A WOMEN’S advocacy group has raised concerns about the safety of Orange women seeking shelter from domestic violence under the NSW government restructured social support system.

SOS Women’s Support Services launched a campaign this week to highlight areas within NSW facing a high need for women’s refuges and where current services were found to be lacking or needed certainty.

SOS spokeswoman Roxanne McMurray said Dubbo had been named a place of concern.

“The new (Dubbo) service is allowing homeless women suffering from drug and alcohol dependency to share the refuge with women and young children, exposing them to violence,” she said.

“Organisations were contacted about women escaping domestic violence locking herself and her three-year-old daughter in their room because of the behaviour of a drug-addicted resident.

“That’s an unacceptable situation for women and children to be placed in when they need safety.”

But Orange Support Services Inc CEO Peter Gallagher said the claims were not reported to staff.

“The service has a risk assessment process in place and does not tolerate behaviour in any of its services that places staff or clients at risk,” he said.

“Sturt House and the Dubbo Women’s Refuge have security in place and trained staff to manage behavioural issues with clients.”

Mr Gallagher said sometimes women with children and women with mental health issues or drug and alcohol addictions live together.

He said at times the two groups interlocked.

“Generally the Women’s Refuge prioritises families escaping domestic violence,” he said.

“Often these families that have been traumatised have mental health and drug and alcohol issues due to the environment they are fleeing.

“As long as their behaviour is acceptable they are welcome in the refuge.”

Ms McMurray said the faults were not of the services, but urged the government to review the process.

“As asking the government to make the groups separate,” she said.

“Women to have women addicted to drugs and alcohol and who are acting erratically with women traumatised by violence is unacceptable.”

“The rules have been disrupted, it’s the way the tender has been constructed.”

Mr Gallagher said Dubbo Women’s Refuge are not subject to any de-ceptable metrics.

“They are doing the best they can in very trying circumstances.”

The Dubbo incident was a specific example, which had raised concern with members of community, according to Ms McMurray.

“People from the Dubbo community had real concerns for the current arrangements of general homeless women with drug and alcohol addiction and mental illness living with those fleeing from domestic violence,” she said.

Orange Support Service Inc also manages Sturt House and the tenancy support service, which is part of the Dubbo Neighbourhood Centre.

Ms McMurray said SOS Women’s Services are also concerned in the Dubbo Women’s Refuge are not subject to women’s only environments.

“It is very important that women who are fleeing from domestic violence are in women’s only environments at a time of crisis,” she said.

“They need to feel completely safe, both physically and emotionally.”

Mr Gallagher said the service criteria was under constant review and changes would be made if needed.

He insisted management change through the government’s Going Home Staying Home package was positive for Dubbo services.

“We’ve not only increased the number of women and children in accommodation, but also started to get some good outcomes for our clients,” Mr Gallagher said.

“People who come looking for crisis accommodation can now come to a central point where we can access all of our options. It’s much more person centred.”

The issue of cuts to women’s services was debated in Parliament last week after SOS presented a petition with 15,000 signatures from across NSW to Parliament in September.

Shadow Minister for Family and Community Services Linda Burney in Parliament said the government’s “brutal slash-and-burn tender process” had destroyed the NSW network of women’s shelters.

**MP defends co-payment**

from front page

Mr Coulton yesterday said he would be disappointed if the co-payment policy was changed.

“I’ve always been quite prepared to defend it,” he said.

As of a couple of hours ago, on my inquiries it’s still going ahead as far as I know.”

The MP noted there were differing opinions about a co-payment, but said there were a couple reasons why he supported it.

“A small charge means something is valued more and quite frankly in many of my towns, there is no bulk-billing,” Mr Coulton said.

“And the main reason is we have to be financially responsible to get the debt under control.”

People who are critical forget there is a large budget deficit the government has to address.

Mr Coulton said he would be “defending it” if the co-payment was enacted through “another way” but criticised some senators.

“The frustration is decisions made about legislation are not made about the legislation’s merits, they are made on point scoring,” he said.

Combined Pensioners and Superannuants Association research and advocacy manager Amelia Christie did not get carried away with the airports the co-payment had been dumped.

“If it’s definitely off the cards, that’s something (the association) would be very pleased about,” she said.

“But there is still a question mark if it will be introduced via regulation.”

**Clarification**

THE Cancer Council NSW’s Saving Life: Vision for Change campaign launch will be held at the Dubbo RSL Social Club, December 10 from 12pm to 2pm.

To RSVP please call Camilla Barlow on 6392 0800 - this is a free public event but places are limited. Bookings are essential.

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**Rural life opens medical students’ eyes**

FIVE young Dubbo locals will be graduating as doctors from the University of NSW medical program next month.

Rebecca Ainsworth, Khynare Biles, Alice Halpin, Nicola Hicks and Jarrod Rawson will have completed six years of their medical degrees at UNSW’s Rural Clinical School (RCS) when they graduate in December.

Graduate Nicola Hicks said studying at RCS had given her an insight into healthcare challenges people in rural areas often face.

“Challenges like poor public healthcare awareness in rural areas that can result in patients visiting the hospital at a late stage in their illness, or limited and stretched facilities forcing patients to undergo very invasive procedures for the right treatment,” she said.

Despite the challenges, she said the RCS was a positive place and had shown her how to be resourceful and innovative when providing patients with quality healthcare.

“With such a broad and practical experience almost a sure thing at country hospitals, along with all the benefits of country living, I can’t wait to begin my medical career, especially as I’ll be close to home, at Orange Health Service,” she said.

Graduate Khynare Biles said she would be returning to Dubbo next year to start her internship.

“My goal is to complete my junior training in Dubbo, and then gain a spot on either the obstetrics and gynaecology or paediatric training programs. She said in the longer term, she would like to work in Dubbo as a staff specialist who locums in smaller areas in far west NSW.

RCS Executive Officer Justin Nicolls said the program’s success is in ways he did not expect.

“We’ve not only increased the number of new doctors coming from Dubbo and even outside of NSW that are planning to return to the country,” Ms Brindle said.

“If people who come through our school’s success in helping to redress the imbalance of quality healthcare and specialist care between the country and urban areas.”

UNSW’s Rural Clinical School has five rural campuses across New South Wales, helping to bring world-class medical education to rural Australia.

Bloomin’ good time at Gardens Christmas party

DUBBO Gardens held their annual Christmas party with food and music aplenty.

Residents were treated to a performance by members of the Dubbo Country and Music Association.

The Dubbo Country Music Association performs for the residents of Dubbo Gardens fortnightly.

“The Dubbo Gardens community presented them with a small gift as a thank you.”

Trish and Dave Linton, chef and manager at Dubbo Gardens.

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**Letters to Santa**

DAILY LIBERAL, Friday November 28 2014

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Letters to Santa from local students.