

The Annual Audit 2025: Summary and Policy Recommendations

Summary

The Women's Aid Annual Audit 2025 presents the provision and uptake of domestic abuse services in England, examining the financial year 2023-24. With this report, we use data from On Track, Routes to Support, the Women's Aid Annual Survey 2024, and Freedom of Information requests to understand the reality of the sector by looking at current demand, provision and funding of domestic abuse services in England, considering where progress is being made and what is still needed to support survivors. The persistence of ongoing challenges over the past year, such as the high cost of living, the housing crisis, as well as international conflicts, have also all had significant impacts on the national network of lifesaving services.

This year's report highlighted a number of areas that must be addressed urgently. Refuge provision is improving, however there is still a significant shortfall; for example, the number of bedspaces in England still falls short by 1,160 spaces of the Council of Europe's recommendations, representing a total shortfall of 20.3%. There is continued inequality in the experiences of survivors and accessibility of services. The proportion of vacancies that could consider a woman with no recourse to public funds remains low at 12.3%, and vacancies

suitable for wheelchair users fell from 1.0% of all vacancies in 2022-23 to just 0.7% (52) vacancies in 2023-24.

Services are not funded to adequately provide services and address overall unmet need, with key areas such as prevention and support for children often missing. Just over a third (35.0%) of respondents to the annual survey this year were running an area of their domestic abuse service without dedicated funding during 2023-24. Since the introduction of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, children are recognised as survivors of domestic abuse in their own right¹ and therefore should have access to services to support them. It is therefore particularly concerning that the proportion of organisations that were running children and young people's domestic abuse services in the community without dedicated funding doubled this year, from 15.7% to 31.4%.

We accompany our 2025 report with 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.

¹ [Domestic Abuse Act 2021](#)

Policy Recommendations

For HM Treasury:

1. Invest a minimum funding settlement of £516 million per year, for specialist domestic abuse services in England, including £178 million ring-fenced funding for specialist services led 'by and for' Black and minoritised women, d/Deaf and disabled women and the LGBT+ community.² *It is essential that 'by and for' organisations lead on both the development and evaluation of any ringfenced funding pot, as well as on further research into developing these figures. We also recommend further consultation to better understand barriers and challenges in funding and commissioning that 'by and for' services face.*
2. This funding settlement should include a minimum of £228m for refuge services via Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 for survivors of domestic abuse, combined with a minimum of £288m statutory funding for community-based support services.
3. Introduce dedicated funding for children and young people domestic abuse services, and work with Women's Aid and the wider sector to invest in further research to identify the financial shortfall of investment in these services.

For the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government:

1. Ensure funding for the Statutory Duty to fund safe accommodation for women and children, which forms Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 to remains protected under a Section 31 grant with a dedicated purpose.
2. Implement reforms to the oversight of the statutory duty, working alongside specialist partner organisations, to ensure the duty is being delivered in line with the statutory guidance for the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, and that it delivers the best value for money and meets unmet need.
3. Urgently address the social housing crisis, to reduce pressure on refuges and ensure survivors can access suitable move-on accommodation.
4. Reform joint tenancy laws so survivors do not need to obtain consent from an abuser to remain in their home.

² Domestic Abuse Commissioner (2024) [Briefing Paper 'By and for' funding pot.](#)

For the Ministry of Justice:

1. Ensure that statutory funding for specialist community-based support services is enshrined in forthcoming victims' legislation. This funding settlement should include a minimum of £228m for refuge services via Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 for survivors of domestic abuse, combined with a minimum of £288m statutory funding for community-based support services. Legislation should include a mechanism for national oversight of this funding that builds on lessons learned from the National Expert Steering Group (NESG) set up to monitor the delivery of Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.

For the Home Office:

1. Ensure the upcoming VAWG Strategy includes a requirement to engage with the specialist domestic abuse sector to monitor the provision and uptake of services for survivors, to accurately evidence the level of need and support available.
2. Guarantee funding for the Flexible Fund for 2025/26 and beyond and ensure that this is renewed at a minimum of £2m each year, rising with inflation, population changes and demand. As part of this, engage in longer term discussions with the Department for Work and Pensions as part of the VAWG strategy work to ensure that the welfare system is adequately equipped to ensure that survivors of domestic abuse have the means to flee.
3. Work with the Office for National Statistics and organisations like Women's Aid to develop a measure for prevalence of domestic abuse in children and young people's relationships under the age of 16.

For Local Authorities, Police and Crime Commissioners and Integrated Care Boards:

1. Ensure that public authorities at a local level, follow best practice on conducting needs assessments and work closely with specialist and 'by and for' services to ensure local service provision meets the needs of all survivors including D/deaf and disabled survivors, Black and minoritised survivors and survivors with no recourse to public funds.
2. Collaborate with specialist services and service users to urgently address the shortage of accessible refuge options for disabled survivors, including wheelchair-accessible accommodation.
3. Adequately fund Children and Young People's community-based domestic abuse services to ensure they can access specialist, trauma informed support.
4. Fund mental health interventions provided by specialist domestic abuse services including counselling services and IDVAs in mental health trusts.
5. Review procurement practices for commissioning domestic abuse services to ensure they align with statutory guidance and meet the needs of all survivors, including the most marginalised survivors. **Women's Aid would be happy to support you to review your commissioning practices, please contact us at: policy@womensaid.org.uk**
6. When commissioning services use established quality standards, including the Women's Aid National Quality Standards (NQS) and Imkaan standards which are recognised by national government, as benchmarks for quality, expert service provision for women and children.
7. Adopt longer term funding strategies, ensuring commissioned services are contracted for a minimum of 3-5 years, and include inflationary increases (including for staff costs). **Please refer to the Home Office VAWG commissioning toolkit³ and National Statement of Expectations⁴.**
8. Ensure that services are adequately funded to monitor and evaluate their work, including through the use of integrated case management and outcomes framework systems such as Women's Aid's On Track programme. **For further information about On Track please contact ontrack@womensaid.org.uk**

³ [Home Office VAWG commissioning toolkit](#)

⁴ [National Statement of Expectations](#)

Women's Aid Federation of England,
PO Box 3245, Bristol, BS2 2EH

www.womensaid.org.uk | www.loverespect.co.uk

Women's Aid Federation of England is a registered charity in England & Wales (1054154) and is a company limited by guarantee in England & Wales (3171880)