

Item 3.4

Gender-Based Violence

File No: S051491

Minute by the Lord Mayor

To Council:

One woman is killed every four days in Australia, twice as many as this time last year. At least 28 women have been killed in Australia this year alone. Many are killed by a current or former partner.

Thousands of people marched last month calling on governments to address the epidemic of women killed in violent attacks. I agree that the need to prevent violence against women, children and gender-diverse people is a national emergency.

Government action

In 2022, the Federal, State and Territory Governments released the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032, which highlights how all parts of society must work together to end gender-based violence in one generation.

Last year, the first of two five-year action plans under the National Plan was released along with a dedicated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan and more than \$2 billion in investment to deliver outcomes.

Investment needs to be directed to all our diverse communities. With some communities experiencing greater isolation and barriers to reporting and accessing support to become and stay safe, including LGBTIQ+, people with disability and culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

Research also tells us that police and the courts must do more to protect people who report violence and to stop people who are abusive and controlling from repeat offences. We need to regulate damaging industries including pornography and social media where sexual and gendered violence can be normalised as well as alcohol and gambling, which can exacerbate violence. We also need to support recovery to prevent intergenerational trauma and violence.

On 1 May 2024, the beginning of Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Month, the Federal Government announced a \$925 million investment to make the existing Leaving Violence program permanent. They must ensure financial support under this program is open to all as soon as possible, not just for those who meet its strict criteria, and is implemented alongside increased funding for community legal centres and wrap-around supports that people who need to escape their abuser.

On 7 May 2024, the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commissioner Micaela Cronin held a crisis meeting with key organisations to review progress on the Federal Government's National Plan. They highlighted the need for urgent action to prioritise housing and to fund frontline services and recommended the plan is updated to address the increasing number of women killed and those taking their own lives to escape violence.

The Commissioner stated that all states and territories must commit to a coordinated roadmap to implement the plan and she will host a national roundtable to accelerate actions.

I welcome the NSW Government's recent announcement that they will invest \$230 million over the next four years including \$73 million towards reforming the NSW justice system to help people who report violence, including to improving bail laws. They will spend \$96 million expanding the Staying Home Leaving Violence program, which helps prevent homelessness, increase case management support and provide more specialist support workers for children.

They will also implement prevention and early intervention strategies to address the drivers of family violence and expand Domestic Violence NSW, including by teaching young children about healthy relationships. It is imperative that programs focus on boys and men who are more commonly the perpetrators of physical violence, sexual harassment and sexual violence.

The NSW Government has also launched a new advertising campaign to raise awareness and understanding of coercive control which is a common form of domestic violence where people who report violence have their freedoms restricted and controlled. This coincides with coercive control formally being considered a criminal offence in NSW from July 2024.

Domestic Violence NSW welcomed the government's investment but flagged that more stable housing and crisis accommodation is a vital part of the emergency response to domestic and family violence. The NSW Government must ensure the gender-based violence sector remains a priority in the long term and receives continued funding.

City of Sydney support and services in our area

While responses to domestic and family violence is the responsibility of the NSW Government and Police, the City leads and supports interagency networks to improve collaborative responses to gender-based violence and promote gender equality and respectful and non-violent relationships benefiting the whole community.

In partnership with the Women and Girls Emergency Centre, we deliver bystander training for our residents and licensed premises to equip them with the skills to respond with compassion and report all violence in our community.

We also work with Domestic Violence NSW and NSW Police to coordinate quarterly forums across the sectors working to respond to and reduce violence. During the United Nations 16 Days of Activism initiative, we help coordinate workshops and education programs in our area to draw attention to gender-based violence and call for action to challenge inequality.

We have a foster care program in conjunction with Sutherland Shire Council Animal Shelter, the Cat Protection Society and Animal Welfare League NSW to offer temporary emergency accommodation, and veterinary care for the pets of people fleeing domestic violence.

We provided \$1.5 million from our Affordable and Diverse Housing Fund to HammondCare in Darlinghurst to accommodate people at risk of homelessness including a dedicated floor for older women. \$7.8 million of our Affordable Housing levies has enabled Bridge Housing to provide and manage dedicated housing for Aboriginal women. We are also selling seven terrace houses in Darlinghurst at a discount to establish the first dedicated housing project for transgender women, who are highly at-risk in our community.

We have supported many community organisations in our area with grant funding. In 2023, we gave over \$16,000 to support a meal service at Lou's Place in Redfern and \$150,000 over three years towards a Domestic Violence Support Worker at the South Eastern Community Connect.

However, many are struggling to stay afloat. Lou's Place, for example, provides a refuge for a staggering 40 women escaping violence each day. This essential service relies heavily on volunteers with only ten paid staff. They receive no regular State Government funding, unlike other services.

There is a strong and consistent association between gender inequality and gender-based violence. Financial independence gives women more options if they find themselves in harmful relationships. At the City of Sydney, 43 per cent of our workforce is made up of women, and 51 per cent of our leadership roles are held by women. Since 2018, the City has had a gender pay gap in favour of women.

The City was among the first Australian organisations to develop and implement a Dealing with Domestic Violence at Work Policy and offer employees paid leave for medical appointments, legal proceedings and other activities related to dealing with domestic violence, which is now mandated at up to 10 days paid leave a year. These leave days help when it may not be safe to make plans and appointments outside of work hours and this type of leave isn't identified on payslips.

These are positive steps, but the legal, health and shelter services that support women and children to leave violence must be appropriately funded by Federal and State governments on an ongoing basis at the same time as a colossal cultural change is needed in Australia.

Recommendation

It is resolved that:

- (A) Council note that one woman is killed in Australia every four days with at least 28 women killed in Australia this year alone, many by a current or previous partner;
- (B) Council declares gender-based violence a national emergency;
- (C) in consultation with relevant stakeholders, the Chief Executive Officer be requested to investigate how the City of Sydney can offer further support for women, children and gender-diverse people escaping violence through our Affordable and Diverse Housing Fund, and report back to Council via the CEO Update; and
- (D) the Lord Mayor be requested to write to the Prime Minister, NSW Premier and other relevant Federal and State Government Ministers with a copy of this Lord Mayoral Minute acknowledging their respective funding commitments and urge them to ensure it is directed to services and housing that support women, children and gender-diverse people escaping violence as soon as possible.

COUNCILLOR CLOVER MOORE AO

Lord Mayor