



National Advocacy Group Backbone Coordination – for Women on Temporary Visas Experiencing Violence

Summary

- COVID-19 has had tremendous impacts on victim-survivors of family violence who are on temporary visas. Temporary visa holders face barriers to accessing safety and support when they experience family violence in Australia. COVID-19 and the public health restrictions to contain the virus, have further exacerbated the risks, disadvantage and access to safety and support for these women and their children. This global crisis has highlighted the need for policy changes to better support this cohort of victim-survivors.
- The National Advocacy Group on Women on Temporary Visas (the National Advocacy Group) is a coalition of specialist services, peak bodies and other organisations from every state and territory advocating for victim-survivors on temporary visas to be able to access the safety and support they need, regardless of their visa status. Since the National Advocacy Group first formed, the group has met and collaborated frequently and consistently, undertaking advocacy with a broad range of stakeholders across government. The National Advocacy Group represents a united voice for women on temporary visas experiencing violence.
- The impacts of COVID-19 on victim-survivors who are temporary visa holders require further work and advocacy to be undertaken. Backbone coordination of this work is critical.

What and when

- Fulfilling the role of backbone coordination requires the total amount of \$36,171 (SCHADS Level 4.1, 2 days per week, 12 months). The National Advocacy Group has raised \$17,660 from its members and requires a further \$18,511 to fill this position.
- The person will be employed by inTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence (inTouch). When employed, this person will coordinate the critical activities of the National Advocacy Group. This role is expected to be filled in November-December 2020.

Why

- Domestic, family and sexual violence remains endemic in Australia. One in 6 women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by a current or previous partner since the age of 15.¹ Women are more likely to experience violence from a known perpetrator² and the experiences of domestic, family and sexual violence happen repeatedly.³ It has also been well established that domestic and family violence is a gendered crime with the vast majority of it perpetrated against women, usually by men.⁴
- While violence affects all women regardless of their identity, background or circumstances, some women face additional, specific barriers to accessing the range of supports they need to be safe. This is particularly true for women who are subjected to violence and live in Australia on a temporary visa, and this impacts on the safety and access to supports for their children too.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated the difficulties that many women on temporary visas face. Many temporary visa holders who have experienced family violence in Australia continue to be ineligible for government support. Many of these women are at risk of poverty and homelessness during this difficult time. In May 2020, Domestic Violence NSW ran a survey of organisations supporting people on temporary visas experiencing violence. 45% of survey respondents had noticed an increase in sexual, domestic or family violence against people on temporary visas, and 64% had observed this group had decreased access to income, food, essentials and community

¹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2018) Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence in Australia, p. ix

² Ibid.

³ ABS 2017b. Personal Safety Survey 2016. ABS cat. no. 4906.0. Canberra: ABS.

⁴ See ABS, Crime victimisation, Australia, 2012–13 cat no 4530.0 December 2014. Available [here](#).



supports. In September 2020, Monash University published a [report](#) outlining the impacts of COVID-19 on 100 inTouch clients during the first wave of the pandemic. As the authors found, COVID-19 has intensified “the impact of the exclusion of temporary visa holders experiencing family violence from safety and support mechanisms.”⁵

- During the second wave of COVID-19 in Victoria and the ensuing lockdowns, inTouch has reported a substantial increase in referrals to their services – with a 50 percent increase in the number of risk assessments undertaken each week. inTouch has had to increase its Flexible Support Packages to meet the needs of women on temporary visas and is also providing food aid to these clients.

How

- In 2018, the National Advocacy Group on Women on Temporary Visas Experiencing Violence (the National Advocacy Group) was formed to respond to the national crisis of women on temporary visas experiencing violence and their children being unable to access the supports they need to be safe. Currently, the National Advocacy Group consists of over 70 state and territory peak bodies, service providers and other organisations working to address violence against women across Australia. Its secretariat support is provided on an in-kind basis by Domestic Violence NSW, Harmony Alliance Migrant and Refugee Women for Change and Australian Women Against Violence Alliance.
- Since its inception, the National Advocacy Group has produced two foundational documents: the data snapshot “[Path to Nowhere](#)” and the nationally agreed position on needed reforms “[Blueprint for Reform](#)”. Together, these documents have outlined the complex issues faced by temporary visa holders when they experience family violence, the barriers they face to seeking safety, and the reforms and changes needed to overcome these issues. The Blueprint for Reform has put forward three essential steps for the reforms across multiple systems to ensure the access to justice and safety for women on temporary visas who are experiencing violence. The three steps are:
 1. Improve the migration system so that all women on temporary visas who experience domestic, family and sexual violence and their dependents can access protections, services and justice.
 2. Ensure eligibility and access to services and government support are based on women’s needs for safety and recovery, regardless of their migration status.
 3. Ensure that women on temporary visas who have experienced domestic, family and sexual violence and their dependents have immediate and full access to safety, protection, justice and fully funded specialist support with demonstrated gender expertise and cultural competency.
- The backbone coordinator ((0.4 FTE, SCHADS Level 4.1, 12 months) of the National Advocacy Group will be tasked with:
 - Implementing activities and direct advocacy in line with the National Advocacy Group’s strategic work plan
 - Supporting meetings and events for the National Advocacy Group
 - Exploring opportunities for collaboration and actions that will help to progress the objectives of the National Advocacy Group.

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⁵ Marie Segrave and Naomi Pfitzner (2020). Family violence and temporary visa holders during COVID-19. Monash Gender and Family Violence Prevention Centre, Monash University, Victoria, Australia, p6.