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Family violence during COVID-19: the perfect storm brewing behind closed doors

With demand for family and domestic violence services rising dramatically as a result of the coronavirus crisis, UnitingCare Australia is calling for an urgent increase in support for emergency accommodation and domestic violence services.

As people isolate to prevent the spread of the virus, many victims and survivors of domestic abuse are left inside their homes with their abuser – all day, every day. The financial and social stresses brought on by the pandemic, combined with restrictions on movement and isolation in the home, have created a 'perfect storm' for violent and controlling behaviour behind closed doors.

"Our services are reporting seeing increasing violence against families, women and children and we need to act urgently to increase support. The withdrawal of children from schools, childcare, playgroups and family gatherings is creating a greater risk of harm for vulnerable children and families" said National Director, Claerwen Little.

"We commend the Government for calling out this issue early on with the \$150 million support package, but more needs to be done to protect the safety and wellbeing of children and families at risk of violence" said Ms Little.

On 29 March the Federal Government announced a support package totalling \$150 million for people experiencing domestic and family violence due to the fallout from coronavirus, as part of a broader \$1.1 billion funding measure targeting social services.

As part of this package, the Federal Government has committed to distributing \$32 million across the country by the end of June. This much needed funding risks falling short of meeting the rapid increase in demand for services.

"Emergency accommodation and domestic violence services on the ground continue to be overwhelmed and are struggling to meet demand" Ms Little said.

"To ensure the safety of women and children during this time we need adequate investment in crisis accommodation, specialist outreach and case management services. As a nation, we have a responsibility to support those experiencing family violence and help them develop safety plans and access safe living situations."

"We welcome the opportunity to work with the Government to fast track delivery of these critical support measures in our community. Families and children are counting on us."

The UnitingCare network is one of the largest network of social services providers in Australia, supporting 1.4 million people every year across urban, rural and remote communities and powered by over 50,000 staff and 30,000 volunteers.

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