

# Shaping the design and delivery of new Core and Cluster refuges for women and children in NSW: Engagement Summary



Department of Communities and Justice



## About the Core and Cluster program

In October 2021, the NSW Government announced new funding of \$484.3 million over four years for housing and supports for women and children experiencing domestic and family violence (DFV). This included \$426.6 million for new Core and Cluster refuges, across the State. The new refuges will be designed and operated based on the Core and Cluster model, which offers independent living and privacy, while providing women and children with access to support.

The Core and Cluster program will substantially increase the existing network of NSW Government funded women's refuges throughout the state. New refuges will be established in areas with high existing demand for crisis accommodation, including regional and rural areas, with construction commencing in 2022.

The Department of Communities and Justice (the Department) is committed to increasing the number of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations that deliver specialist homelessness services, in NSW. A key aim of the Core and Cluster program is for a proportion of the Core and Cluster refuges to be led by Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations.

## Stakeholder engagement approach

Delivery and operation of new Core and Cluster refuges across NSW impacts a diverse group of stakeholders. From May to June 2022, the Department engaged with a wide range of stakeholders to inform the approach to delivering the new refuges.

The objectives of the Core and Cluster program stakeholder engagement were to:

- inform delivery and implementation of the Core and Cluster program
- understand needs and opportunities in different locations to inform locally led implementation
- build strong working relationships with sector and industry stakeholders to support future implementation
- respond to cultural considerations for Aboriginal communities and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations
- inform workforce development plans to increase resources to the sector.

The stakeholder engagement process was designed to inform tranches two and three of the Core and Cluster program procurement process. Discussions focused on key aspects of the Core and Cluster program's procurement process, with a view to exploring local needs and opportunities for locally led delivery. A total of 15 sessions were held as part of the Core and Cluster stakeholder engagement process.

### The opportunity:

- \$426.6 million over 4 years to support delivery of Core and Cluster refuges

### Purpose:

- to improve outcomes for up to 2,900 additional, women and children in NSW each year

### Early engagement:

- Stakeholder engagement sessions, held during May and June 2022, involving over 700 individuals
- Insights provided through 15 sessions by: women with lived expertise, Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and stakeholders, community housing providers, specialist homelessness services, DFV specialist service providers, peak organisations, state government agencies, local government, and a diverse range of further participants





## What you told us

Key themes raised in feedback:

### **Sector and workforce capacity building, including specifically for Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations**

Feedback focused on the importance of sector and workforce capacity building in terms of enhancing the capacity of the sector to: effectively participate in the Core and Cluster program; deliver refuges that support client outcomes; and address existing and anticipated challenges impacting the sector – with a focus on workforce development. It was widely acknowledged that some organisations seeking to participate in the Core and Cluster program are better placed and resourced than others. Feedback highlighted a range of organisations and consortia in the Core and Cluster program in order to best serve client outcomes. Rather than new refuges being delivered and operated predominantly by larger and better resourced organisations, a number of participants commented on the importance of smaller organisations, those with specialist expertise, and those that offer culturally safe services, to successfully meet the needs of women and children leaving DFV.

### **Culturally safe and trauma-informed delivery that considers the vulnerabilities and flexibility needed for client cohorts**

Culturally safe and trauma informed approaches to delivery of the Core and Cluster refuges were regarded as critical to effectively support women and children in need, across cohorts. Cultural perspectives were discussed in relation to Aboriginal women, children, families and communities; and responses to support women and children across diverse cultural, linguistic and spiritual groups. New refuges should meet the specific needs of women with disability, and those who identify as LGBTQI+. The critical importance of trauma informed approaches that draw on the expertise of women with lived experience was highlighted to support refuge design, service delivery and related communications. Culturally safe and trauma-informed delivery should consider the needs of specific client groups to ensure that the new refuges are inclusive and meet the needs of women and families across culture, language and identity.

## Local stakeholder considerations and communications

Understanding local needs, challenges and opportunities is critical to support effective delivery of the Core and Cluster program. Regional insights were provided to support an understanding of commonalities and nuances across NSW, to inform delivery of refuges and services that meet the needs of women, children and families. Engagement should be genuine, localised and planned with consideration for other initiatives taking place within the sector, to avoid consultation fatigue. Communications must be accessible, clear and timely to ensure stakeholders and communities are informed about the Core and Cluster program, from procurement through to implementation and operation. Ongoing communications and engagement should harness established stakeholder networks and channels. The important role of peak organisations including: Homelessness NSW, Domestic Violence NSW (DVNSW), Community Housing Industry Association (CHIA) and Aboriginal Community Housing Industry Association (ACHIA) was highlighted to support effective sector wide communications and engagement. Further forums and networks were also identified as offering valuable reach and insights including:

- The Aboriginal Women's Advisory Network (AWAN)
- The DCJ Commissioning and Planning Forum (CaPF)
- ACON (formerly known as the AIDS Council of NSW)
- Network of stakeholders who participated in the engagement process
- Multicultural networks
- Regional interagencies focusing on DFV.

## Core and Cluster building design

Feedback on building design focused on specific design elements to support delivery of fit for purpose refuges, as well as planning and development considerations. Refuge design should ensure safety and security and provide flexibility and adaptability. New and refurbished Core and Cluster refuges should be informed by lived expertise and best practice design approaches including Designing with Country principles, place based design and sustainable design. Importantly, the refuges should feel homely, welcoming and non-threatening – with interiors and soft furnishings in neutral tones.



## Procurement process and implementation

Strong support was expressed for the commitment of this new funding for housing and supports for women and children experiencing DFV. However, the four year timeframe for planning and development / refurbishment of Core and Cluster refuges was identified as a major challenge for sector participation, establishment of partnerships, and achieving optimal client outcomes. Participants highlighted the importance of early action to increase awareness and understanding of the Core and Cluster program and procurement process. There was a particular focus on maximising participation, supporting client outcomes and informing tranches two and three of the program.



## Aboriginal cultural perspectives

Applying a cultural lens to all aspects of the Core and Cluster program, from procurement to operation, was considered critical – to meet the high level of demand for support that exists within Aboriginal communities across NSW. Early and targeted sector capacity building, genuine engagement and approaches informed by established knowledge holders and existing research, are required to support culturally appropriate program delivery, while growing the sector and workforce. Important considerations for culturally appropriate design and delivery of Core and Cluster refuges include:

- learning from Aboriginal led refuges, programs and services that are currently supporting client outcomes
- recognising the importance of responses that consider 'family' more broadly rather than women and children in isolation
- ensuring that all refuges and services are delivered using culturally appropriate approaches (not just Aboriginal led refuges and services)
- establishing new refuges using Designing with Country principles and to support connection to Country
- ensuring the tender process is culturally appropriate and includes the requisite capacity building mechanisms to support strong participation by Aboriginal organisations
- building in opportunities for Aboriginal procurement through the delivery process; and ensuring Aboriginal participation in the tender evaluation process.

## Next steps

Thank you to all individuals and organisations who contributed to the Core and Cluster program by participating in the recent stakeholder engagement activities. We value and appreciate your time and ideas. Your feedback will be considered by the Department's team and used to inform planning and delivery of the second and third tranches of the Core and Cluster program.

[dcj.nsw.gov.au](http://dcj.nsw.gov.au)

The Department will provide regular updates on the program and further opportunities for engagement. We encourage you to stay up to date by visiting the [DCJ website](#).

If you would like to share any further thoughts and comments with the DCJ team or have any questions, you can email [SHSProgram@facns.gov.au](mailto:SHSProgram@facns.gov.au).

Questions in relation to Core & Cluster Expressions of Interest or Requests for Tender should be directed to the [NSW e-Tendering site](#).