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Shadow Minister for the Prevention of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault

Kate Washington MP

Shadow Minister for the Hunter



Thursday, 28 July, 2016

SAFER PATHWAYS FOR PEOPLE ESCAPING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE WELCOMED

Shadow Minister for the Hunter, Kate Washington, and Shadow Minister for the Prevention of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault, Jenny Aitchison, together with Tim Crakanthorp, Member for Newcastle, have welcomed the roll out of the Safer Pathways model for the Newcastle and Port Stephens Police Local Area Commands (LACs).

The Safer Pathways model was well received in its trial sites and has shown positive results for women escaping domestic and family violence, although the government has not released the formal evaluation yet.

Importantly, the viability and success of the program will rely on appropriately funding service providers that women are referred to. Many of these services across the state have consistently expressed their concerns that funding has not been increased to keep up with demand, and in some cases funding has been cut altogether.

The Minister for the Prevention of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault, Pru Goward, stated in a recent briefing that no additional funds would be provided by her department to cover the attendance of agencies at Safety Action Meetings.

Bringing together local representatives from Police, Health, Corrections, Family and Community Services and Education will indeed create a more streamlined approach for victims, but without more resources to cover these officers within their own department, it is only cost shifting.

The Bureau of Crime Statistics has previously reported that domestic violence rates in parts of the Hunter are some of the highest in the state, and are increasing faster than other areas.

Quotes attributable to Shadow Minister for the Prevention of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Jenny Aitchison

“Safer Pathways will require significant input from a number of agencies to operate effectively. While it is true that reducing domestic violence should be a core concern of all government agencies, if no additional funding is provided cuts will have to be made elsewhere.

“It’s great to finally see the Government rolling out Safer Pathways (even if it is at a glacial pace), but it needs to stop making cuts to services that are required in the early intervention, accommodation and counselling for victims.

“We are still waiting to hear when Safer Pathways will be rolled out in my own electorate of Maitland, a key hotspot for domestic violence in the state, and when the long promised additional Domestic Violence Liaison Officer position will be created and recruited for.

“When the government doesn’t even know how many beds it is funding for women escaping domestic violence, there are some serious fundamental issues in their approach.”

Quotes attributable to Shadow Minister for the Hunter Kate Washington

“Port Stephens only specialist domestic violence support service, continues to face funding uncertainty after it was threatened with closure in 2014 under controversial funding changes made by the NSW Government. It was only due to community pressure that the NSW Government capitulated and provided temporary funding which allowed the service to remain open. This funding is due to expire in 2017.

“Safer Pathways is an important model of supporting women escaping domestic violence. I am very pleased to see that Safer Pathways is being rolled out in Port Stephens.

“I’m hopeful that the announcement comes with appropriate funding because every agency and service working in this sector, are already struggling to meet the need in our community.

“I welcome Safer Pathways being made available to women in the region, but having de-funded women’s refuges and caseworkers, and sacked around 100 child protection workers, I wonder where these women and children will be referred to?”

Quotes attributable to Member for Newcastle Tim Crakanthorp

“Safer Pathways will be a welcome addition to support services for victims of domestic violence.

“I’m hopeful that today’s announcement will go some way to addressing the recent horror stories of traumatised women escaping DV, who have been placed in hotels used by corrective services as a ‘last resort’ facility for men, forced to sleep in their cars, and not receiving appropriate support from the Government.”