



STATEMENT ON COVID 19

As national organisations representing services delivering violence against women and girls (VAWG) services across the UK, we know COVID 19 will have serious impacts on the lives of women and children. We want to reassure survivors and local specialist services that we are here for you and we will be doing everything we can to support you during this challenging time.

For women and children experiencing domestic abuse, sexual violence, forced marriage, so called 'honor based' violence, child sexual abuse, FGM and other forms of VAWG, home is not always a place of safety. We know perpetrators will use infection control measures as a tool of coercive and controlling behavior. Access to support for women and children may also shrink further due to social isolation and those in poverty will be severely impacted. Measures to decrease social contact are likely to have significant mental health impacts on the population, and this could be acute for survivors coping and recovering from trauma.

Reports from China evidence the impact of COVID 19 on reports of domestic abuse and resulting demand for support services. This comes at a time when survivors are routinely unable to access the help they need and those experiencing multiple forms of discrimination - including black and minoritised women, women with insecure immigration status, disabled and LGBT survivors – face severe barriers to safety and support.

Survivors of VAWG need both the public sector and specialist services which save lives, are designed to meet their needs and the long-term impacts of the trauma they've experienced. COVID 19 will place even greater pressure on the police, the NHS and local authorities. Specialist VAWG services are a critical part of our national infrastructure and must also be prioritised by the UK government and all devolved administrations in the response. They are likely to see higher demand for their help at the same time as funding challenges and staff shortages – particularly as they have women-only workforces who have a higher caring burden and who may be disproportionately impacted when schools close. National helplines, email, text and live chat support services, and local specialist VAWG services, listed at the end of this statement, are currently open for business as usual, but delivery is likely to have to adapt over the coming weeks.

This is a rapidly developing situation in which no one has all the answers. We are supporting the sector with advice and guidance, and working with our members to understand the challenges that COVID 19 is having on women experiencing VAWG and the services they provide. We identify the following priorities for action:

- **Funding:** all funders – including the UK government, national administrations and local government, as well as trusts and foundations – must ensure that specialist VAWG services can meet demand for help, do not face unnecessary burdens in reporting or achieving targets, and are resilient during this emergency. Governments must ensure that the provision of life-saving VAWG services, who have faced years of budget cuts and have limited cashflow, is secure in this period. This requires: providing the sector with an immediate cash injection to cope with additional pressure now; repurposing the final £15 million Tampon Tax round as unrestricted grant funding to specialist women's services to ensure they can cope and adapt, and making this work for all nations; committing to replace any loss of rental income for refuges who have to close as a result of the virus; monitoring and responding to demand and capacity for all specialist services, including helplines and online services, and committing to step in if services are hit financially.
- **Equal support:** controlling the virus requires all of us, so all women must be supported in the response. We join [the calls](#) for an end to hostile environment policies, 'no recourse to public funds' conditions, and immigration detention to prevent the spread of the virus and ensure

migrant women experiencing VAWG can access free healthcare at the point of need and other forms of statutory support. Local authorities must work to identify all women and children made homeless and destitute due to VAWG, who are often the 'hidden homeless', and support them to self-isolate as required. The government must commit to treating everyone in society with humanity and compassion, and denying no one help.

- **Contingency planning:** life-saving VAWG professionals must be specified as key workers and services included within planning for the essential sectors which must continue during the pandemic. The realities of social distancing and isolation will require immediate investment in technology and remote working to ensure that every survivor can access the support they need on the phone or online. Refuge services, which are often communal forms of accommodation, must be supported to test for coronavirus and deliver self-contained provision where needed.
- **Guidance:** government guidance on social distancing and self-isolation urgently requires specific safeguarding advice for those who experience harm at home, the steps adult and child survivors, their family and friends, and professionals can take to protect their safety, the support that's available and how to access it. This should be developed in partnership with specialist VAWG services and relevant public sector agencies.
- **Awareness:** the government should deliver clear public communications on why forms of VAWG are crimes and that the additional pressure families and individuals will be facing at this time is no excuse to commit them, their scale, nature and impact, the full range of support types available for women and children and the response available for those using abuse, and the continuing need for a consistent and robust response to tackle perpetrators and keep survivors safe in the context of COVID 19. Communication should speak to all communities and recognise the additional barriers facing women and children from marginalised groups.
- **Equal representation, monitoring and action:** women are set to be disproportionately impacted by COVID 19. Women are over-represented in the care sector, and more likely to be in precarious and low paid work, more reliant on social security and worst impacted by poverty. Understanding how the pandemic affects women's economic independence – and how this impacts on women's safety and experiences of VAWG - will be critical to ensure the right action is taken in response. We call for [women's representation](#) in national and global responses to COVID 19, including the UK's C-19 ministerial group which should be cross-party, and include all devolved nations.

This is a rapidly developing situation and the impacts on survivors and services are changing day by day. We stand together to support our life-saving VAWG sector, who are on the frontline in supporting women and children impacted by the pandemic. We will work to ensure the challenges they face are understood within government, public sector agencies and all relevant partners, and necessary steps are taken to ensure every survivor gets the support they need during this time of national challenge.

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Dawn Jeffery, Director, Welsh Women's Aid

Vivienne Hayes MBE, CEO, Women's Resource Centre

Sarah Green, Director, End Violence Against Women Coalition

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Suzanne Jacob OBE, CEO, SafeLives

Baljit Banga, Director, Imkaan

Jo Todd, CEO, Respect

Dr C Quinn, CEO, Rape Crisis England & Wales

Sarah Mason, CEO, Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland

HELP AND SUPPORT

England

- The Freephone, 24hr National Domestic Abuse Helpline – 0808 2000 247 or www.nationaldahelpline.org.uk/Contact-us
- Rape Crisis services - www.rapecrisis.org.uk/get-help/want-to-talk/
- National LGBT+ Domestic Abuse Helpline – 0800 999 5428
- Men’s Advice Line - a confidential helpline, email and webchat service for male victims of domestic abuse: 0808 801 0327 or www.mensadvice.org.uk.
- The Mix, free information and support for under 25s in the UK - 0808 808 4994
- Rights of Women advice lines: www.rightsofwomen.org.uk/get-advice/advice-lines/
- Women’s Aid – including Live Chat, email, the Survivors Forum and local services: www.womensaid.org.uk/information-support/
- Respect Phonenumber - a confidential helpline, email and webchat service for domestic abuse perpetrators and those supporting them: 0808 8024040 or www.respectphonenumber.org.uk

Northern Ireland

The 24 hr Domestic and Sexual Abuse helpline is open to women and men affected by domestic abuse or violence. This free telephone service is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year:

- Phone: 0808 802 1414 (Freephone)
- Email: help@dsahelpline.org

Local services: www.womensaidni.org/get-help/local-groups/

Scotland

Scotland’s 24hr Domestic Abuse and Forced Marriage Helpline: 0800 027 1234 or www.sdafmh.org.uk/

Rape Crisis Scotland: National Helpline on 08088 01 03 02 (6pm to midnight, 7 days a week) or www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk/

Further support and local services: www.mygov.scot/domestic-abuse/support-for-female-victims/

Wales

The Live Fear Free helpline provides advice, support and referrals 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year to anyone affected by violence against women, domestic abuse or sexual violence in Wales. You can contact the Live Fear Free Helpline on:

- Telephone: 0808 80 10 800
- Live Chat Service: gov.wales/live-fear-free
- Text: 078600 77 333
- Email: info@livefearfreehelpline.wales

Local services: www.welshwomensaid.org.uk/information-and-support/find-your-local-service/