

POLICY COSTING BRIEF

**REFORMING THE CRISIS
PAYMENT FOR FAMILY
AND DOMESTIC
VIOLENCE: A NATIONAL
TEST OF WILL**

June 2025



Acknowledgement of Country

The Working with Women Alliance acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land on which we work and live.

We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders past, present and future, and we value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders past, present and emerging.

We value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures, and knowledge.

About Us

The Working with Women Alliance (WwwA) represents two key portfolios: National Women's Safety (NWS) and National Women's Equality (NWE).

The WwwA connects the critical areas of gender-based violence prevention and the advancement of women's economic equality and leadership, bridging these important policy fields for greater impact.

We work with members and stakeholders, including the Australian Government, to provide expertise and advice on gender equality and women's safety.



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Working with
Women Alliance



Executive Summary



Leaving violence should not cost you your future. Yet in Australia today, it often does.

Every year, thousands of women and children attempt to escape abusive relationships, only to find themselves trapped, not just by their abusers, but by economic barriers. Without sufficient funds for secure housing, safe transport, or even basic essentials, many survivors are forced back into danger. The crisis payment system, initially intended as a safety net for one-off emergencies, falls drastically short in supporting those experiencing coercive control, economic abuse, and ongoing instability. Comprehensive reform is not just overdue, it is critical. This policy brief lays out a fully costed, evidence-driven pathway toward urgently needed change.

The current crisis payment system has significant flaws that actively hinder rather than help survivors. Eligibility is narrowly restricted to individuals already receiving income support, excluding many others equally in need. The payment itself, capped at approximately \$369, barely covers immediate necessities, let alone the substantial expenses associated with safely leaving violence. Additionally, the requirement that claims be submitted within a seven-day window ignores the reality of trauma, logistical challenges, and systemic delays. Survivors navigating coercive control frequently find themselves unable to provide the documentation the system demands. Further compounding these difficulties, an annual limit of just four claims fails to acknowledge the grim reality of recurring or escalating violence.

Urgent recommendations for reform include:

- **Broadening eligibility criteria** to remove restrictive income support requirements and include temporary visa holders and referrals from specialist services.
- **Increasing the payment amount to a base rate of \$5,000**, indexed to CPI, and allowing optional split disbursements.
- **Extending the claim window to 28 days post-incident**, with provision for retrospective claims through trusted services.
- **Review the current claim cap** to adequately support those facing recurring or escalating risks.
- Building specialist domestic and family violence capability within Centrelink through **mandatory trauma-informed training and integrated referral models**.

Ultimately, the current system is not merely inadequate it effectively penalises survivors for seeking safety. Immediate reform is essential to ensure no survivor is forced back into danger due to financial barriers.

What Works: National and International Insights

Across comparable jurisdictions and pilot programs, the evidence is consistent: flexible, adequate financial assistance enables victim-survivors to leave violence safely and stabilise their lives.

In the United Kingdom, the Women's Aid Survivors Fund offers one-off payments of up to £2,500 to women escaping abuse. Evaluations found that 83.4% of recipients used the payments to flee abusers, while 77.6% used them for essentials, directly improving safety and wellbeing (Women's Aid, 2023).

In Australia, independent evaluations of the Leaving Violence Program and the Red Cross Emergency Assistance Program have found that \$5,000 in direct cash support enables survivors to secure accommodation, replace documents, and access legal and counselling services. These programs have reduced returns to violence and increased housing and financial stability (Department of Social Services [DSS], 2023; Red Cross Australia, 2023).

UN Women and the International Monetary Fund have reported that reducing gender-based violence contributes to national economic growth and women's workforce participation (International Monetary Fund [IMF], 2021; UN Women, 2023).

Despite this, uptake of Australia's existing crisis payment remains extremely low. In 2023, just 0.63% of income support recipients accessed the payment, despite an 83% increase in demand between 2015–16 and 2023–24 (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare [AIHW], 2024). This points to unmet need and structural barriers.

Treasury-Aligned Costing and Economic Impact Analysis

A reformed crisis payment of \$5,000 for victim-survivors of domestic and family violence is a fiscally responsible and evidence-based policy solution that delivers long-term economic and social returns. Using conservative Treasury-aligned assumptions, this proposal models both the costs and the measurable benefits of scaling access to crisis payments nationally.

Program Costing Overview

Based on an estimated 50,000 eligible claims annually, the direct program cost is \$250 million. Including a 5% administrative overhead (\$12.5 million), the total program cost is \$262.5 million, which constitutes just 0.045% of the Australian Government's total expenditure for 2024–25 (Australian Government, 2023).

To allow for variability, a 10% contingency reserve is included, and the costing accommodates a phased rollout:

- Year 1: Pilot in NSW and VIC — \$125 million
- Year 2: National expansion, guided by evaluation data

These figures draw on uptake patterns from the Leaving Violence Program (LVP), which reached approximately 65% of its eligible cohort during early implementation (Department of Social Services, 2024).

Sensitivity Analysis

- Low uptake (40,000 claims): \$200 million
- Base case (50,000 claims): \$262.5 million
- High uptake (60,000 claims): \$300 million

Projected Economic Benefits

Beyond immediate safety and stabilisation, crisis payments deliver significant downstream savings. Based on comparative program evaluations and modelling (KPMG, 2016; Women's Aid Federation of England, 2023; UN Women & IMF, 2022), the following conservative benefits are projected:

- \$120 million annual reduction in demand for homelessness services (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2023)
- \$80 million annual relief to the health and justice systems (Productivity Commission, 2022)
- \$25 million annual economic uplift from increased workforce participation (ANROWS, 2021)

These are not speculative benefits — they are consistent with observed economic gains from violence reduction and housing stability initiatives across OECD countries.

Benefit–Cost Ratio (BCR)

- Year 1: 0.86 (reflecting initial investment and partial scale)
- By Year 3: >1.1, meaning the program generates a positive economic return over time

This modelling confirms that investing in crisis payments is not just a moral imperative it's a smart, cost-effective use of public funds that prevents future harm and reduces systemic burden

Policy Recommendations

To ensure crisis payments for domestic and family violence victim-survivors are effective, accessible, and trauma-informed, the following evidence-based reforms are recommended.

1. Broaden Eligibility

Restricting eligibility to people on income support excludes many victim-survivors, particularly temporary visa holders, women in insecure work, and those recently separated.

Recommendations:

- Remove the income support requirement.
- Extend access to temporary visa holders and referrals from specialist domestic and family violence (DFV) services.

This aligns with Red Cross temporary visa holder support (Australian Red Cross, 2023) and findings from the Leaving Violence Program (Department of Social Services, 2024), which highlight unmet need among women not receiving income support.

2. Increase the Payment

The current \$1,500 payment is insufficient for relocation, securing new housing, or safety upgrades. UK evaluations show £2,500 (~AUD \$5,000) enables women to leave safely and recover (Women's Aid Federation of England, 2023).

Recommendations:

- Set the base payment at \$5,000, indexed annually to CPI.
- Allow split disbursements to support staged exits and recovery.

Evidence from the LVP pilot shows that \$5,000 is a practical and effective threshold for enabling safety transitions (Department of Social Services, 2024).

3. Extend the Claim Window

A 7-day claim window fails to reflect the realities of DFV, where delays in reporting and help-seeking are common due to fear, trauma, and instability.

Recommendations:

- Extend the claim window to 28 days post-incident.
- Allow retrospective claims referred through specialist DFSV services.

Trauma-informed models and economic security research support longer windows as critical to access and safety (ANROWS, 2021).

4. Review the Cap on Claims

DFV is often cyclical and escalating, particularly in cases involving coercive control. Limiting assistance to per year leaves many without recourse when risk returns.

Recommendations:

- Review the cap on claims.
- Allow multiple claims with risk validated by specialist DFSV services.

ANROWS (2021) and KPMG (2016) emphasise the need for flexible supports that match the lived experience of survivors.

5. Build DFV Capability within Centrelink

Centrelink is a key service touchpoint. Yet, staff often lack training in coercive control, economic abuse, and trauma-informed service.

Recommendations:

- Provide mandatory DV-alert Training.
- Partner with specialist services via integrated referral models to improve uptake and safety.

The Productivity Commission (2022) highlights the success of integrated service models in improving outcomes across housing, mental health, and justice.

Conclusion

This fully costed reform represents an immediate, practical solution to strengthen Australia's social safety net, align effectively with the objectives of the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children, and deliver demonstrable economic and social returns on public investment. By adopting these recommendations, policymakers can swiftly dismantle the financial barriers that trap survivors in cycles of abuse. The investment required is modest; the benefits both economic and moral are significant. Reform is urgent, evidence-based, and achievable.

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