Chairman’s Foreword

The Western Sydney Leadership Dialogue is always looking at the demographic and economic markers – positive and negative – that set our region apart from the rest of Sydney, NSW and Australia. Our aim is to provoke discussion on these issues among our network, partners and regional stakeholders to shape government projects, industry practice and community standards that can carry the West forward.

When we looked into crime statistics over the past decade, we found two rather alarming trends. Firstly, despite the rates of most major crimes (common assault, theft, robbery, etc.) consistently trending downwards, rates of domestic violence, sexual and indecent assault remained static and even increased in some areas over the same period. Secondly, the rate of domestic violence in Greater Western Sydney (and regional NSW) is unacceptably higher than in central and eastern parts of the city. We need to do better than this.

This is a difficult subject for many of us to discuss, and while it is easy for the Dialogue to focus on the massive growth and investment in major projects across our region, we won’t shy away from Western Sydney’s problems. As we strive for a more connected, smart and prosperous Greater Western Sydney toward 2050, we need to take a stand on domestic violence just like we have on ‘de-racialising’ the population debate, proper local government reform and our forthcoming work on the West’s obesity and diabetes epidemic. Our advocacy on this issue has been reinforced by conversations with our Patrons and Partners, whose support we rely upon to play our role in carrying GWS forward.

Tackling domestic violence ought to be the highest priority law and order issue coming into state and federal election campaigns in 2019, and this paper seeks to spark a discussion on what government, business and the community can do to address the issue.

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Overview

Domestic and family violence is one of our most pressing societal issues and is pervasive across all cultural, socio-economic and age groups. It is a persistent law and order issue, a major health and welfare issue, and predominantly affects women and children¹.

NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics data shows that over the last 10 years, crime rates across 17 major crime categories have been in steady decline except for domestic violence assaults, indecent assault and sexual assault, all of which have remained static or, in some areas, have trended upwards. In Greater Western Sydney (GWS), rates of domestic, family and sexual violence² are unacceptably high, pointing to the need for targeted resources and awareness-building across the region.

The impact of domestic violence on our community is substantial, and urgent attention is required to address the issue. The Western Sydney Leadership Dialogue does not purport to have all the answers to this complex issue, however we do believe that it deserves the utmost priority level among business, community and political leaders. To achieve this, it may be necessary for a Royal Commission into domestic and family violence, as occurred in Victoria, to thoroughly examine the extent of this issue, how we are tackling it and, importantly, where we are failing to do so.

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1. AIHW 2018, *Family, domestic and sexual violence in Australia*
2. Throughout this paper, references to “domestic violence” include what would typically be described as domestic, family, sexual and gendered violence. We have grouped these for simplicity, however recognise that each may be considered separately with distinct causes/impacts.
The prevalence of domestic, family and sexual violence

Across Australia in 2018, 69 women were murdered by a partner or family member. One in six women, and one in sixteen men have experienced physical or sexual violence at the hands of a current or previous partner.

It is not dictated by your socio-economic status, it doesn’t discriminate between your age, the colour of your skin, where you live or how much money you earn. Domestic violence happens everywhere”
Tanya Whitehouse, Chair, Women’s Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Services of NSW

Australians experience emotional abuse by current or previous partners at a rate of one in four for women, and one in six for men. Domestic and family violence is a major risk factor for a number of health and wellbeing categories. For example, it is a leading cause of homelessness (in particular for women), and for women aged between 25 and 44, intimate partner violence is the biggest health risk.

Within NSW, the issue has been growing; with the rate of reported domestic violence related assaults increasing between 2010 and 2015. Since 2013, domestic violence has been linked to 41% of all NSW murders, and currently makes up over 30,000 reports made to police each year. While we are seeing a steady decline in the rates of most crime categories across NSW, the per-capita rates of reported domestic assault, as well as sexual assault and indecent assault, have not improved over the last decade, and in some areas have in fact increased.

Greater Western Sydney accounts for 51% of the Greater Sydney population, but 59% of all reported incidents of Domestic Violence.

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4. AIHW 2018, Family, domestic and sexual violence in Australia
5. Ibid
6. Ibid
7. NSW Ministry of Health 2016, NSW domestic and family violence blueprint for reform
8. Gladstone, N 2018, More than 40 per cent of NSW murders now family violence related
In 2013, these figures stood at 49% and 62% respectively, so the ratio has improved with population growth but remains unacceptably high\textsuperscript{10, 11}.

The rates of reported domestic violence per-capita in Campbelltown, Blacktown and Penrith are double those throughout most of Sydney’s east. Among GWS LGAs, only Parramatta, the Blue Mountains and The Hills have rates of domestic violence equal to or lower than the average rate for Greater Sydney. It is important to also note that rates of reported domestic violence in Regional NSW are unacceptably high, and consistently higher than the state-wide and Rest of Sydney\textsuperscript{12} per-capita rate.

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\textsuperscript{10} NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (BOCSAR), 2018. BOCSAR data also sourced for Figures 1, 2 and 3.

\textsuperscript{11} Greater Western Sydney is defined as Blacktown, Blue Mountains, Camden, Campbelltown, Canterbury-Bankstown, Cumberland, Fairfield, Hawkesbury, Liverpool, Parramatta, Penrith, The Hills and Wollondilly. For statistical simplicity we have combined Canterbury and Bankstown, however we do not regard the former Canterbury LGA as part of Greater Western Sydney.

\textsuperscript{12} “Rest of Sydney is defined as every metropolitan council area not included in the above definition of Greater Western Sydney.
While domestic and family violence is prevalent throughout the country, certain groups are more vulnerable to experiencing domestic and/or family violence. In NSW, Aboriginal women are four times more likely than average to experience domestic violence related assault.13

13. NSW Minister of Health 2016, *NSW domestic and family violence blueprint for reform*
It is noteworthy that GWS is home to the largest indigenous population in Australia, highlighting the need for investment in culturally-specific resources in the region. In addition, pregnant women, women living with disabilities, young women, women experiencing financial hardship, and people who have witnessed domestic violence as children all face a higher risk of experiencing domestic violence in their lifetime\textsuperscript{14}.

\textsuperscript{14} AIHW 2018, \textit{Family, domestic and sexual violence in Australia}
Attitudes

Examining attitudes about domestic violence is important in understanding and tackling the issue. According to White Ribbon, two key drivers for the perpetuation of violence against women are: attitudes which condone violence against women, and rigid ideas around gender roles and identities. Surveys suggest that these attitudes remain entrenched in the Australian psyche.

Views on domestic, family and gendered violence appear to be slowly changing, however there remains several topics where attitudes held are of concern. On the positive side, only 4-6% of Australians think that violence against women can be justified, and most Australians support gender equality in the public sphere as well as at work.

In terms of areas of concern, there are still a number of indicators that point to a misunderstanding of the underlying causes of domestic, family and gendered violence, as well as a strong current of adherence to traditional gender norms. One in five people still believe that there are circumstances of violence where a woman bears some responsibility despite being a person subjected to domestic violence.

More than half of people agree with the phrase “women could leave a violent relationship if they wanted to” suggesting many of us have only a surface-level understanding of this complex issue.

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15. Department of Social Services 2013, National Community Attitudes towards Violence Against Women Survey
17. Ibid
18. Ibid
A large portion of the cost of domestic violence is borne by those currently experiencing, or that have survived, domestic violence, and the government, as outlined in the chart below.
Over 2015-16 the overall cost of violence against women and their children amounted to $22 billion\(^20\). At $10.4 billion the category of “pain, suffering and premature mortality” accounts for almost half of the 2015-16 cost of violence\(^21\). This category is the most expensive by far. It encompasses the costs attributed to lost quality of life, primarily for survivors of domestic violence and their children.

The second largest proportion of the $22 billion is consumption related costs, which is estimated to amount to $4.4 billion\(^22\). This category is again largely borne by survivors and their children. It includes not only immediate short-term costs regarding damage to property and belongings, but also lost economies of scale resulting from survivors of domestic violence being less likely to enter into another relationship after experiencing an abusive one\(^23\).

It is estimated that each time a woman experiences domestic violence, it will incur a cost of approximately $27,000\(^24\). Looking to the future, without decisive action to bring about a downward trend in domestic violence, it is estimated that the cumulative cost from 2014-15 to 2044-45 will be $323.4 billion\(^25\).

These costs are real and significant. When it comes to putting domestic violence on the agenda for our leaders and policy-makers, it is instructive to remind them that while the immediate consequences and costs of domestic violence are often private, the public resource implications and economy-wide costs are very much public. Ultimately many of these costs are avoidable and are borne by taxpayers, who should rightly expect their government to minimise and ultimately eliminate such a pervasive issue in society.

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20. KPMG 2016
22. Ibid
23. Ibid
24. The National Council to Reduce Violence Against Women & their Children 2009
25. PwC 2015
Putting the prevention of domestic violence on the agenda

The Dialogue does not purport to have all the answers, and there is no simple solution to this very complex issue. Nor are we suggesting that nothing is being done to address this issue – on the contrary, the NSW Government has been proactive in looking at strategies to address domestic and family violence in NSW, and is in the process of implementing the NSW Domestic and Family Violence Blueprint for Reform 2016-2021. At the local government level, Blacktown City Council is also a strong supporter of the White Ribbon Foundation and is leading a local-level response. As the peak body for community NGOs in the region, the Western Sydney Community Forum is a staunch and active advocate for the specific programs and funding required to tackle domestic violence in the region.

The persistence of domestic violence rates in comparison to other major crime categories over the last decade suggests that more must be done, and should make this a front-and-centre issue for voters. With state and federal elections taking place within the next six months, it is an opportune time to bring the issue into focus for politicians.

Typically, we see law and order issues attracting much attention in the lead up to elections, and justifiably so, given that public safety and security is a core function of any government. As we have seen in the recent Victorian state election campaign, tabloid media coverage of issues such as gang crime can be grossly out of step with community attitudes and distract our attention from issues such as domestic violence that affect more of us day-to-day.

In 2019, we are urging business and community leaders and the general voting public to shift the discussion on law and order, and demand immediate and meaningful action on domestic violence from the major parties, minor parties and independent candidates.
Recommendations

Paid domestic violence leave

The Dialogue applauds the NSW Government’s recent move to introduce 10 days of paid domestic violence leave per year for all NSW public sector employees. It is particularly important for Government to lead from the front on issues such as these. Now that the NSW Government has set the precedent for the State, the private sector and the rest of the economy can follow.

Reforming leave entitlements for those affected by domestic violence is an important move. This is both in supporting survivors of domestic violence and recognising the pervasive effect that domestic violence has on people’s lives, but importantly also in breaking down the stigma attached, much in the same vein as the normalisation of discussions on mental health between employees and their managers. This reform is one of many that are necessary to continue along the path of eradicating domestic violence, and the first step in paid domestic violence leave becoming a standard employment condition across all workplaces.

The Dialogue calls on the non-government and private sectors to introduce 10 days of paid domestic violence leave as a standard employment condition, matching the recent commitment of the NSW Government to provide the same for NSW public servants.
In Greater Western Sydney

As an advocate for the region, the Dialogue strongly supports targeted resources and programs to address what we see as unacceptable rates of domestic violence. Further, we are alarmed at the apparent culture of under-reporting domestic violence in the region, which must be addressed by accelerating attitudinal change and empowering sufferers to come forward. To address domestic violence rates across Greater Western Sydney, the Dialogue supports the following recommendations made by the Western Sydney Community Forum as part of its Build Beyond Bricks campaign:

- $20 million over five years to develop and implement a primary prevention public health model around family and domestic violence.
- $2.5 million over three years to extend the Staying Home Leaving Violence initiative across Western Sydney.
- $800,000 over two years in a pilot program to address cultures of under-reporting within Western Sydney.

With Western Sydney’s population expected to grow by over 1.1 million people over the next 20 years, the demand for secondary and tertiary services will continue to grow unless programs aimed at preventing domestic and family violence before it occurs, are considered a priority.”

Western Sydney Community Forum 2018, ‘Build Beyond Bricks’
Recommendations

A Royal Commission into Family Violence

The Victorian Government called a Royal Commission into Family Violence in 2015 after a series of shocking family violence-related deaths. The Commission made 277 recommendations and prompted a comprehensive government response and implementation plan around each recommendation.

Notwithstanding the range of initiatives underway in our State to address this issue, the Dialogue believes a similar course of action may be appropriate for NSW. A Royal Commission would not in itself solve the problem. It would, however, provide a thorough public enquiry into issues, attitudes and our responses to domestic violence. Importantly, a Royal Commission would send a powerful message around the priority ascribed to the issue, the resolve of the NSW Government to tackle domestic violence and the important role that we all need to play to support it in doing so.

The Dialogue recommends that the NSW Government establishes a Royal Commission into Domestic and Family Violence in NSW.
Tracking progress

In response to the recommendations from the Royal Commission into Family Violence, the Victorian Government committed to implementing each of the 277 recommendations. Progress is being tracked on a publicly accessible website whereby the intended actions, the projected completion date, what department is responsible, and the progress of the implementation is documented and publicly accessible.

While the progress of the NSW Domestic and Family Violence Blueprint for Reform 2016-2021 is reported annually, the Dialogue believes that the effectiveness, sustainability and accountability of achieving the targets outlaid in the Blueprint would improve if the process involved greater engagement and transparency using frequent project updates, as occurs on issues such as road safety.

The Dialogue recommends that the NSW Government adopt a similar approach to the Victorian Government in tracking the progress of the implementation of strategies designed to combat the prevalence of domestic and family violence.
Western Sydney Leadership Dialogue
The Dialogue

Western Sydney Leadership Dialogue is a not-for-profit, community initiative leading a national conversation about Greater Western Sydney. The Dialogue facilitates interaction between key opinion leaders across industry, government, academia and the community, to inform public policy debate and to advance a Western Sydney regional agenda through research, analysis, advocacy and events.

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