



**Victorian Women
with Disabilities Network
Advocacy Information Service**



**A Framework for
INFLUENCING CHANGE
Responding to Violence
against Women with
Disabilities
2007-2009**

Summary

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Victorian Women with Disabilities Network Advocacy Information Service (VWDN AIS) recognises the right of women to live free of violence. It further recognises violence against women occurs regardless of socio-economic status, cultural or linguistic background, age, sexuality, religious belief and ability or disability

Women with disabilities experience violence at a significantly higher rate than other women and have greater difficulty in accessing support services. There is a critical need for government policy and services to take account of the needs of women with disabilities in responding to violence. This Framework outlines a plan to guide the work of the VWDN AIS. It targets family violence and sexual assault as priority areas of concern. It recognises that women residing in a range of domestic environments including their own homes, boarding houses and supported accommodation are vulnerable to physical, sexual and psychological violence. Women with disabilities are also vulnerable to violence from both paid and unpaid carers providing personal support. Some domestic environments specific to women with disabilities fall outside the current definition of family violence.

This Framework seeks to intersect with the Victorian Government's Family Violence and Sexual Assault Reform Strategies currently being implemented under the Fairer Victoria Policy.

The key issues identified within the Framework are:

1. Women with disabilities have a right to live free of violence and fear.
2. The extent of violence experienced by women with disabilities is a critical and significant problem. To date the policy and service response has been inadequate.
3. Responding to women with disabilities experiencing violence is a mainstream cross-departmental issue that must be integral to all policy and program development responding to violence.
4. Women with disabilities must be represented at key planning forums concerned with preventing and responding to violence.
5. Education is required to help women with disabilities identify when they experience violence and to provide information in appropriate formats.
6. Specific resources are necessary to build the capacity of all relevant service sectors to develop the skills and knowledge needed to respond to women with disabilities. To achieve this:
 - Competency standards and accredited training on violence against women must include standards related to responding to women with disabilities.
 - Funding specifications and agreements must reflect inclusion of women with disabilities in service responses with appropriate allocation of funds.
7. Further research is required on the extent and nature of violence experienced by women with disabilities, and the systemic factors which increase women with disabilities' vulnerability to violence.

The key strategies identified for the VWDN AIS to address violence against women with disabilities are:

1. Continue representation on key statewide advisory and governance committees and explore further opportunities to represent the needs of women with disabilities at 5 regional or sub regional family violence integration committees.
2. Provide specific input with regard to the HASS Standards of Practice and the Counselling and Support Standards of Practice to ensure the inclusion of the needs of women with disabilities.
3. Within resource constraints, provide advice and information to the state-wide and regional family violence integration committees about the needs of women with disabilities who experience violence.
4. Work with Disability Services Division, Department of Human Services, to develop and implement a training model for service sectors and encourage workforce development in relevant sectors to take account of women with disabilities.
5. Provide collaborative advocacy to support the implementation of the recommendations of the Federation of Community Legal Centres' Report, *Making Rights Reality*.
6. Provide input to VicHealth's literature review and Violence Prevention Framework.
7. Advocate for the enactment of a broader definition of family violence to recognise the diverse domestic arrangements of women with disabilities.
8. Provide information, support and mentoring to women with disabilities who are committed to representing the needs of women with disabilities who experience violence.
9. Continue to develop working relationships with relevant organisations to address the needs and rights of women with disabilities at all levels.
10. Advocate for the disaggregation of data re disability as part of data collection by all services responding to violence across all sectors.
11. Encourage the further development of research evaluating the provision of support for women with disabilities who experience violence.
12. Promote and encourage the dissemination of information on healthy relationships and accessing support services for women and girls with disabilities.

SUMMARY OF VWDN AIS VIOLENCE RESPONSE STRATEGIES

Strategy	Outcome sought	Relevant organisations	Timeline
1. Continue representation on key statewide advisory and governance committees and develop further opportunities for representing the needs of women with disabilities at 5 regional or sub regional committees.	VWDN representation on Statewide Steering Committee to Reduce Family Violence; Statewide Steering Committee to Reduce; representation on other key committees identified. Representation on 5 Regional or sub regional committees. Opportunities will be explored in Hume, Southern, Barwon, Gippsland and Grampians regions.	Family Violence Unit; Disability Liaison Officers, Regional Disability Advocacy Services; Rural/Metro Access workers; Regional Family Violence committees; Women's Health Services.	Mar. 2007 - ongoing
2. Provide specific input to the HASS standards of practice and the Counselling and Support Standards of Practice to ensure the inclusion of the needs of women with disabilities.	Counselling and Support Standards of Practice and HASS Standards recognise the needs of women with disabilities.	Family Violence Unit; Office for Children; Office of Housing, DV Vic .	Mar. – Dec. 2007
3. Inform statewide and regional family violence committees and services about the needs of women with disabilities who experience violence.	All regional family violence integration committees have access to information on women with disabilities and violence.	Integrated Family Violence Lead Positions; DVVic; DVIRC; Regional Family Violence committees	Mar. 2007 - ongoing
4. Work with Disability Services Division to develop and implement a training model for disability and family violence sectors and encourage workforce development initiatives to take account of the needs of women with disabilities .	A model for training is available to disability services and family violence workers at local level. Training programs on violence against women in all relevant sectors include the issues for women with disabilities.	Disability Services Division, DVIRC, tertiary institutions, Training Co-ordinators within Victoria Police, Department of Justice and Department of Human Services.	Mar. 2007 – Mar. 2009
5. Provide collaborative advocacy to support the implementation of the recommendations of the Making Rights Reality Project Report.	Implementation of recommendations from the <i>Making Rights Reality</i> report.	Federation of Community Legal Centres, South East CASA and CASA Forum.	Mar. 2007 – Dec. 2008

6. Provide input to VicHealth literature review and development of the Violence Prevention Framework.	Women with disabilities included as a population sub group in the violence prevention framework.	VicHealth	Jan. – Dec. 2007
7. Advocate for the enactment of a broader definition of family violence to recognise the range of domestic arrangements common to women with disabilities.	The definition of family violence includes carers of people with disabilities.	Department of Justice, Federation of Community Legal Centres, DVVic.	Feb. – Dec. 2007
8. Provide information, support and mentoring resources to women with disabilities representing women with disabilities who experience violence.	Six women with disabilities providing informed representation and advocacy on statewide and regional committees.	Leadership Victoria, Disability advocacy services, Individual women with disabilities	Jan. 2007 - ongoing.
9. Continue to develop effective working relationships to address the needs and rights of women with disabilities at statewide, regional and local levels.	Effective collaboration with a range of family violence and disability service providers.	Statewide and Regional Family Violence Services, Advocacy services, Women's Health Services.	Mar. 2007 - Ongoing.
10. Advocate for the disaggregation of data re disability as part of data collection by services responding to violence across all sectors.	Data on women with disabilities experiencing violence is collected, collated and reported in the 5 year family violence data base report.	Police, family violence and sexual assault services, courts and government departments.	Apr. 2007 – Jun. 2009
11. Encourage further development of research evaluating the provision of support for women with disabilities who experience violence.	Key research on violence ensures women with disabilities included within evaluation methodologies.	Universities; philanthropic trusts.	Jan. 2007 - ongoing
12. Encourage accessible information on healthy relationships and support services for women and girls with disabilities.	Women with disabilities have access to appropriate information to understand and seek help when violence occurs.	WWDA, DVIRC, VicHealth Disability Services Division, DHS	Jun. 07 – ongoing

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