



WWDACT Position Statement 4

Crisis services for women* with disabilities

Our Position:

- Crisis and emergency housing should be available to all women* with disabilities who require these services in the ACT.
- The domestic violence services must work with disability services and Disability People's Organisations to share expertise and improve understandings of an intersectional approach to avoid creating silos in the sector.
- Information about how domestic violence services can and will cater to women* with disabilities should be explicit and easily accessible.
- Women* with disabilities who contact domestic violence services should be asked what their immediate care needs are.
- All women* with disabilities who seek crisis and emergency housing should promptly be put in touch with an individual advocacy organisation to support them through the process.
- All crisis and emergency housing in the ACT should be accessible for women* who have physical disabilities including those women* who use mobility aids.
- Crisis services should ensure current important information on accessing the service is made accessible (e.g., Easy English, plain English, screen reader friendly information)
- Women* with disabilities must be consulted about how to improve services.
- Data on the number of women* with disabilities requesting, accessing, or being turned away from domestic violence services should be kept and made public.

Key Points:

1. Women, girls, feminine identifying, and non-binary people (hereby referred to as women*) with disabilities are at a higher risk of violence than their peers but have fewer pathways to safety.
2. Discrimination, lack of access to financial and other resources to enable independence, and a lack of accessible services makes escaping violence extremely difficult.
3. Crisis and emergency housing providers cater to women* with disabilities in incredibly low numbers, despite high levels of violence.

Understanding crisis services for women* with disabilities

In Australia, compared to their peers, women* with disabilities experience higher levels of all forms of violence more intensely and frequently and are subjected to such violence by a greater number of perpetrators.ⁱ Discrimination, lack of access to financial and other resources to enable independence, and a lack of accessible services makes escaping violence extremely difficult. For example, most women's crisis accommodation is not accessible to women* with disabilities.ⁱⁱ

This lack of pathways to safety places women* with disabilities in further danger and contributes to the pervasiveness of violence perpetrated against them. Specific barriers to accessing services include:

- lack of knowledge of the issues and of services available by women* with disabilities:
- physical barriers to accessing services
- inappropriateness of services to the needs of women* with disabilities
- philosophy of management and community attitudes reflected in attitudes and skills of service providers.ⁱⁱⁱ
- dependence on the abuser to meet immediate care needs

While crisis services emergency housing providers cater to women* with disabilities, they do so in incredibly low numbers.^{iv} A recent survey conducted by WWDACT suggests there is a general sense that emergency and crisis housing cannot or will not accommodate women* with disabilities. Consequently, women* with disabilities – who are more likely to need services - are less likely to seek them.

Recent research by ANROWS has shown that making crisis services accessible will require more than addressing physical access needs. Access must be understood to include attitudinal and procedural factors within service providers (e.g., how they think about disability); methods by which information about services is made available; and moving beyond minimum requirements set out in the *Disability Discrimination Act* (1992).^v For example, ANROWS found women^{vi} with disabilities who participated in their research suggest the definition of ‘access’ should expand to include appropriateness, approachability and acceptability.^{vii}

Want to Learn More?

[Women with Disabilities Accessing Crisis Services: A project to assist domestic violence/crisis services in the ACT to better support women with disabilities who are escaping domestic and family violence](#)

[Whatever it takes? Access for women with disabilities to domestic and family violence services: Key findings and future directions](#)

[Stop the Violence](#)

What can you do?

Issues surrounding crisis and emergency housing for women* with disabilities are complex. Correcting the problem will involve better awareness, education, funding, and accessible infrastructure. You can help by learning more about these issues, creating awareness within your networks, and petitioning your local member to act.

ⁱ Carolyn Frohmader, Leanne Dowse and Aminath Didi. Preventing Violence against Women and Girls with Disabilities: *Integrating a Human Rights Perspective*. Sydney: Women with Disabilities Australia, 2015. Accessed 7 September 2021. https://wwda.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Think-Piece_WWD.pdf

ⁱⁱ Carolyn Frohmader, Leanne Dowse and Aminath Didi. Preventing Violence against Women and Girls with Disabilities: *Integrating a Human Rights Perspective*. Sydney: Women with Disabilities Australia, 2015. Accessed 7 September 2021. https://wwda.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Think-Piece_WWD.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ Women with Disabilities Accessing Crisis Services: A project to assist domestic violence/crisis services in the ACT to better support women with disabilities who are escaping domestic and family violence. Canberra: Domestic Violence Crisis Service, Women with Disabilities ACT and Women's Centre for Health Matters, undated. Accessed 8 September 2021. <https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&ved=2ahUKEwj489Hfte7yAhXCzzgGHRE7DgUQFnoECAIQAAQ&url=https%3A%2F%2Fpwd.org.au%2Fwp-content%2Fuploads%2F2019%2F05%2FSBWWD.doc&usq=AOvVaw3sCgXIv2yhxMuOvSxsm4>

^{iv} Leanne Dowse, Karen Soldatic, Aminath Didi, Georgia van Toorn, Carolyn Frohmader. Stop the Violence: Addressing Violence Against Women and Girls with Disabilities in Australia. Background Paper. Hobart: Women with Disabilities Australia, 2013. Accessed 8 September, 2021. https://wwda.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/STV_Background_Paper_FINAL.pdf

^v Patsie Frawley, Sue Dyson and Sally Robinson. 'Whatever it takes': Access for women with disabilities to domestic and family violence services: Sydney: ANROWS, 2017. Horizons, issue 5. Accessed 8 September 2021. https://20ian81kynqg38bl3l3eh8bf-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Disability_Horizons_FINAL-1.pdf

^{vi} Please note, this study refers generically to women. It is unclear whether they included trans women and gender diversity in their study.

^{vii} Patsie Frawley, Sue Dyson and Sally Robinson. 'Whatever it takes': Access for women with disabilities to domestic and family violence services: Sydney: ANROWS, 2017. Horizons, issue 5. Accessed 8 September 2021. https://20ian81kynqg38bl3l3eh8bf-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Disability_Horizons_FINAL-1.pdf