

Home in a Storm – The legal and housing needs of women facing homelessness

RECOMMENDATIONS

In response to the findings in the report “Home in a Storm – the legal and housing needs of women facing homelessness”, PIAC makes the following recommendations:

1. That the Federal and NSW Government urgently increase the funding for community legal services to increase the capacity to provide legal advice and assistance to women facing domestic violence, and those at risk of homelessness. In particular, priority should be given to legal services that focus on the needs of women in rural, regional and remote areas, women at risk or facing homelessness, and women who have recently arrived in Australia.
2. That the NSW Government increase the funding for specialist crisis accommodation and support services that assist women in housing crisis or who are homeless.
3. That all Governments commit to provide sufficient appropriate, long term accommodation options for women leaving domestic violence.
4. That the NSW Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS) publish its debt write off policies and allow tenants seeking waiver of debt on the basis of domestic violence to provide evidence in the form of letters from specialised support workers, rather than requiring court or police documents.
5. That community housing providers, including providers of transitional accommodation, adopt policies to ensure vulnerable women are not evicted into homelessness and that victims of domestic violence are not held liable for damage caused by, or debts incurred by, an abusive partner.
6. That the NSW and Federal Government provide funding for specific services that assist women who are recent arrivals, such as those women who arrived with their partners on temporary protection visas, and who have since become homeless due to their relationship breaking down.
7. That the NSW and Federal Governments increase funding for non-legal advocacy services, financial counselling services and mental illness counselling services to assist women in housing crisis or homelessness.
8. That all energy and water utility providers, telecommunication service providers and financial institutions review their hardship programs to ensure women who experience domestic violence are included as a specific category of persons eligible for hardship assistance.
9. That FaCS review its advice and information services to ensure those services are appropriate tailored for women escaping domestic violence in housing crisis or homelessness, and ensure those information services and materials take a trauma-informed care approach to service delivery.
10. That FaCS review its process for monitoring contract compliance amongst specialist homelessness services, and develop an appropriate regulatory framework for the contracted services that ensures high quality, sensitive and appropriate service delivery to all homeless consumers.