

Responding to Domestic and Intimate Partner Violence during COVID-19; Suggested Resources for GPs and other Health Care Providers

What do I need to know?

- ✓ Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic there have been rising concerns for the safety of people in abusive relationships
- ✓ Living under varying health orders restricting movement, the necessity of social distancing and self-isolation, reduced or no work may mean that people experiencing domestic, family or intimate partner violence could be at increased risk by having to remain in one place for extended or indefinite periods of time
- ✓ Data from NSW [1] shows the first person trusted with a disclosure of partner violence or abuse is most often a GP.

Important data

- A survey of 15,000 Australian women by the Australian Institute of Criminology: [*The prevalence of domestic violence among women during the COVID-19 pandemic*](#) [2] conducted in May and published in July 2020, showed 4.6 percent of respondents experienced physical or sexual violence from a current or former cohabiting partner in the three months leading up to the survey. Almost six percent (5.8%) of women experienced coercive control and 11.6 percent reported experiencing at least one form of emotionally abusive, harassing or controlling behaviour in the three months prior to the survey.
- The COVID-19 pandemic coincided with the onset or escalation of violence or abuse with two-thirds of respondents reporting physical or sexual violence by a current or former partner had begun or increased since the start of the pandemic. Many of the survey participants said that safety concerns were a barrier to them seeking help [2].
- On 29 March 2020 it was reported that Google searches for domestic violence service had increased by 75% since the first COVID-19 case was reported in January 2020.[3] At the same time, it was widely reported that calls to help lines also increased such as 1800RESPECT (up 11%) and Mensline (up 26%) [4,5]. These increases were also reflected in NSW in a report on HSNET searches. [6]
- Women are three times more likely to be victims of domestic violence than men; approximately 5% of men experience domestic violence. 1:6 women and 1:16 men reported having experienced physical and/or sexual violence by a current or previous partner [7]. Data from 2016 PSS shows that 96% of male victims experience partner violence from a female a partner and 5% from a male partner (ABS 2017b)[8] and may present as mental health issues (such as depression or anxiety), drug and/or alcohol use or misuse as well as physical injury.

How can I offer support?

- ✓ The expansion of Telehealth in March 2020 to include all people with a Medicare card, meant that many GPs and other practitioners may have been faced with conducting phone or video consultations for the first time.
- ✓ Whilst Telehealth may have placed support for victims of violence and abuse within easier reach for some people, others may have spent far more time at home with their abuser which may have also led to increased stress and conflict whilst at the same time reducing opportunity for private telephone

or video calls. Where some people may have experienced some respite from violence and abuse from partners going to work before COVID-19, they may have been subjected to even greater risks as lockdowns, job losses or suspensions and restrictions on movement came into effect.

Being able to identify and respond appropriately to either a disclosure of partner violence or the more subtle signs of its existence when conducting consultations via telehealth arrangements mean GPs can provide the best support and advice to people affected by it.

Where can I access expert help and resources?

- ✓ On 23 June 2020 The RACGP released a new fact sheet: [COVID-19 and family violence support](#), which includes advice on how to manage phone and video consultations as rates of abuse and violence rise during the COVID-19 pandemic.[9]
- ✓ The August edition of Medicine Today published a helpful paper by Ellie Freedman and Deborah Bateman: [Recognising and responding to domestic violence during COVID-19: how telehealth can help](#) [10] which contains a step by step practical approach for GPs to recognise and respond to people affected by or at risk of domestic violence.
- ✓ Central and Eastern Sydney PHN have produced a 1.5 hr webinar [Domestic and Family Violence: during COVID-19 and beyond](#) Christina Antonas and Mireille Schlesinger discuss the complexities of dealing with family violence and tips for how to manage in the primary care setting.[11]

Important to note

- There are jurisdictional differences across Australia regarding advice from the various Departments of Health and the availability of independent organisations offering services for victims of domestic and family violence
- GPs are encouraged to familiarise themselves with local guidelines and services. We have included here a list of national and local guidelines and also other resources that may be useful including those tailored more to LGBTI communities

Note the list whilst comprehensive is not exhaustive and there may be other local resources available not listed here.

PART 1 - PATIENTS: Information and resources

National

**National Sexual Assault, Domestic Family Violence Counselling Service
1800RESPECT**

<https://www.1800respect.org.au/>

Self isolation and COVID-19

<https://www.1800respect.org.au/help-and-support/self-isolation-and-covid-19>

With Respect 1800 LGBTIQ (LGBTQ+ Specialised Services)

<https://www.withrespect.org.au/community/about>

eSafety Commissioner

COVID-19: advice for women experiencing domestic violence

<https://www.esafety.gov.au/key-issues/covid-19/advice-women-domestic-violence>

Australian Government Department of Health

Head to Health

<https://headtohealth.gov.au/supporting-yourself/domestic-violence>

Beyond Blue

Domestic and family violence during the coronavirus pandemic

<https://coronavirus.beyondblue.org.au/managing-my-daily-life/coping-with-isolation-and-being-at-home/domestic-and-family-violence.html>

State Based Services

New South Wales

NSW Health

[Guidance for violence, abuse and neglect risks and vulnerabilities and use of telehealth](#)

South Australia

Domestic and family violence and sexual assault support services

<https://www.sa.gov.au/topics/family-and-community/safety-and-health/domestic-violence-and-sexual-assault/support-services>

Tasmania

RAIN - Relationships Abuse of an Intimate Nature

What can you do when home is not as safe as it should be?

<https://www.anglicare-tas.org.au/what-can-you-do-when-home-is-not-as-safe-as-it-should-be/>

Engender Equality: Family Violence and domestic violence in Tasmania

<https://engenderequality.org.au/family-violence-in-tasmania>

Victoria

Respect Victoria

<https://www.respectvictoria.vic.gov.au/coronavirus-covid-19>

Djirra Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Services website

<https://djirra.org.au/>

InTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence

<https://intouch.org.au/>

Queerspace

<https://www.queerspace.org.au/>

The Lookout

COVID-19 and Family Violence

<https://www.thelookout.org.au/family-violence-workers/covid-19-and-family-violence/covid-19-and-family-violence-faqs>

Western Australia

Yorgum Aboriginal Family Counselling Service

<http://www.yorgum.org.au/>

Multicultural Women's Advocacy Service

<https://whfs.org.au/services/multicultural-womens-advocacy-support/>

PART 2 - Health Professionals; information and resources

RACGP

COVID-19 and family violence support

<https://www.racgp.org.au/FSDEDEV/media/documents/RACGP/Coronavirus/COVID-19-and-family-violence-support.pdf>

Abuse and violence - Working with our patients in general practice (White Book)

<https://www.racgp.org.au/clinical-resources/clinical-guidelines/key-racgp-guidelines/view-all-racgp-guidelines/white-book>

The RACGP Professional Development Program on Family Violence

<https://www.racgp.org.au/familyviolence/index.htm>

With Respect (LGBTIQ+)

Resources for professionals

<https://www.withrespect.org.au/professionals-results?searchword=partner%20violence&searchphrase=all>

Jurisdictional Resources

ACT Government – COVID-19

Domestic and Family Violence Support

<https://www.covid19.act.gov.au/community/domestic-and-family-violence-support>

Northern Territory

Northern Territory Council of Social Service

Coronavirus (COVID-19) – Advice for social and community services & the NT

<https://ntcoss.org.au/news/coronavirus-covid-19-nt-general-advice-16-march/>

Northern Territory Services

<https://www.dvrcv.org.au/talk-someone/services-other-states/nt>

NSW

NSW Health

Violence, abuse and neglect and telehealth

<https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/covid-19/Pages/van-telehealth.aspx>

Violence, abuse and neglect and COVID-19

<https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/covid-19/Pages/violence-abuse-neglect.aspx#telehealth>

Queensland

Queensland Health

Revised resources to support clinicians

<https://www.health.qld.gov.au/clinical-practice/guidelines-procedures/patient-safety/duty-of-care/domestic-family-violence/healthcare-workers>

South Australia

Break the Cycle Website

<https://breakthecycle.sa.gov.au/#report>

Tasmania

Tasmania Family Violence Counselling and Support Service

Family Violence Counselling and Support Service

https://www.health.tas.gov.au/service_information/children_and_families/family_violence_counselling_and_support_service

Tasmania Victims Support Services

https://www.communities.tas.gov.au/csr/information_and_resources/family_and_community_violence/where_to_get_help

VICTORIA

VIC Health

Family violence support during coronavirus (COVID-19)

<https://www.vic.gov.au/family-violence-support-during-coronavirus>

Western Australia

Government of Western Australia, Department of Communities

Western Australia Family and Domestic Violence Referral Guide

<https://www.dcp.wa.gov.au/CrisisAndEmergency/FDV/Documents/Referral%20Guide%20June%202016.pdf>

Government of Western Australia, Department of Communities

Family and Domestic Violence Services and Resources

<https://www.communities.wa.gov.au/services/child-protection-and-family-support/family-and-domestic-violence-services-and-resources/>

WA Government Department of Health

Domestic violence support and advice

<https://www.wa.gov.au/services/community-services/counselling-services/domestic-violence-support-and-advice>

References

1. When she talks to you about the violence. A toolkit for GPs in NSW. Sydney: Women's Legal Service NSW; 2013. Available online at: www.wlsnsw.org.au/newly-updated-gp-toolkit/ (accessed August 2020).
2. Boxall H, Morgan A & Brown R 2020. *The prevalence of domestic violence among women during the COVID-19 pandemic*. Statistical Bulletin no. 28. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology. <https://www.aic.gov.au/publications/sb/sb28>
3. Media Release 29 March 2020 *Prime Minister, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Women, Assistant Minister for Health, Minister for Families and Social Services* <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/11-billion-support-more-mental-health-medicare-and-domestic-violence-services-0> [Accessed 26 August 2020]
4. COVID-19 and its impact on the family violence legal and service system Angela Lynch 25 June 2020 Australian Institute of Family Studies Webinar <https://aifs.gov.au/events/families-focus-webinar-series/covid-19-and-its-impact-family-violence-legal-and-service-system> [accessed 26 August 2020]
5. Doran M. *Domestic violence services prepare for demand as coronavirus restrictions begin to ease*. ABC News. 1 May 2020. Available at www.abc.net.au/news/2020-05-01/domestic-violence-brace-for-demand-coronavirus-restrictions/12203178 [Accessed 1 September 2020].
6. Changes in demand for social services during COVID-19 - Analysis of HSNET searches January 2019 to March 2020 <https://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/download?file=780008>
7. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2018: *Family, domestic and sexual violence in Australia 2018* accessed at <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/d1a8d479-a39a-48c1-bbe2-4b27c7a321e0/aihw-fdv-02.pdf.aspx?inline=true>
8. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2018. *Family, domestic and sexual violence in Australia 2018*. Cat. no. FDV 2. Canberra: AIHW <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/d1a8d479-a39a-48c1-bbe2-4b27c7a321e0/aihw-fdv-02.pdf.aspx?inline=true> (Accessed 28 August 2020)
9. COVID-19 and family violence support RACGP available at: <https://www.racgp.org.au/FSDEDEV/media/documents/RACGP/Coronavirus/COVID-19-and-family-violence-support.pdf> [Accessed 25 August 2020]
10. Ellie Freedman, Deborah Bateson, *Recognising and responding to domestic violence during COVID-19: how telehealth can help* *Medicine Today* 2020; 21(8): 33-36 <https://medicinetoday.com.au/2020/august/regular-series/recognising-and-responding-domestic-violence-during-covid-19-how> [Accessed 26 August 2020]
11. Central and Eastern Sydney PHN <https://www.cesphn.org.au/coronavirus>
Domestic and Family Violence: during COVID-19 and beyond (1 hour, 29 minutes) **30 June** [Watch youtube recording here](#) (Accessed 27 August 2020)

