“Safe at home” responses to prevent homelessness among women who have experienced domestic and family violence

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DFV and homelessness

- Domestic and family violence remains a leading reason for homelessness among women and children in Australia

- In 2013-14, 84,774 adults and children (33 percent of all clients) identified DFV as their main reason for seeking Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) assistance (AIHW, 2014)

- SHS which include refuges and other forms of crisis accommodation were able to offer support to only 44 percent of those who had sought assistance (AIHW 2014)

- It is difficult for women to access affordable and appropriate housing when trying to exit the emergency accommodation offered by refuges (Spinney 2012; Breckenridge et al., 2013)
The “Safe at Home” Meta-Evaluation Project

- National mapping and meta-evaluation outlining key features of effective “safe at home” programs that enhance safety and prevent homelessness

- Funded by:
  - Australian National Research Organisation for Women’s Safety (ANROWS)

- Three distinct activities:
  2. National Mapping of Safe at Home responses by jurisdiction
  3. Meta-evaluation of existing “safe at Home” evaluations
What is a SAH Response?

DFV focused interventions and strategies that aim to keep women and children in their home or in other independent domestic accommodation thereby reducing the risk of the perpetrator being present and using further violence and abuse

- are implicitly or explicitly focused on preventing women who have left a violent relationship from entering or remaining longer than necessary in specialist homelessness services or supported accommodation
- may have a criminal justice focus to ensure women’s safety
- may be offered as an independent strategy or as a wrap-around service featuring case-management over a longer period of time
4 conceptual pillars of SAH responses

1. A focus on maximising safety utilising a combination of legal, judicial, policing and home security provisions to exclude the perpetrator from the home and protect victims from post separation violence;

2. A coordinated or integrated intervention response involving partnerships between government departments, sectors or local services;

3. ‘Safe at home’ as a homelessness prevention strategy which includes ensuring women are informed about their housing options before the time of crisis, at separation and provides support for women to maintain their housing afterwards; and,

4. Recognition of the importance of enhancing women’s economic security
Preventing Homelessness

From the mapping, SAH programs which explicitly focus on homelessness prevention may provide:

- case management and/or coordination over a period of time (Breckenridge et al., 2013)
- outreach support services designed to develop women’s confidence in their ability to remain in their home with their children
Concluding comments

• ‘Safe at home’ responses are a socially just and fair response for women and children in circumstances who are able to make this decision

• ‘Safe at home’ responses should be seen as alternative choice for women
Why should I leave with my kids, and let him stay, when he’s committed the crime? I’m the victim, it would be a lot easier for him to go.