

# Briefing for Incoming Ministers 2024



**WOMEN'S  
REFUGE**

# The National Collective of Independent Women's Refuges (NCIWR)

Last year Women's Refuge celebrated our 50-year anniversary, having opened our doors in 1973 and now operating across 40 refuges nationwide.

NCIWR is committed to upholding both our rights and obligations under The Treaty of Waitangi and Te Tiriti O Waitangi. NCIWR operates under a parallel development model and is governed by Te Tau-mata o Te Kōwhiri Core Group, comprised of equal numbers of tangata whenua and tauwi members drawn from our membership. Our values are underpinned by our four cornerstones: parallel development, collectivism, feminism, and takatāpui nurturing diversity.

NCIWR's commitment to the parallel development cornerstone has most recently been demonstrated through the revitalisation of Nga Tua Totara Whakamarumaru, our Māori Growth Strategy. Through this strategy we aim to ensure the best opportunities and outcomes for our tangata whenua and tauwi clients and staff. Further detail in relation to NTTW can be found below.

Today, and for the past 50 years, our purpose has been to support women and children to live free of family violence. Using evidence-based research and practice, Women's Refuge effectively responds to the needs of those who have experienced abuse.

We receive an average of 50,000 referrals a year (the majority of which are made by Police) and receive more than 20,000 calls to our crisis line. We support women of all ages and ethnicities. Almost sixty percent (59%) of our clients are aged between 20 and 39 years of age, many accompanied by their children. Pākehā and Māori make up 40% of our referrals respectively, Pasifika another 5% and the remainder comprised of refugee and migrant women and children.

Our workforce specialises in family violence as a distinct field of practice. We offer specialised skill sets, knowledge, and practice approaches, which enable us to offer clients the intensive, flexible, and open-ended support they require to achieve safety from family violence.

As well as operating safe houses and a 24/7 crisis line, our services extend into the community. Our front-line safety work encompasses family violence informed risk assessment, safety planning, and advocacy, tailored community services and group programmes, child specific group programmes, child advocacy, transitional and emergency housing, and Whānau Protect – a home security and safety service. These are supported by national projects aimed at increasing awareness and intervention capacity in communities, such as our research and policy programme.

NCIWR enjoys and values respectful collaborative relationships with a range of Ministries, including the Ministry of Social Development, the Ministry of Justice, Police, Oranga Tamariki, alongside trusted collaborations with other NGOs. As a specialist organisation, we also contribute to supporting the Government's efforts to address, prevent, and eliminate family violence, through the provision of evidence-based feedback and advice.

Alongside these central partnerships NCIWR also holds valuable relationships with Kainga Ora, from whom we lease our safe houses, the Ministry for Housing and Urban Development, with whom we have developed a substantial transitional housing portfolio, and the Ministry of Justice which funds the Whānau Protect Home Safety Service project.

Over the past decade we have purposefully developed and strengthened trusting and trusted relationships with our government partners, believing this to be the pathway to the change we want to see for Aotearoa New Zealand. With the support of our partners, we have worked to develop our people and our systems to ensure we are well positioned to do our fair share of the immense work ahead of us.

## **The context within which we work**

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The progress that Women's Refuge has seen and been a part of over 50 years is encouraging; family violence is no longer a hidden issue. Unfortunately, family violence remains pervasive in Aotearoa New Zealand, leaving ripples of impacts that spread across homes, families, and childhoods and disrupting the futures of thousands of women and children each year.

- Family violence is perpetrated against one in three ever-partnered women in New Zealand over the course of their lifetime.
- Family violence accounts for approximately half of New Zealand homicides.
- Children under the age of 18 make up 20 percent of all violent deaths in New Zealand.
- The Family Violence Death Review Committee found that over 500 tamariki were impacted by the death of a parent from family violence homicide (of 187 adult deaths reviewed).
- Police found that children are primary victims in 70 percent of households where family violence is perpetrated.

All Women's Refuge clients are victims of serious violence. Women are most likely to be killed around the time that they are separating from their abusers. Our latest risk assessment data (taken from the initial risk assessments of 3500 women from 2022-2023) show that 55% believe their abusers might kill them, 46% had been strangled or suffocated, 55% had been held hostage, and 57% of women experienced more severe violence from their partners when they tried to seek safety.

Family violence continues for years after separation, with over half of our client population reporting that they have experienced post separation physical stalking, and 80% reporting digital stalking throughout and after separation from their relationships.

Women's Refuge is committed to responding to the needs of our clients and communities for as long as the need persists. The data above shows that alongside the safety response of services like Women's Refuge, it is essential that prevention and intervention focuses on stopping family violence, and those who perpetrate it.

## **Changes to sustainable funding arrangements and service delivery**

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In our 2017 and 2020 briefings to incoming ministers, we underlined the need for adequate, purposeful, and sustainable funding models to futureproof our work with women and children, targeted funding for dedicated child advocates, and support to develop and implement additional Outcomes Star tools to both guide and evidence intervention efficacy.

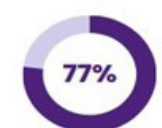
Since then, we have entered a long-term strategic partnership with the Ministry of Social Development which includes an extended (8 year) contract term. Additionally, the Ministry has extended the Kōkihi ngā Rito child advocacy project for an additional four years. Both developments are a welcome signal of Government's commitment to genuine partnership and sustainable funding for family violence services. We are now more able to support and develop refuge staff and invest in services to

ensure we continue to provide high quality specialist services to women, children, and families.

## Focus on high quality robust data, reporting systems and service accountability

For several years now NCIWR has been investing significant resources into the development of a robust data gathering system, and science-based service evaluation tools. This enables us to closely monitor and report on service efficacy at a fine-grained level. We are now undertaking online risk assessments which are providing a rich data source to assist with service planning. We are utilising the Outcomes Stars system, a scientifically validated instrument developed in the UK.

### THE EMPOWERMENT STAR



clients report  
greater  
empowerment



report improved  
safety



outcome areas  
reported average  
improvement



### AVERAGE IMPROVEMENT UPON EXIT

Pasifika clients report the most significant average score change of **+2.4** across all outcome areas during service

The most significant changes for Pasifika were reported in  
**Safety**  
**Accommodation**  
**Legal Issues**

Māori wahine report an average improvement of **+1.7** across all outcome areas during their journey with refuge

The most significant changes for Māori clients were reported in  
**Safety**  
**Support Networks**  
**Empowerment & self esteem**

### NATIONAL AVERAGE SCORE CHANGE



As part of our push towards strengthened accountability, we recently implemented a confidential on-line service evaluation tool (Ask Nicely) to encourage clients to provide anonymised service feedback to ensure we are providing the services our communities need, when and where they need them.

## **Workforce training and development**

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In response to the development of specialist family violence workforce standards by Te Puna Aonui (TPA) as a part of Te Aorerekura, with the support of the Ministry of Social Development, NCIWR is currently undertaking a full redevelopment of our national training programme. This programme of work is well-advanced and has ambitious aims for the future, including disability specific training and specialised risk assessment and professional development opportunities. To ensure the most productive and cost-effective approach to training and professional development all programmes will be available both on-line (through our E-learning portal) and in person. Importantly, the development of this training suite will enable us to ensure that we can maintain a focus on and monitor our commitment to continuous learning and service improvement. We believe this is the area where NCIWR can most efficiently and effectively support the progress of Te Aorerekura.

## **A ‘whole-of-Government’ approach**

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NCIWR recognises and applauds that family violence has recently been the subject of significant investment and legislative progression and we support the continued and collective momentum towards its elimination. However, victims’ access to safety, justice, and recovery remains hindered by aspects of the wider social and legislative contexts that frame their vulnerability to family violence, experiences of family violence, and opportunities to rebuild their lives in the aftermath of family violence.

A whole-of-government approach that is taken up by every single Ministry will offer accountability that enables genuine progress toward eliminating family violence. At present, many Ministries are not yet fulfilling their potential to identify how their current policies and practices inadvertently collude with perpetrators of family violence, or how they sustain barriers to victims’ safety.

One immediately practicable step Government could take to reflect their commitment to a whole-of-government approach to ending family violence is ensuring a shared understanding of family violence is upheld by Government and Ministry spokespeople.

## **Building on the momentum of Te Puna Aonui and Te Aorerekura**

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NCIWR supports the establishment of TPA and, by extension, the introduction of Te Aorerekura, a landmark national strategy to end family violence. The efficacy of such whole-of-government approaches is validated internationally.

Te Aorerekura provides a roadmap toward sustained and meaningful change, administered by a specialised agency within Government, Te Puna Aonui, that gives effect through inter-Ministry collaboration and action. TPA offers the vital, centralised leadership needed to bring Te Aorerekura to fruition. NCIWR believes it is crucial to build on the momentum of Te Aorerekura.



TPA acts as the glue between sectors and government agencies. Over time it has built a concentrated knowledge of family violence and identified an array of levers within governmental systems that impact risk and safety. If this concentration of evidence-based knowledge and policy insight can be utilised for the whole of government (rather than the 10 core agencies only) and there is an equivalent onus on all government agencies to fulfil their role in driving forward progress on family violence, the impacts will be transformative, with benefits spanning generations.

Te Aorerekura offers unprecedented potential to transform New Zealand's embedded culture of family violence. However, some work programmes instigated by TPA have not yet reached all corners of Government. Some Ministries still lag in demonstrating their commitment to the elimination of family violence, as illustrated by their lack of family violence policy or demonstrable progress toward understanding the roles they each uniquely hold in shaping what safety is possible for those impacted by family violence. Inland Revenue, for example, is not amongst the 10 agencies considered core to TPA, yet its processes are influential in how perpetrators can apply coercive control, even long after the relationship has ended.

## Family violence; expense or investment

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Te Aorerekura is a 25-year strategy, a term purposefully and pragmatically chosen. Addressing the depth and complexity of family violence-related harm cannot be done through a brief intervention, and the eventual outcomes of intervention cannot be fully ascertained until years later. The reversal of family violence impacts, and the restoration of safety, health, resilience, resources, and opportunities, is as complex, lengthy, and open-ended as the perpetration of family violence is in the first place. The costs across a wide range of government agencies and NGOs providing support to victims, their children and perpetrators are immense, having been estimated by leading economists to reach many billions of dollars each year. While this is significant enough, NCIWR does not believe that these analyses capture many of the less tangible costs, for instance the often severely impaired life chances of victims and their children.

As a long-term strategy, Te Aorerekura will unquestionably require significant resourcing across time. However, should it succeed, the investment will be repaid many times over in lowered health costs, better educational outcomes, and a lessening demand for justice system responses.

## A shift in focus

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A common myth about family violence is that when victims get support, the perpetrators' behaviour (and the risks of it) will subside. It is therefore crucial that work programmes relating to preventing, reducing, or responding to family violence distinguish 'risk' from 'safety'. 'Risk' being the perpetrator's behaviour and its potential to cause harm to others and 'safety' being the support, resources, and opportunities that help to safeguard victims from the harm, and ongoing potential for harm, those perpetrators may inflict on them. Both are important, and neither can alone achieve freedom from family violence.

Intervening with victims saves lives. Safety services offer swift and intensive support for victims, often involving meticulously planning for every possible way the perpetrator might attempt to harm or kill the victim. These services (such as those provided by Refuges) can address many of the impacts of past violence by increasing victims' personal, social, and material resources, reducing how badly they are disadvantaged by the violence and creating more viable futures.

At the same time, while an essential means of keeping women and children alive, meeting their needs, and improving their wellbeing, intervening with victims can only provide safety in response to risk – it does not remove the risks of perpetrators' behaviour or stop the perpetrator's behaviour from extending to other people. Perpetrators' use of violence seldom ceases when one perpetrator's most recent victim is out of their reach.

Accordingly, the rates and prevalence of family violence, and the risk perpetrators pose to the safety and wellbeing of their victims, can only be truly changed through a dual accountability focus: accountability for perpetrators, and accountability for systems. It is essential we help victims find safety. It is equally essential we find ways to stop the perpetrator from escalating their violence, excusing their violence, or simply choosing subsequent victims to use violence against. Finally, it is essential that every agency identifies their role in making victims safer and perpetrators more accountable – and that requires a truly whole-of-government approach.

### *New approach to assessment and responding to family violence risk.*

To better comprehend the breadth of family violence-related harm in the lives of women and child victims, NCIWR recently launched a new risk assessment instrument which is now used with clients during their initial contact with NCIWR. It captures a wider scope of the risks to the viability of women's and their children's safety, lives, and futures that result from perpetrators' use of family violence. Since its introduction, it has been used with over 3,500 new Refuge clients, and the aggregated data informs our understanding of the reach and longevity of family violence-related risk. As with any field of expertise, this understanding continually evolves in response to the growing evidence base on family violence, risk, and safety. Below is a snapshot of the unseen risks that stem from family violence:



## Specialist support for children impacted by family violence

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Family violence is a crime perpetrated against children. The youngest members of our society are impacted most, both as primary victims and because of living with family violence being perpetrated against their Mums. It is well known that tamariki are among the most in need of protection from violence, however, children represent the biggest and arguably one of the least-served victim cohorts in Aotearoa. In 2021/2022 children made up 50% of clients who accessed Women's Refuge safehouses across the country.

Exposing children to violence is recognised as a severe form of child abuse, irrespective of whether they are the primary or intended targets. Tamariki are disadvantaged by perpetrators' decisions to use violence against them or against their protective parents and have little power over the way this violence shapes their immediate and future safety or their life prospects. When children are exposed to, or experience family violence, the result is a diminishing of their freedom, autonomy, dignity, and childhoods.

NCIWR has dedicated a large amount of its capacity over the last four years to understanding children's experiences of violence. The research and policy team at NCIWR have produced two reports (shared with MSD and available on our website) that heard from 47 tamariki about what facilitates safety for them after victimisation. Many children spoke about their negative experiences of services and the justice system, and the systemic and structural disablers of safety they encounter. Children reported feeling overwhelmed, unheard, confused in their interactions with services primarily designed for adults.

Targeting prevention and support efforts for children victimised by family violence across agencies, services, and the justice system therefore needs to focus on developing targeted child-specific services so children do not have to function within adult centric systems. Services need to become child appropriate, be informed by the voices of children and provide what they want and need.

The Ministry of Social Development (MSD) recently funded NCIWR's Kōkihi ngā Rito (KNR) children's pilot. The pilot provided a specialist child advocate (Kaiārahi Tamariki/KT) in seven affiliated Women's Refuge sites across the motu to work alongside tamariki aged 5 – 12 years old who have experienced family violence. An evaluation was completed at the two-year point and the outcomes showed significant improvement in both the safety and wellbeing of all 127 children in the pilot.

### Kōkihi ngā Rito (A family violence specialist pilot for children)

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In the above we note that expanding specialist support for children impacted by family violence is essential. KNR, is our contribution to this challenge. The pilot's specialised family violence advocacy was developed in partnership with young people and was driven by what they said was important to them as service users.

The average length of children's engagement was five months, with the longest-supported child in service for 580 days. Using the evidence based MyStar tool, children self-evaluated eight areas of their lives; their initial ratings revealed that the areas of greatest concern for them on arrival into the pilot were 'where you live', 'being safe', and 'feelings and behaviour'. Children subsequently identified the greatest improvements in these three domains throughout the course of their engagement with Refuge.

The findings also showed that being a client of the pilot meant they suffered fewer losses, less psy-



chological abuse, and less harm than they would have without access to the pilot. The outcome of 'being safe' is enabled because of the exclusive, extensive, and sustained focus on family violence and safety. As the evaluation findings illustrate, the identification, recording, and conveying of these risks and where they come from is the bedrock of the safety advocacy that follows.

As signaled above, the designation of capacity and capability (including deploying the right people with the right skills and knowledge) is paramount in shaping what access tamariki have to family violence advocacy. Funding decisions and prioritisation of services for children must therefore be informed by the (otherwise unmet) needs of tamariki and by the prospective gains to safety that services like KNR can offer if made available to children at the right time.

We therefore urge the Government to prioritize the resourcing and development of support for child victims of violence that is (family violence) evidence based. The efficacy of the pilot stems from its focus on safety from family violence, restoration of what has been lost because of family violence, and purposeful, child-specific, family violence advocacy and support.

## Praise for Kōkihi ngā Rito

### TAMARIKI ARE SAYING:

*It was helpful but also enjoyable.*

*[KT] is my safe person; [KT] just listens and understands.*

*My feedback already is just this is amazing already.*

*I'd like to stay here for years.*

*I guess it feels like rewarding once you are past [the violence] because I did have to work hard to get where I am now.*

*[My KT] is really great, doing a great job.*

### MUMS ARE SAYING:

*[KNR] has been the most continual support we have had through all organisations.*

*I couldn't have done it on my own. I genuinely think we couldn't have done it without KNR because it is a different programme that no one else offers. No one else offers what we had through here.*

*I don't know how, like what is the word, like express it enough how important this programme is because we benefitted so much.*

*I would be lost without them.*

*My kids love it, they absolutely love it.*

*There had never been a time where I thought [KT] has given up on us or hasn't pushed hard enough for all my kids.*

*I don't think I would be where I am today without KT truly.*

*For me, KNR was just bringing me back to my son and getting rid of the guilt that was keeping us apart.*

## Ngā Tuarā Tōtara Whakamarumarū - Māori Growth Strategy

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The Te Roopu Whakawhanake Māori (Māori Development Team) of NCIWR National Office has initiated the national implementation of the revitalised Nga Tuara Totara Whakamarumarū Māori Growth Strategy. Māori clients make up 40% of NCIWR referrals and it is therefore critical that our kaimahi are properly responsive to their needs as whānau Māori. The intention of the work is to provide Refuges with resources to support the delivery of family violence informed practice that is both tika (correct) and pono (authentic and true), and to showcase options for advocacy that promote healing.

“We’re thinking far into the future, we are providing knowledge, guidance, and hope today, so that in the future our wāhine, and their tamariki and mokopuna, know they can live flourishing lives. The disruption of family violence is intergenerational, so we are future oriented, and we are seeing positive outcomes.”

The national approach supports refuges, kaimahi (staff), and communities impacted by family violence. The Māori Development Team, alongside local experts, have facilitated nationwide wānanga focusing on the drivers of intergenerational violence, and the consequences of these on whānau. Using matauranga Māori, these wānanga offer safe spaces for knowledge growth and healing from family violence and the ongoing impacts of family violence at individual, whānau, and community levels.

The wānanga are offered to both tauwi and tangata whenua staff, clients, whānau, and community, in line with our commitment to Parallel Development. The uptake has been extremely positive as has the feedback from participants. Participants described positive outcomes because of both the content and facilitation method of the wānanga. Comments on the content included: feeling hopeful about life after violence; feeling committed to their healing journeys; feeling more confident in parenting and supporting children; understanding more about family violence and its impact on them, their children, and future generations; feeling more confident and positive about their Māori identity; feeling less anxious, feeling more confident to open up and share; feeling safer within themselves; feeling powerful; feeling re/connected with community; and having a greater understanding of historical trauma. “Now I have a reason to get up in the morning, a connection to something positive.”

Our future funding aspirations include a continuation of the national approach to the Māori Growth Strategy as the current funding approaches its end. The feedback from Refuges, staff, and whānau has reinforced the need to commit to this kaupapa and its facilitation to ensure a sustainable and thriving approach to service delivery and safety for wāhine, tamariki, and whānau impacted by family violence. Current resourcing has been via E Tu Whānau, and we urge government to extend this funding.

# System change

## The judicial system

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Children, and victims of family violence face many and disproportionate barriers to procedural equality in the court system. Many victims and their children struggle to find viable pathways to safety or find that safety is short-lived due to some aspects of the social, institutional, and legislative contexts in which family violence is perpetrated. Children are especially vulnerable to the adverse consequences of decisions that are made for them or about them within systems that do not hear their voices or prioritise their safety.

The system must then be adequately equipped not only to identify standalone tactics, but to acknowledge how these feed into one another and respond to the full picture of family violence, rather than to the individual parts of it. When justice pathways are not equipped to do this, there is a greater likelihood of further harm to victims, based on incomplete or inaccurate perceptions of the picture of family violence.

Substantive change to patterns of family violence in the lives of tamariki in Aotearoa is unlikely to change until the specialism of family violence is introduced into family and criminal court decision-making. Alternatively (or in the meantime), establishing a mechanism through which the input of professionals best positioned to hear and understand children's experiences and perspectives on both family violence risk and safety is sought and utilised within systems that decide their futures is a vital first step to making children safer. We ask that education for lawyers and judges, preferably developed in consultation with the specialist family violence sector, be prioritised, that family violence matters before the Family Court be considered with the assistance of family violence subject matter experts, and that family violence decision-making and analysis is strengthened to reduce the opportunities for perpetrators to manipulate systems, such as by implementing mandatory training in the Safe & Together Model.

## Use of family violence information in care of children cases

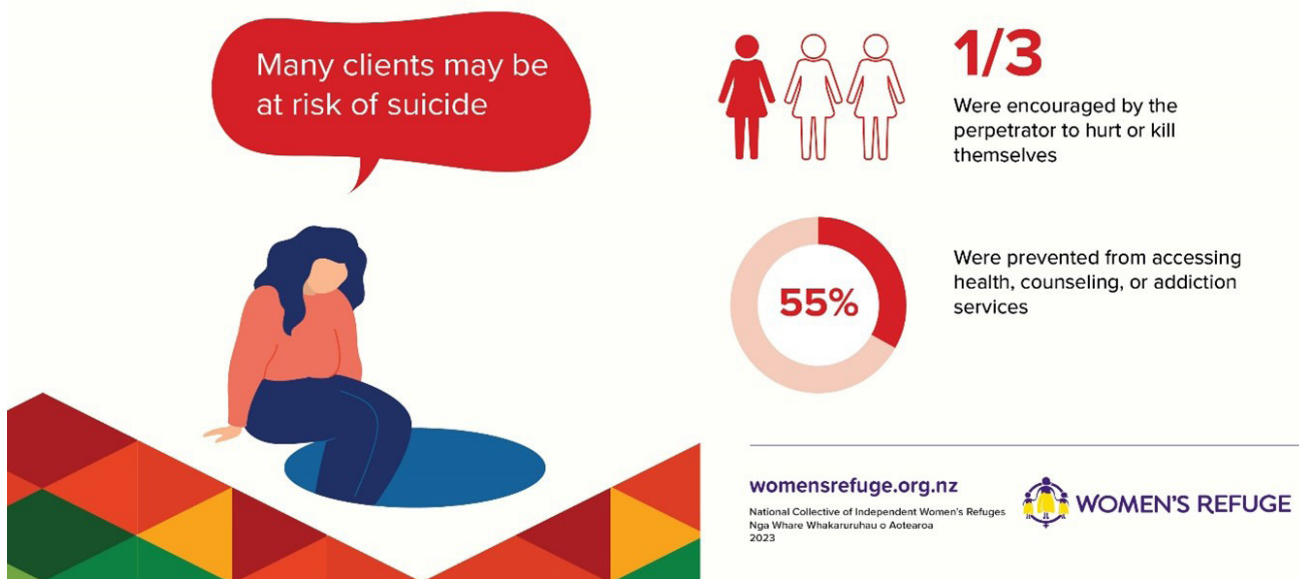
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Currently, in care of children cases, only convictions for family violence and current protection orders are considered. This does not reflect women's realities of family violence. Often, women at the most risk of lethal violence from a partner elect not to exacerbate the abuser's anger by obtaining a protection order and alerting them of her intention to seek safety, thus rendering her experience of violence invisible to the Family Court system when considering care of children matters. This frequently leads to shared care being prioritised despite current threats to children's wellbeing or on-going family violence perpetrated in front of the child. We ask that the government consider mandating the inclusion of all family violence information (such as police callouts and agency-held data released by the applicant) in care of children decisions and consider amending the evidence law to allow the submission of specialist family violence reports to the Court.

## The health system

Family violence is a health issue of immense proportions and is one of the biggest contributors to disease burden for women of reproductive age with. The more severe and sustained the violence, the greater the cumulative impact on victims' health.

### What Refuge risk data tells us about the spread of family violence in clients' lives



Most of the opportunities for health workforces to respond early and well to the health-specific risks of family violence are presently overlooked. For instance, physical assaults like strangulation, suffocation, extreme shoving, or blows to the head (which are experienced by most of our clients) often cause traumatic brain injuries (TBIs). Recent research into the outcomes of family violence screening at Wellington hospital found even when these assaults are disclosed, the medical sequelae was rarely identified or assessed by medical practitioners. As a result, most TBIs go untreated and have long-term implications for victims' health and for their social, occupational, and whānau functioning and well-being.

Family violence victims see health providers more frequently than non-victims, although family violence-related injuries frequently remain undisclosed and even more frequently remain unrecorded. Their presentation to healthcare is often delayed or disrupted by abusers, and so at the time of presenting, their healthcare is often centred on chronic rather than acute health impacts.

Traditionally the role of healthcare workforces has been to attempt to identify the signs of family violence and refer patients to social services. However, given less than one percent of Women's Refuge referrals originate from the health sector, overreliance on identification and screening is an inadequate health response. Even more importantly, referrals back to the social sector cannot change the health-specific consequences of family violence. Health practitioners, not social practitioners, are uniquely equipped to mitigate the family violence risks to victims' health and the health of their children.

## Immigration

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Safety seeking is a time of high risk for women, if women try and leave their violent partners the abuse may escalate in retaliation. Migrant women, whose visa status is tied to their abusers, are simultaneously at risk of deportation and long-term separation from their children. It is vital that Immigration New Zealand (INZ) addresses these barriers to prevent further violence towards migrant women.

INZ determines whether being safe from family violence is a viable and achievable prospect or not. We applaud INZ on its recent changes to the Family Violence Visas in February this year, which expanded the Family Violence Work Visa to include victims of temporary visa holders, removed application costs for both Family Violence Visa, and prioritised consideration of Family Violence Visa applications. However, substantive barriers still preclude safety from the family violence – many of which are already known to INZ, including issues such as time delays, cost, and wide exclusion clauses.

To support victims' safety as they are progressing through the Family Violence Visa pathways, NCIWR would ask that the government consider the provision of family violence training to all INZ staff, investigate (with a view to reforming) the various barriers to accessing the family violence visas, and consider assistance with the costs associated with visa applications for family violence victims.

## Policing

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At present, there is considerable regional variance in Police lead Safety Assessment Meeting (SAM) processes, and which of the FVIARS, ISR, or Whāngaia models they use for these. This precludes national consistency and leaves regional partnership between organisations contingent on individual relationships. There is therefore little data available with which to identify or explain trends or discrepancies across differing practices nationally. We ask that the government prioritise Police focus on consistency of practice to ensure that all victims, wherever they happen to reside, can receive the same level of support.

Member Refuges and participants in recent NCIWR research have also identified persistent gaps in police responses to family violence. These chiefly relate to inconsistency in the application of family violence legislation including, among other issues, inadequate enforcement of Protection Orders, appropriate use of Police Safety Orders, and a widespread failure to recognise non-physical forms of abuse and/or act if a victim is unable or unwilling to support a prosecution. This last point is concerning given that the Prosecutor-General guidelines reiterate that pursuing charges against perpetrators is not contingent on victims' willingness to participate.

We ask that the government look to re-commit to the delivery of high-quality family violence training to all serving officers, rather than just new recruits. We would ask too that this training includes a deeper understanding of the various unseen forms of abuse, given the way in which these can tend to exacerbate victim risk.

## Amending New Zealand's stalking law

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New Zealand has lagged the rest of the world in its stalking legislation. Intimate partner stalking typically lasts months to years, impacts victims' safety and security long after separation, and is internationally recognised as having predictive risk potential for subsequent physical violence and intimate



partner homicide. While criminal law technically covers many aspects of stalking, this rarely translates to victims of partner stalking in New Zealand accessing safety or justice as the key legislative instruments (such as the Harassment Act and Harmful Digital Communications Act) do not allow for the specificities of family violence.

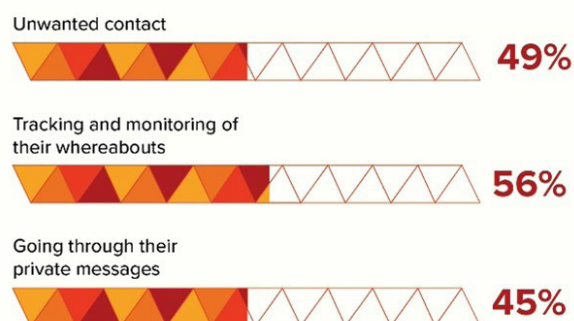
Amending the Harassment Act to make it fit-for-purpose for partner stalking has been a stated intention of successive Justice Ministers, yet to date, it remains an outstanding policy issue that we ask to be urgently addressed.

## What Refuge risk data tells us about the spread of family violence in clients' lives

Abuse can be perpetrated anytime, even from a distance



### Many victims experienced constant:



womensrefuge.org.nz

National Collective of Independent Women's Refuges  
Nga Whare Whakaruruahu o Aotearoa  
2023



WOMEN'S REFUGE

## Nationally coordinated services

The core operations of Women's Refuge are deeply rooted in our commitment to locally managed and controlled but nationally supported services. This is an approach that has served our communities well over the years and is unlikely to change. Nonetheless, there are undoubtedly services best suited to a more national service provision model, both in terms of stakeholder preferences and the need for coordination and oversight of accountability that are impractical at a purely local level. In recognition of this, the approach of National Office has changed over time to encompass both approaches to contracting and service provision, seeking a pragmatic balance to ensure we continue to provide the widest and best possible mix of services to our client group.

## Whānau Protect – National Home Safety Service

The National Home Safety Service – Whānau Protect, funded by the Ministry of Justice, is available across New Zealand to victims of domestic violence who are at the most critical and imminent risk of serious harm. For victims who have separated from their perpetrators it is a service that enables them to remain living safely in their current homes with their children while reducing the risk of revictimisation.

The service involves provision of monitored safety alarms, which when triggered, activate a recording, and prompt the dispatching of Police; a home safety improvement assessment; safety upgrades to the home and property when required; and a plan of action so women and children know exactly what to do if the abuser attempts to gain access to the home.

In the 2021-2022 contract year, we accepted 998 referrals, and upgraded 655 Whānau Protect clients' homes. These clients had 810 dependent children. We responded to 3165 alarm triggers, and 93 percent of clients reported that they had been protected from further physical violence in the three-month follow-up period. NCIWR National Office has held the contract to provide the National Home Safety Service since 2015. We have developed robust infrastructure to support the service and have consistently received highly positive evaluations since this time.

## Transitional Housing

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In recent years NCIWR National Office has worked with some of our member refuges around the provision of transitional housing. While this was something of a departure from our core business, given the close relationship between family violence and homelessness and housing insecurity, it was a logical progression for those refuges interested in expanding their service offering. We are currently providing transitional housing services across 16 locations across the country, housing between 600-700 individuals each quarter, of which approximately half are children aged 10 years or younger. Most transitional housing clients in our services are women, with roughly equivalent percentages of Maori and tauiwi. National Office manages all contractual issues, including all accountability and compliance requirements.

## In conclusion

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Women's Refuge services are likely to be a necessary feature of the social service provision landscape for some time to come. While this is an unpleasant reality, in the meantime it is our role to fulfil the needs of our client group until such time as family violence rates reduce, and we are proud of the work we do. We are equally proud of the trusted and trusting relationships we have managed to build with various governments, government agencies and other corporate and public stakeholders through the last decade. There can be no doubt that this has been of benefit to those who use our services those who fund us, and the hundreds of women who work incredibly hard within our organisation. We look forward to solidifying and building upon these foundations.