

Feedback from engagement sessions

Engagement sessions on the Domestic Violence Crisis Accommodation Functional Design Brief were held with peak bodies, community housing providers and specialist homelessness providers throughout the course of the development of the functional design brief document.

Feedback covered many items of asset design and, while not in the scope of this document, we have included comments relating to the service as this may assist with the design of the service model at the property.

The full summary of takeaways from the engagement sessions are detailed below.

Session	Topic	Feedback
Homelessness and DV peaks – 20 October 2020 – 14 December 2020	Children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children focussed service design, focussing on children of all ages, allowing for a space that is therapeutic. • Flexibility for older children, e.g. break away spaces for small groups etc.. • Crèche/child minding facilities. • Sensory play areas. • Green space for kids.
	Parking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Off street parking, where cars are not easily identifiable from the street, especially in rural/remote areas. • When off-street parking is not available, provide secure access to transport for women and children without cars. • Safer to keep resident cars away from site due to availability of tracking devices. Create relationships with local councils to enable residents to confidentially park on council facility parking.
	Pets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pet friendly accommodation is important; however flexible design is needed as some women and children have anxiety around animals. • RSPCA is a valuable support and resource for advising on suitability of areas for specific pets. • Where there is space and amenity pet enclosures can be wonderful but community partnerships (vets/foster carers) located nearby really help. • Consideration for kids with allergies. • Currently, core/cluster model with courtyard at rear works well with animals. • Consider concerns regarding the potential for pets to cause property damage.

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	Core and cluster model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shared spaces are not working well due to different parenting styles; different levels of intense trauma; COVID-19 management; etc. Difficulty to have children in apartments, which is easier to accommodate in a Core and Cluster design.
	Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consultation at the local level with the local community for design and site selection. Flexibility around family size is needed. Communal space needs to be separated from main entry. Having generous storage is important, consider storage within furniture. Consider providing communal rooms that may be repurposed. Domestic feel to the design, rather than institutional, i.e. natural lighting, garden spaces.
	Core	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wrap around supports needed for temporary visa holders. Staff need additional space to operate, privacy issues. Communal kitchens are good, allows for organised activities. Internet connectivity is important, allowing for telehealth services, accessing court via video link.
	Cluster units	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adequate sound proofing – music is important for healing.
	Dual key	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dual key designs are considered positive as a single bed unit still has access to a garden/balcony.
	Outdoor spaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provision of outdoor spaces may allow for smaller living spaces. Vegetable gardens – peaceful, therapeutic activity for women and kids. Connection with a green space is important.
	Staffing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimal space and privacy for service staff. Caretakers do not stay overnight; however are serviced remotely by after-hours staff.

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Disability groups – 16 April 2021	Design Standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lifts are needed in all multi-level dwellings built from now on, otherwise staff are forced to assess if disability is ‘severe enough’ that the client can’t manage steps. Preference for design to be gold standard under the Livable Housing Design Guidelines. Universal design approach much more inclusive of all kinds of disability, so lifts are important, but there are a whole range of other issues like blindness, cognitive disabilities and/or temporary issues. Accessibility of communal and office spaces for all stakeholders – employees, volunteers. Retrofit accommodation comes with issues, as all components of the dwelling do not have the disability in mind.
	Pets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider children with a disability as well as important to be able to accommodate animals. Not just guide dogs, people use assistance animals for so many other type of disabilities.
	Finishes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Surfaces such as carpet are difficult for wheelchairs
	Specialist design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need to provide accurate information about alternative ways to get to the refuge, e.g. for the vision impaired. Climate control – ease of use. Wi-Fi. Hearing loops. Cupboards that can be moved up and down. People like to live independently. The heights of kitchen areas should be considered too.
	Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Require better planning controls as a Core and Cluster model is not clearly defined as a group home or a boarding house.
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) groups – 19 November 2020 (Session 1) – 20 April 2021 (Session 2)	Family composition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A mother with 4-6 children is more typical than 1-3 children. Family sizes may be even larger. Need options to store additional beds. Large families may disengage early due to existing accommodation constraints. Dual key is very important. Often dealing with family and community violence, not necessarily the intimate partner. Trundle beds work well with large families. They are more space efficient and a safer option than bunks.

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	Core space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amenities and privacy are important for staff. • Passive surveillance for mothers watching over children. • They can see the monitors within the office. • If you are transparent with the reason for the camera, the women will feel safer. • Hold groups with indigenous women in the refuges – activities such as painting, cooking, weaving. Opportunities to leverage elders on governance boards, other ATSI-focused agencies, universities. • Call list for after-hours support - Aboriginal service directory incorporated in the design. • Spaces where there is a lot of seating outside, so people can feel as though they have an ability to leave and not be enclosed. • Having the common area near the kitchen helps mothers' supervise their own children but also bond with each other.
	Adolescents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teenage sons do not appear to stay in the crisis accommodation. Mothers will disengage from crisis accommodation if teenage sons don't wish to stay in the refuge. • A separate area for differently aged children, in particular teenage boys. • A computer room that the kids can use for homework.
	Cluster units	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual units are important to maintain privacy and confidentiality of clients. • Focus on shared parenting responsibilities within ATSI population can lead to increased pressure/stress for mothers within the refuge if they aren't able to retreat to own self-contained space. • Security, duress alarms in each of the units, as well as an overarching security system. • Important to have a bath in addition to showers. • Separate toilets.

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	Location	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addresses are not secret in remote locations, resulting in higher safety and security risks. • Consider multiple smaller sites throughout the community – enabling transfer of clients if confidentiality/security is breached. • Sometimes going out becomes a safety issue, as you may be seen. Lack of suitable transport, particularly in regional areas can also prevent access. • There are a lot of women who come in with DV intersecting with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ mental health issues ○ drug addition ○ long term homelessness • Hard to meet goals required to keep custody of children when many require travel offsite to attend appointments again risking safety. • Consider location of the refuge in relation to services such as the police. • Remote areas - access to fast internet and technology
	Staffing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Space for health workers and legal support separate from the main building. • Staff who are locals, to provide understanding / insight to local family structures to prevent conflict. • Confidentiality is a big issue - workers that are not on country to protect privacy. • Having Aboriginal staff available to discuss things with. Two to three days cultural awareness training is not enough to break down barriers. • Remote areas - lack of accommodation options, even for staff. Need to consider accommodation options for staff who are not onsite (for wellbeing).

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	Finishes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid things that are made of fabric. • Focus on sturdiness. • Built in furniture. • Healing, colours can be adapted by artwork (by local artists or past clients) etc. • Hard time keeping places clean, during COVID-19 pandemic. • Dark leather couches. • Core meeting spaces. Women meet in circles. Beautifully decorated rooms with meeting mats.
Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) groups – 23 April 2021	Religious sensitivities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Morning prayers would wake up women sharing (Islam) • Quiet rooms for meditation / prayer • Once a boy is older than 10 the women need to cover themselves when out i.e. wear a hijab (Islam) • A dedicated space is ideal, but if not available dedicated time for each activity can work.
	Pets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulties accommodating certain pets because CALD women cannot be around them. • Families come with pets, and appropriate pet accommodation is needed.
	Service flexibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bilingual, bicultural staff and practices are important from a services perspective. • Deliveries sometimes occur after hours when staff are not present – consider design options to facilitate these deliveries, as well as security.
	Design flexibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High need for accommodation that can cater for all family units with children of all ages, including teenage boys. • A timeout room is good for teenagers who don't want to be in the same space as their mothers. • Teenage boys are also traumatised and need their own space for healing, while ensuring all women feel safe.
	Communal spaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communal spaces allow families to feel supported, safe and they feel like they're part of that local community • Cooking is very important. CALD women take up the kitchen, which can frustrate other women that just want to go in and make a coffee. • Separate storage in kitchens to cater for religious and dietary needs i.e. vegan, vegetarian, halal. • A place to do homework, hang out, play games, feel like they're not constantly being looked at in a public space.

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Family Safety Victoria - 16 July 2021	Accessibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At least one platinum level under the Liveable Housing Design Guidelines, disability accessible cluster unit per refuge. Remaining units are designed to silver standard. Step-free access to each unit. All multi-storey developments have lifts.
	Fire compliance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Properties are designed to Type 3 fire compliance¹, i.e. a client who is not able to understand and respond to an alarm but can evacuate with staff intervention
	Cultural sensitivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Catering for diverse cultural needs is driven by support services, rather than by visual augmentations
	Design flexibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Victoria make use of movable partitions to amend bedroom categories.
	Site selection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Land size between 2,500-3,000m², with a minimum of 6 units, maximum of 10 units. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reliant on advice from police Privacy Safety/security Proximity to services Advice from the agency operating the existing refuge Proximity to bushland/waterways (create additional safety concerns with children and pets)
	Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aim for increased client satisfaction rather than different outcomes.
	Service model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Length of stay - goal is for clients to reside in cluster units for no longer than six weeks.

¹ Capital development guideline – 7.1 – Fire risk management policy and procedures (2013)