

FEDERAL PRE-BUDGET SUBMISSION 2026-2027



WOMEN'S
COMMUNITY
SHELTERS

CONTENTS

| | | |
|----|------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| 1 | Acknowledgement | 3 |
| 2 | Executive Summary | 4 |
| 3 | WCS Recommendations | 5 |
| 4 | About Us | 6 |
| 5 | How We Work | 7 |
| 6 | What we are delivering | 8 |
| 7 | The Current Landscape and Emerging Trends | 9 |
| 8 | WCS Detailed Budget Priority Proposals and Recommendations | 11 |
| 9 | Measuring Impact | 15 |
| 10 | Conclusion | 16 |

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Women's Community Shelters acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land and waters.

We pay our deepest respects to Elders past and present and extend that respect to all First Nations peoples.

We honour their strength, resilience, and enduring wisdom, recognising the deep and sacred connections to land, waters, and community connections that have existed for tens of thousands of years and continue to be unbroken.

In this spirit, Women's Community Shelters stand in solidarity with First Nations communities, honouring the courage and dignity of those who not only stand up and say no to violence but who take action to challenge it, holding perpetrators accountable.

We also pay our deepest respects to the mothers, children, sisters, cousins, and loved ones who have lost their lives at the hands of perpetrators. We honour their memory, holding them in our hearts as we continue our collective fight for justice and change.

We commit to working alongside First Nations peoples and all communities in creating a future where safety, dignity, and respect are a reality for all. We will continue to advocate for change so that those emerging may never need to question their safety, can live a life free from fear, and flourish.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Women's Community Shelters (WCS) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Federal Government's pre-budget consultation for 2026-27.

We commend the Government's commitment to supporting women, children and families and the collaboration and cofunding our organisation to enable us to build on our existing mission, offering long-term secure housing pathways.

In light of the escalating cost-of-living pressures, housing stress and lack of available housing options, the increasing demand for trauma-informed and culturally responsive services, and the complex needs faced by many women and children, WCS believe this is a pivotal moment for the Federal Government to prioritise targeted investment that delivers long-term social and economic benefit.

Our submission presents three priority investment areas that align and advance on the Federal Government's priorities consistent with the core purpose, mission and service delivery expertise of WCS.

Our work together equally contributes to the delivery of the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children (2022–2032), by expanding evidence-based crisis and prevention interventions in local communities.

For each area of priority investment, we provide context and evidence, proposed initiatives and budget requests. These priorities are designed to immediately contribute to address the crisis around domestic and family violence and risk of homelessness faced by our families. These proposals save future costs by preventing and responding to abuse and violence, reducing entrenched disadvantage, improving family outcomes, supporting economic participation and instilling empowerment, dignity and a positive future for women and children across Australia.

Our submission and priority investment areas have been informed by analysis of evidence-based research from across the sector and our housing continuum, victim-survivors across our shelter and housing network, our grassroots operational functions and our partnerships from philanthropy, all levels of Government and local communities. Our submission factors in the complexities and challenges of the intersectionality of housing delivery, health and wellbeing, legal and justice systems.

We thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to inform the priorities and shape the budget of the Federal Government's 2026-2027 Budget.

WCS RECOMMENDATIONS

Priority 1: Expand dedicated safe and secure shelters as the pathway for women and children escaping domestic and family violence.

Priority 2: Provide immediate safe bed options for women and children in crisis accommodation including short term underutilised and vacant properties.

Priority 3: Invest in prevention and early intervention through the expansion of the Walk the Talk (WTT) Program to build awareness and take meaningful action in local communities.

EXAMPLES OF WCS SHELTERS AND HOUSING PROJECTS

Glenfield



Parramatta



Penrith



Revesby



ABOUT US

Women's Community Shelters (WCS) works with communities to provide accommodation, safety and support for women and their children impacted by domestic and family violence (DFV) and at risk, or experiencing homelessness.

Since opening our doors in 2013, WCS has supported over 9,000 women and children and currently holds the capacity to support 130,000 safe beds each year. Through our multiple capacities including as a Community Housing Provider we support women of all ages, at all stages of their journey, and their accompanying children. We believe – safe beds, save lives.

We empower communities and take action to:

- recognise and address early warning signs to stop violence before it takes root;
- provide immediate crisis support, creating safe havens and sustainable housing solutions;
- deliver transformative education programs and lead strategic systems advocacy;
- develop local capacity building and leadership; and
- incubate and lead innovations.

WCS delivers measurable safety and housing outcomes for women and children through a proven, flexible, and community-driven social franchise model adapted across jurisdictions. As an innovative partner for the NSW Government, WCS provides a practical, scalable solution to frontline service delivery to ensure women and children at risk of violence or homelessness can access immediate safety and long-term stability.

The urgency of this work cannot be overstated: without timely access to housing and support, women and children face escalating risks to their safety, wellbeing and security. WCS offers exceptional value for money, leveraging government investment through philanthropy, volunteering, and community partnerships to multiply social impact per dollar spent.

As a trusted partner with demonstrated results, WCS stands with the specialised skills, expertise and experience to expand its network and prevention programs to ensure every woman and child has the opportunity to flourish and live free from abuse.

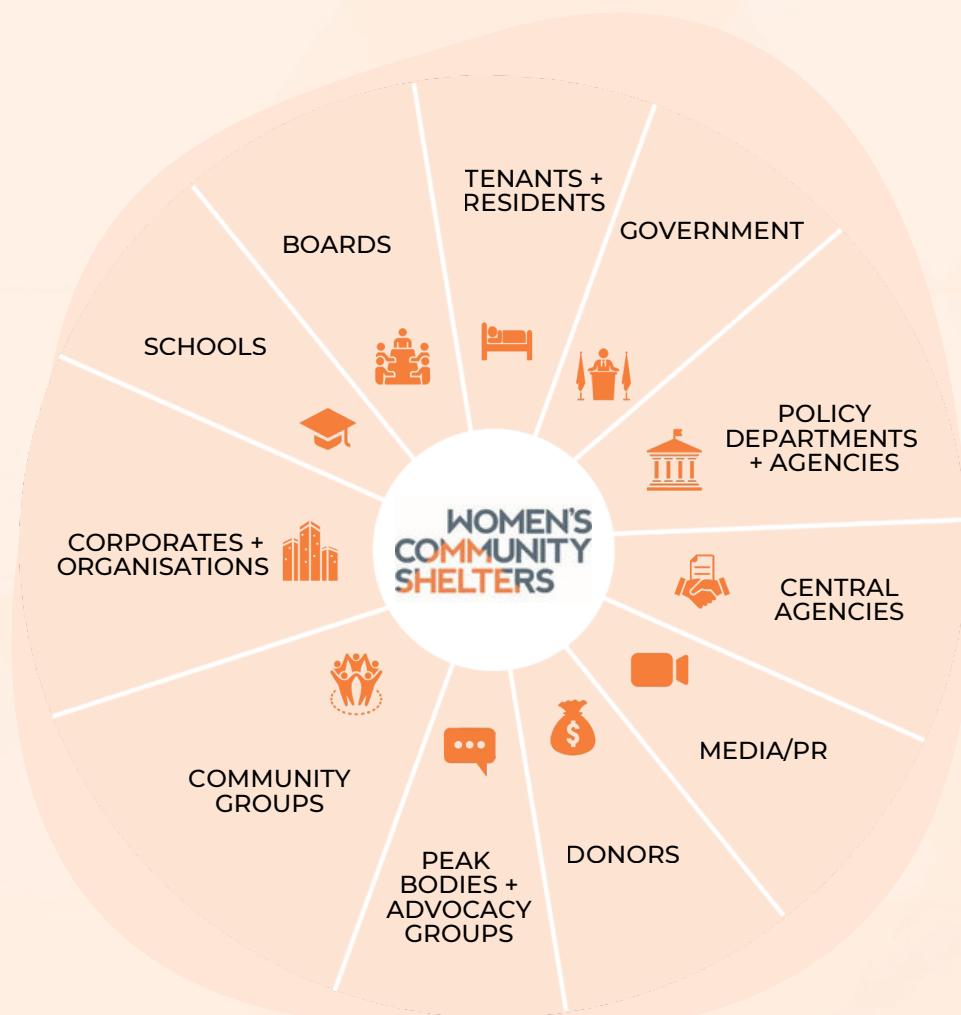
HOW WE WORK

WCS delivers and operates safe beds and support end-to-end of the housing continuum under its own innovative 'social franchise model' (model) under joint governance arrangements combining community boards with professional oversight to ensure local ownership, sustainable funding and evidence-informed support.

Our scalable, accountable and cost-effective model is enabled by way of tripartite partnership funding and support from philanthropic investment, industry Commonwealth and State Governments and local communities, strong governance and evidence-based practice. Our model ensures that 100% of funding for services goes directly to those services.

The WCS model delivers specialist DFV crisis accommodation, transitional housing, affordable and social housing supported by comprehensive specialised wraparound services such as counselling, healthcare, legal aid, education, employment and help navigating systems. This includes shelter set-up and support with funding, to shared resources and operational guidance.

Each shelter operates independently, led by a local board and community volunteers, ensuring critical community engagement. This proven model allows shelters to be responsive to local needs with the support and guidance of WCS, ensuring quality and consistency across all service delivery.



WHAT WE ARE DELIVERING

WCS has enabled the delivery and ongoing operation of:

- ▲ **Crisis Shelters:** Through our innovative social franchise model WCS has worked with local communities to open 12 shelters. We provide safe accommodation along with critical wrap-around case management and support services, including access to health care, counselling, legal help, child support, and pathways to education, training and employment.
- ▲ **Transitional Housing:** Our innovative program of 'meanwhile-use housing' partners with developers and landlords to repurpose vacant properties to provide immediate transitional housing solutions, for women who are no longer in crisis but are yet to secure a permanent, affordable home. We operate four large-scale homes for women aged 55+, who are tragically, the fastest growing cohort of homeless people by percentage in Australia. Our services include onsite support and case management at a minimum of four days a week.
- ▲ **Social and Affordable Housing:** We are creating new social and affordable homes specifically for women and their children who have experienced DFV. This program provides long-term housing solutions with tailored case management support, helping residents heal from trauma and build a pathway toward independence.
- ▲ **Primary Prevention:** WCS delivers the 'Walk the Talk', an evidence-based prevention program promoting respectful, healthy relationships, gender equality and understanding of domestic violence and coercive control. It also includes a service learning component where students support their local shelter. Since 2019 it has reached more than 22,000 young people. We also run a corporate education program, 'Walk the Talk Corporate', and a corporate team building program 'Allies in Action', to increase community awareness and understanding of DFV.



THE CURRENT LANDSCAPE AND EMERGING TRENDS

DFV against women and their children is a national crisis, and a major driver of demand for health, justice, housing and social services. DFV transcends geographic, cultural and socio-economic boundaries, and it is on the rise. Specialist services are under increasing pressure, with rising unassisted presentations to specialist homelessness services for women and children. Every night, 54,000 women are homeless across Australia, with DFV as the single, biggest cause (2021 Census). The current cost-of-living crisis, and the national housing supply and affordability crises, are exacerbating these conditions, and the severity worsens in regional and remote communities across Australia.

Increasing numbers of women and their children are presenting to WCS year on year, coupled by the rise in the complexity of cases that is leading to a greater need for intensive support, with clients requiring sustained engagement with services over longer periods. As our affordable housing crisis worsens, crisis is perpetuated by increasing rents, which limit post-shelter options for many on low to no income.

Summary of trends identified by WCS in the last 12 months:

- One in two women who approach crisis accommodation are turned away every day, primarily due to the lack of beds available to provide safety and support.
- One in five of our clients are First Nations;
- The primary reason women and children present to WCS is DFV, accounting for 67% of our clients. This represents an increase of 4% in the last 12 months;
- The length of stay in our crisis shelters has increased by an average of two weeks, to a total of 11 weeks;
- A total of 63% of clients in WCS shelter were supported into safe and secure housing, this is an increase of 10% from the last financial year;
- A total of 87% of WCS clients in transitional accommodation were supported into safe and secure housing.

WCS is taking tremendous strides to support the community as demonstrated in our nights of safety and housing continuum to safely exit our clients into safe, secure and long-term housing. However, our resources are finite, and the number of people we cannot assist continues to grow, highlighting that it is more important than ever to build our network and services.

Our response is a continued investment in expansion, education, prevention, as well as expanding our network of communities equipped to support those who need it – and to this end we seek Government's support.



Beecroft House on Sydney's Upper North Shore, provides safe transitional housing for 20 older women. The property has been made possible following the repurposing of an empty aged care facility owned by Twilight Aged Care. It is a nurturing environment where women can stabilise their lives and connect with permanent housing solutions.

WCS DETAILED BUDGET PRIORITY PROPOSALS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Priority 1: Expand dedicated safe and secure shelter as the pathway for Women and Children escaping domestic and family violence

Priority 2: Provide immediate safe bed options for women and children in crisis accommodation including short term underutilised and vacant properties

Housing instability is a major barrier to safety and recovery for women and children escaping DFV. Without access to safe, secure, and affordable housing options, victim-survivors often face the impossible choice between returning to a violent home or entering homelessness.

Demand for crisis and transitional accommodation continues to far exceed capacity, leaving many women and their children in temporary or unsafe arrangements. Specialist Homelessness Services across Australia operate at or beyond capacity, particularly in regional, rural and remote areas where there are limited options and long waiting lists for both crisis and long-term affordable housing. These women face the convergence of complex intersections and helpless to navigate our Federal and State housing, health, legal and justice systems. The consequences are profound.

For women and children fleeing DFV, instability and repeated displacement compound trauma, disrupts employment and education which hinders recovery and safety. Without stable housing, rebuilding safety, independence, and wellbeing is exceedingly impossible. Ensuring that every woman and child has access to available safe and secure accommodation is essential to breaking the cycle of DFV.



WCS DETAILED BUDGET PRIORITY PROPOSALS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Proposal: WCS calls for expanded government investment in safe beds to support women and children escaping DFV and at risk or experiencing homelessness.

This funding will deliver:

▲ Six (6) new WCS-affiliated shelters in priority growth regions and regional areas in New South Wales, Queensland and South Australia in partnership with the Federal Government this comprises:

- **Year 1:** \$1.5 million as a one-off establishment cost and \$3 million for community capacity building and shelter,
- **Year 2, 3, 4:** \$1.8 million each year to provide 50% of contributions to the operational costs.

▲ Develop an innovative and collaborative new WCS-affiliated First Nations network model that prioritise the experiences and needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and recognise that DFV in Australia is rooted in our historical context and reflects the disproportionate impacts of DFV within our First Nations communities.

This housing response must be genuinely led by First Nations peoples in a way that embeds and promotes cultural safety, place-based approaches and self-determination, and it will provide \$3 million each year, for three (3) years.

WCS DETAILED BUDGET PRIORITY PROPOSALS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Priority 3: Invest in early prevention through the expansion of the Walk the Talk (WTT) Program to build awareness and take meaningful action in local communities

WCS recognises that the long-term solution to violence lies not only in providing safety and shelter, but in addressing the attitudes, behaviours, and social conditions that allow violence to occur in the first place.

Walk the Talk School Program: Expansion to Regional/Rural NSW

The 'Walk the Talk' Program (WTT) is a proven prevention and education program that empowers young people to become change-makers in their own communities. In 2025, WTT ran in 41 schools reaching over 6,600 students and over 22,000 since the commencement of WTT.

Developed by WCS, WTT is a two-part offering. WTT partners with secondary schools to help students understand the drivers of DFV, build empathy, and take meaningful action supporting their local community shelter. It then connects classroom learning with real-world impact, fostering our next generation of volunteers and encouraging young people to support our most vulnerable to promote respect, equality and safety. This is a true 'Educate then Activate' where students learn about safe relationships and put their learning into practical service delivery and volunteerism to support their local shelters and community.

The benefits of WTT extend beyond individual awareness - it builds stronger, safer communities, empowering communities from within. By engaging students, educators, parents, and local leaders, the program fosters whole-of-community ownership of change and supports our next generation of leaders. The program strengthens the connection between young people and local shelters, breaking down stigma, and creating a shared understanding of the importance of community responses to DFV.

There is an extensive long-standing history of research that proves the investment in prevention reduces demand on crisis services later. Expanding WTT offers a cost-effective, evidence-informed approach to prevention. This early intervention assists in reducing the likelihood of future DFV incidents, alleviating pressure on already overstretched specialised DFV and homelessness systems.

The WTT program is evidence-based with demonstrable intergenerational and community benefits. 97% of all WTT participating students rate the program as very good/excellent. 100% of students would recommend the program to others. In 2025 students returned over \$293,000 of value to the Australian Community through volunteering, plus goods/donations.

Given the success and results delivered by WTT, WCS is ready to scale the program, train more facilitators and strengthen partnerships with the education sector. WCS seeks to expand the program into up to 20 regional/rural LGAs in the next 12 months, which would enable an additional 6000 students to participate in the year-long program.

WCS DETAILED BUDGET PRIORITY PROPOSALS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Priority 3: Invest in early prevention through the expansion of the Walk the Talk (WTT) Program to build awareness and take meaningful action in local communities cont.

Proposal: WCS calls for sustained government investment in prevention as a cornerstone of the DFV reform agenda, and this be achieved by the Federal Government committing:

- \$1million per year for 3 years to develop connections with local regional services and deliver the Walk the Talk program over 12 months.



MEASURING IMPACT

WCS is committed to maintaining rigorous data collection, outcomes measurement and independent evaluation across its housing continuum and prevention programs.

Transparent performance monitoring ensures the Federal Government investment is accountable, evidence-based and demonstrably improving safety and wellbeing outcomes for women and children.

Key performance indicators and outcome measures include:

- Bed nights delivered and occupancy rates – measuring capacity, efficiency and utilisation across the WCS housing continuum.
- Proportion of clients successfully transitioned to stable housing – tracking long-term outcomes and pathways to independence.
- Client safety, wellbeing and empowerment outcomes – assessed through support evaluation tools that measure changes in safety, confidence and community connection among others.
- Program evaluation of WTT – independently assessing attitudinal and behavioural change among participating students, schools, and communities, with evidence of increased understanding of respect, equality and DFV.

Beyond quantitative outputs, WCS captures qualitative impact through client stories, school feedback and community partnerships that demonstrate the broader social return on investment.

Evaluation findings consistently show that WCS programs not only provide immediate safety and stability but also deliver significant preventative and intergenerational benefits.

WCS continues to refine its evaluation frameworks in alignment with the Federal Government's outcomes measurement priorities, ensuring that every public dollar invested contributes to safer communities to form stronger families and lasting change.

CONCLUSION

By the Federal Government's commitment and investment as outlined in this submission will yield exponential social and economic returns - breaking intergenerational cycles of violence, reducing homelessness and strengthening our local communities.

WCS invites the Federal Government to partner with us in expanding a model that works - community by community - shelter by shelter - life by life.



Date Submitted: 18 December 2025

Contact: Lise Sperling | Director, Government Relations

Email: lise@womenscommunityshelters.org.au

Website: www.womenscommunityshelters.org.au