

Q&A: National Home Safety Service

Why do we need the National Home Safety Service?

While the crime rate is the lowest since 1978, we can do more to help the victims of family and sexual violence.

Family and sexual violence devastates the lives of too many New Zealanders. For example:

- In 2013, New Zealand Police conducted more than 95,000 family violence investigations.
- Around half of all violent offence charges in our courts relate to family violence.
- Half of all homicides are the result of family violence. Up to a third of all New Zealand women will experience partner or sexual violence in their lifetimes.
- In 2013, there were around 150,000 notifications to Child, Youth and Family Services regarding care and protection of children. There is also intimate partner violence occurring in approximately 65% of child abuse and neglect cases reported to Child, Youth and Family Services.
- Half of all sexual abuse of children is perpetrated by their primary caregivers or other members of their household.

The National Home Safety Service will play a key role in providing support and resources for family violence victims and children to live free from violence, and continue to do so in their own homes. The National Home Safety Service will give family violence victims more options for leaving an abusive relationship, which is especially important for victims who cannot, or do not want to, leave their home as well.

What is National Home Safety Service?

The National Home Safety Service is a crime prevention initiative, focussed on making changes to high risk domestic abuse victims' homes to ensure they are safer and more secure and reducing their likelihood of re-victimisation.

The service is available for victims of domestic violence who are at high risk of repeat victimisation and of serious injury or death, if they remain in their homes without a safety upgrade.

Only a relatively small group of domestic violence victims are eligible for the service. It is only available for domestic violence victims assessed as being at high risk of serious or death if they remain in their homes without a safety upgrade. The high risk victim must also want to end the relationship with their abuser to be eligible for the service.

As part of the National Home Safety Service, the victims' homes will be upgraded – for example, doors and windows are strengthened, locks replaced, alarms installed, and a

blueprint for home safety is developed to walk families through the new security measures and how to use them to keep themselves safe. This service is particularly important in areas that have a lack of safe houses for alternative accommodation.

Who is eligible for this service?

Eligible victims will be those who:

- have experienced repeat family violence;
- are likely to experience family violence in the future;
- are likely to suffer physical injury or death as a result of future family violence, and;
- wish to remain in their current home.

These victims are considered high risk, because of their high likelihood of future family violence and serious physical violence or death as a result. The likelihood of future family violence will be determined using risk and needs assessment tools developed by Women's refuge specifically for this service.

They will also need to have left the abusive relationship, and no longer be living with the abusive person.

How many people will be assisted?

Once fully implemented 400 victims of family violence a year will be assisted to remain in their homes with a much reduced risk of serious physical harm or violence resulting from ongoing family violence.

In year one, while the service is built up we expect 250 victims to be assisted.

Once fully implemented, an estimated 375 to 600 children per annum will also be supported through this service (based on averages of 1.5 children per home).

Who are the National Collective of Independent Women's Refuges?

The National Collective of Independent Women's Refuges is a well-established domestic abuse charity, who works to help prevent and stop family violence in New Zealand.

There is more information here: www.womensrefuge.org.nz/WR/About-Us/About-us.htm

How will the National Home Safety Service be funded?

The National Home Safety Service will be funded from the Justice Sector Fund. Established in May 2012, the Justice Sector Fund is a funding pool that allows savings to be transferred between justice sector agencies and across years. The fund provides flexibility for savings to be redirected into the wider justice sector's highest priorities, rather than being restricted to reinvestment in the same Vote.

What were some of the results from the pilot programme?

Outcomes in the first year of the pilot indicate very positive changes for participants of the programme and their children. 54 participants who received the pre- and post-security upgrade assessment were analysed for the impact of the pilot programme on them and their children.

Key findings include:

- Prior to pilot programme, 85% of the participants had to move house due to the offender's actions but after the pilot programme none had to move house.
- No participants reported receiving any injuries following the security upgrade (40% had experienced serious and/or potentially life-threatening injuries prior to the upgrade).
- No children reported being hurt by offenders following the security upgrade (72% of 43 participants with children said that their children had been hurt by the offender prior to the programme).
- Participants reported improvements in sleep, self-confidence, concentration or memory, anxiety or panic attacks, depression, alcohol or drug intake, and happiness after the security upgrade.

What else is the Government doing for victims of family violence?

The Government is committed to reducing domestic violence in New Zealand. It has set a Better Public Services target of reducing all violent crime by 20% by 2017.

The Government has implemented a whole-of-government approach to achieving this goal.

The new National Home Safety Service is part of the suite of initiatives announced by the Government in July 2014 in its Stronger Response to Family Violence package.

Last year the Government identified four key Justice sector action areas to: better protect victims of family violence; improve victims' experience in the justice system; support judicial decision-making in cases involving domestic violence; and ensure domestic violence legislation is modern and fit for purpose. The proposals to help achieve these include:

- Establishing a Chief Victims Advisor to the Minister of Justice to advise on the needs and views of victims of crime, including domestic violence victims.
- Testing an intensive case management service to provide specialist support for domestic violence victims at high risk of serious harm or death.
- Establishing a nationwide home safety service to help victims who want to leave a violent relationship. The service will offer practical support such as, strengthening doors and windows and installing alarms.
- Reviewing the Domestic Violence Act 1995 to ensure it keeps victims safe and holds offenders to account.

- Exploring the possibility of a conviction disclosure scheme, which may allow a person to be told whether their partner has a history of violence.
- Trialling mobile safety alarms with GPS technology for victims, so they can notify Police of an emergency, and their location.
- Introduce legislation to change the Sentencing Act, which will allow courts to stipulate GPS monitoring of high-risk domestic violence offenders who can't currently have this condition imposed upon them.