abuse services.
2. Ensure local mental health strategies includes actions to address the specific mental health needs of survivors.

For local authorities:

1. Work with specialist domestic abuse organisations to improve the move-on pathway for survivors leaving refuges, including by ensuring nominations agreements are flexible and facilitate direct letting arrangements for survivors, and work with registered providers to allocate direct lets for move-on from refuges.

For services:

1. Use On Track to showcase the value of specialist services.
2. Continue to record good and poor practice in commissioning domestic abuse services.
3. Engage with the Women's Aid resources available to support specialist domestic abuse services with their commissioning and advocacy needs.

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