

Safe and Equal, Victoria's peak body for specialist family violence services supporting victim survivors, responds to announcements in the Victorian Budget 2022/23.

We welcome the investment into expanding refuge and crisis accommodation capacity, with the establishment of two new core and cluster refuges, six new Crisis Accommodation Program (CAP) properties, and upgrades to three existing refuge properties.

This investment will only go so far towards addressing the critical shortage of specialist crisis accommodation for people experiencing family violence in Victoria.

Safe and Equal CEO, Tania Farha said, "We hope this is just the start, and we look forward to continuing to work with the Victorian Government to significantly increase refuge capacity to ensure that all victim survivors who need it can access secure, specialist family violence crisis accommodation."

In this incredibly lean budget, we also welcome an \$18.7 million crisis case management uplift aimed at meeting increasing family violence demand, as part of a broader \$43 million package for victim survivor programs.

This is, however, a short-term investment and will not create the sustainable footing our services need to support people experiencing family violence on their journey to safety.

"To deliver the best quality services to victim survivors of family violence, the specialist family violence sector needs a sustainable funding increase that enables services to respond not just to skyrocketing demand, but also increasingly complex support needs and a rapidly changing service environment," said Ms Farha.

This budget does not include any commitment towards specialist family violence workforce capability building, which makes it difficult for the sector to quickly attract, recruit and skill up more workers. Ongoing issues around sustainability, increasing demand and funding shortages have resulted in high levels of staff turnover and burnout, with recruitment and retention of this specialist workforce a critical challenge. While an uplift in funding to meet demand is certainly welcome, increasing capacity means finding new people and skilling them up to hold significant caseloads, complexity and risk.

Ms Farha said, “In a very difficult year, we’re pleased to see some funding going where it’s really needed. Workforce shortages remain an unresolved challenge and something we will be keen to work with other community services and the Government to address this year.”

We welcome the continuation of funding for Respect Victoria and hope the government’s ongoing investment strategy will continue to reflect the need for concerted, coordinated efforts and activity across the prevention continuum.

The Victorian Government has demonstrated national leadership in its approach to preventing and responding to family violence since the Royal Commission. We look forward to continuing to work together to establish a sustainable system that can both stop violence before it happens and provide every victim survivor with the support they need to escape and recover from family violence, when they need it.