

## When three sectors collide: national work in Housing and Domestic Abuse



National issues need national responses and interventions. An estimated 1.9 million adults aged 16 to 59 years experienced domestic abuse in the last year<sup>1</sup>. Of these, 1.2 million are women and 713,000 are men. At least seven women are killed every month in England and Wales. The Women's Aid and Nia Femicide research<sup>2</sup> has found that 75% of women killed by current or ex-partners in 2016 were killed in their own homes.

Not only is domestic abuse a national issue, it's happening within homes right across the country.

This is why the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA), recently backed by MHCLG, have made domestic abuse a priority for housing providers. We often have access 'behind closed doors' and have a unique relationship with our residents.

<sup>1</sup> Year ending March 2017 Crime Survey for England and Wales

<sup>2</sup> The Femicide Census, developed by Karen Ingala Smith and Women's Aid (and then footnote: working in partnership, with support from [Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer LLP](#) and [Deloitte LLP](#).)

## **What is the national response to domestic abuse?**

DAHA set up the National Housing and Domestic Abuse Policy and Practice Group first convened in November 2017. This was the first-time representatives from Homelessness, Housing and Domestic Abuse got together to discuss how to work together nationally to tackle domestic abuse, and better shape and connect these policy areas. The main aims of this group are to ensure that:

- the experience of survivors of domestic abuse is more prominent in the housing sector and helps shape improved and enhanced service delivery;
- women and children can access secure housing and good quality services when experiencing domestic abuse and
- co-ordination exists between the housing and Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) sectors with regards to domestic abuse.

Our group seeks to find consensus, share best practice and influence policy and practice on domestic abuse and housing in England and devolved authorities. We recognise that those who have experienced domestic abuse or violence, and other forms of abuse in the home, have insight and knowledge that service providers can learn from to improve co-ordinated working. It is for this reason that we aim to ensure survivors perspectives are embedded in the effective planning, delivery and monitoring of partnership initiatives.

## **Who is involved nationally?**

The group has representatives from the domestic abuse, LGBT+, housing and homelessness sectors.

It includes:

- DAHA
- Women's Aid
- AVA
- Homeless Link
- Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH)
- Surviving Economic Abuse (SEA)
- National Housing Federation (NHF)
- Shelter
- Crisis
- Stonewall Housing
- Resolve ASB
- Agenda
- Safelives
- Respect
- St Mungo's
- National Federation of ALMO's
- Refuge

## **So what have the group done to date?**

In March 2018 Theresa May announced the DVA Bill and public consultation to seek sector views. Our national group agreed to compile a joint response. This was no easy task as it contains some of the biggest players in these sectors. However, we are thrilled to say that through collaboration, hard work and mutual learning, a joint submission was agreed and submitted.

Our joint response brings together the extensive knowledge and experience from each of the individual organisations across the housing and domestic abuse landscape. We have offered recommendations to raise awareness of what policy and practice changes are needed to enable individuals experiencing domestic abuse to be supported appropriately.

Our key recommendations to government are:

1. A ‘whole housing’ approach to domestic abuse:
  - To ensure there is a full suite of housing options for survivors of domestic abuse and one which enables agencies and organisations to work together more collaboratively. Effective prioritisation and co-ordination of this approach will ensure that they look at the long-term security of the survivor, as well as managing short term crisis situations.
  - The ‘whole housing approach’ needs to be supported by more supply of genuinely affordable accommodation.
  - Provision of sufficient and secure move-on accommodation. Consider how the whole housing approach will encourage agencies to work in tandem with each other to look at the long-term security of the survivor, as well as managing short term crisis situations.



2. Homelessness Strategies, and Supported Housing strategies must align with and be developed alongside Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) strategies (or Domestic Violence and Abuse strategies) on both a local and national basis.
3. Ensure priority need legislation protects survivors of domestic abuse. This can be done by ensuring individuals fleeing domestic abuse are automatically assumed to be priority need and removing the postcode lottery around survivors being assessed as ‘vulnerable’.

4. A Domestic Violence and Abuse expert to be located within housing options teams. Provide ongoing and robust training, in collaboration with specialist domestic abuse organisations, delivered on an ongoing basis.
5. Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHRs) should place further emphasis on housing and homelessness. There needs to be more robust analysis of housing situations of victims and perpetrators of domestic homicides in individual DHRs. Overview reports must identify patterns and trends in housing.
6. Provide equal access to housing options and refuge to women with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF).
7. Welfare reforms policies must not create additional barriers to women leaving an abusive relationship, particularly as some of these measures increase the scope for economic abuse. The benefit cap, Universal Credit and repayments of benefit advances need urgent attention.

We feel that there are gaps in the Domestic Violence and Abuse Bill consultation around addressing some practical and low-cost changes to legislation, policy and practice in relation to housing and housing related provision. In our view these changes and this focus is fundamental in the safe exit and successful rebuilding of lives for children, families and individuals that are affected by domestic abuse. This will all require a strong overview from the appointed Domestic Violence Commissioner.

**Want to get involved or find out more?**

If you'd like to get involved in our national group or to find out more, contact: Gudrun (Guddy) Burnet at [gudrun.burnet@peabody.org.uk](mailto:gudrun.burnet@peabody.org.uk) or on Twitter @DAHAlliance @GudrunBurnet