



**domestic
abuse
commissioner**

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Rt Hon Yvette Cooper
Home Secretary
2 Marsham Street
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Dear Home Secretary,

Following on from our discussion at the launch of the *Learning from Loss* report, I wanted to share my key priorities for the forthcoming Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy. I am hugely supportive of the Government's ambition to halve Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) over the next decade. The publication of the VAWG strategy marks a critical opportunity to take a radically different approach to end domestic abuse. I know that you will be acutely aware of the bold and proactive action required from across government and the shift we must make from sticking plaster solutions to long-term investment in resources and tools for specialist services, local authorities, and public services as well as wider society to ensure that we can truly prevent harm.

Health

The Department for Health and Social Care must play a critical role in both developing and delivering the VAWG Strategy.

A wide-reaching intervention will be needed to ensure that all healthcare professionals in the health sphere take an active role in identifying the signs of domestic abuse, signposting into specialist services and themselves delivering critical care and support to all victims and survivors of domestic abuse. This must as a minimum include, but not be limited to, GPs, acute trusts, mental health trusts, CAHMS, maternity services, dentistry and sexual health clinics. The last time the DHSC published guidance on domestic abuse for health professionals was in 2017.

I have [called for the expanded roll-out of a whole health approach](#) to preventing and tackling domestic abuse, led by Standing Together Against Domestic Abuse (STADA) which

came to an end in March 2025. As part of the Whole Health Project, which had previously been funded by the Home Office, STADA commissioned 30 grant-funded services across England, through ICB, NHS Trusts and local by and for specialist services. The purpose of the Whole Health Project was to better understand gaps and barriers in healthcare settings, improve healthcare professionals' response to disclosures of domestic abuse and improve referral pathways for victims and survivors to support services and increase the number of victim-survivors disclosing in health settings.

Research from the [project evaluation](#) indicates the average intervention cost (£656) per case over an average of six months prevented high-cost critical incidents such as domestic homicides with early intervention saving public sector costs exceeding £2.6 million per survivor. A commitment from the DHSC to fund the roll out of this project would be a significant step forward in bolstering the role of health in preventing and ending domestic abuse and one that I would very much welcome.

It is essential that the VAWG strategy is linked closely to the 10 Year plan for the NHS to ensure it plays its part in keeping victims and survivors safe. My 2022 mapping report found that health professionals were most often the first professionals that victims and survivors disclosed abuse to, with 44% of victims and survivors having disclosed to a healthcare worker first. Healthcare settings can sometimes be the only places survivors can go alone, and are trusted by survivors more than other settings. Concerningly, despite this, referrals and signposting to specialist local domestic abuse services from practitioners are alarmingly low – only 19% of survivors found out about domestic abuse support available to them from healthcare workers. I was therefore very disappointed to see a lack of reference to tackling VAWG in the NHS plan and I very much hope that the VAWG strategy will strengthen alignment on these critical and overlapping government objectives.

Education and young people

To meet the Government's ambition to halve VAWG within a decade, investment in prevention activity is a fundamental pillar which cannot be overlooked. I have strongly welcomed the Government's recent updates to the RSHE curriculum, which, if met with the necessary investment for delivery, will help children to understand what constitutes harmful behaviour, how to behave in relationships, and crucially, give children the tools and language to disclose their harmful experiences and get the support that they need.

However, investment in prevention activity cannot end here nor be implemented in isolation. Children have reported to the Commissioner (through the "Tell Nicole" framework, developed as part of the substantive research my office has conducted over the past year on children and domestic abuse) that the Government could help by designating a greater role to schools to support children affected by domestic abuse. They also reported that they wanted workers who are experienced and have a good understanding of domestic abuse, and who are kind and respectful to children, as well as good listeners and non-judgemental. There is a significant role for education settings to play in the whole systems response to domestic abuse, which at present, is not recognised by government. Despite what we know

about the significant impact of domestic abuse on babies, children and young people, domestic abuse was not once mentioned on the face of the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill.

The VAWG Strategy offers a foundational opportunity to strengthen the role of education, recognising education settings as the eyes and ears of the safeguarding system. My recent report, *Victims in their own right?* makes a number of recommendations, which I would very much welcome being reflected in the VAWG Strategy. These include:

- The piloting of a 'Dedicated Safeguarding Lead', focused on safeguarding and family liaison and support work within schools – this would cost approximately £5m for a 2-3 year pilot, across 100 schools in 3 local authority areas. A pilot would help the government to provide the capacity to fulfil the safeguarding needs of children subject to domestic abuse, and other types of harm. The leads would also receive multi-agency referrals for children in need of support and notifications from Operation Encompass, the police and education early information sharing partnerships.
- The roll out of Education Domestic Abuse Advisor roles – this would cost £10.7 million and would pay for itself if it prevented just 117 incidents of violence. This role would entail taking a strategic role in the coordination of the local education sector's ability to respond effectively to child victims of domestic abuse as well as collating and analysing key data from safeguarding and inclusion referrals, to feed into joint strategic needs assessments.
- The establishment of a Relationships, Health and Sex Network and investment in high quality training for RSE education in relation to domestic abuse. This would cost approximately £452,500 per annum, and would ensure that where external, specialist experts are not available to deliver high quality RSE, that teachers are funded to access high quality RSE training, as one part of the overarching effort to professionalise RSE teaching. The network, would develop practice, pool best practice resources and drive the formulation of better standards helping meet the Government's manifesto commitments to reset the system and 'ensure schools address misogyny and teach young people about healthy relationships and consent.'
- For Government to fund the development and delivery of comprehensive and specialist training for every frontline professional who may work with babies, children and young people, including identifying domestic abuse and responding safely through a tiered, building block approach.
- A commitment to develop new statutory guidance accompanying the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill, which includes substantial detail for frontline practice on what Section 3 of the Domestic Abuse Act means in practice, a shared linguistics framework and a child-friendly version of this guidance.

Funding for the specialist domestic abuse sector

Independent specialist Community-Based Services are the backbone of our national response to Violence Against Women and Girls. They enhance the statutory system and pick up the pieces when public agencies are unable to. Without their expertise and knowledge, efforts to prevent and respond to domestic abuse will be futile. Everything from prevention work, to training, to specialist support, to working with young people and perpetrators needs to be informed by the specialist domestic abuse sector working locally, including specialist by and for services.

Despite the critical role that they play, specialist services face an increasingly precarious financial situation – with excellent organisations forced to close their doors for good. My 2022 mapping research found that just 35% of survivors found accessing support easy, and nearly half of all ‘by and for’ organisations had been forced to cease services due to lack of funding. This will only have worsened since the research was published in 2022.

Research undertaken as part of my recent report, *Victims in their own right?*, which examined the position of children and young people as victims of domestic abuse and was published earlier this year, found that over half of the services surveyed said they’d had to place children on waiting lists due to the number of referrals they were receiving. The research found that forty-five per cent of children have to wait over a month – which for a child in crisis may feel unimaginably long, and they may not understand why. Over a quarter of services said that they have to turn away referrals entirely and over a quarter of services surveyed had to make a difficult decision to stop providing specialist support to children due to resource constraints.

I strongly welcome the recent government announcement on the provision of perpetrator and behaviour change programme. These specialist services are absolutely critical in preventing future harm and investment must be matched by support for victims and their children. It is therefore critical that the VAWG Strategy makes ambitious commitments to enhance provision, addressing the ‘patchwork of provision’ and postcode lottery in the response to domestic abuse. This must be based on robust needs assessments conducted as part of the Duty to Collaborate under the Victims and Prisoners’ Act, and be informed by an understanding of what victims and survivors need. I have called for £303.8m to be made available for community-based services each year. Of this funding, £88.25m⁶ should be ringfenced for ‘by and for’ services. I have also called for the total of £240.5m to be made available to local areas for the delivery of the Safe Accommodation Duty, of which £70.1m should be ringfenced for ‘by and for’ services.

Learning the lessons from domestic abuse related deaths

There were 108 domestic homicides in England and Wales between April 23– March 24. This equates to a quarter of all homicides in England and Wales during this period, a figure relatively unchanged in the last 10 years. Reduction in domestic abuse related deaths will be an essential measure of government progress in halving VAWG.

Domestic Homicide Reviews present a critical opportunity to ensure that local areas, as well as national government, learn lessons to prevent similar tragedies from ever happening again. However, too often, agencies are not held to account in the implementation – and continuation – of the recommendations made to them.

As you are aware, I am calling on the Home Office to make a commitment, as part of the VAWG Strategy, to rollout the Domestic Abuse Related Deaths Oversight Mechanism pilot my office has been running, nationally. Over a three-year period, this would include £1.15 million staff costs and £1.2 million to design and develop a new digital platform which would allow for secure, simple data input from multiple agencies, including the 300+ CSPs. It would feature AI-assisted data processing, advanced analytics, benchmarking tools, and a learning library which would empower my team to analyse and track implementation and support peer learning across regions. As well as unlocking local lessons to help prevent future deaths and improve the wider response on domestic abuse across the country, the mechanism would also allow my office to produce national annual thematic analysis of key trends from recommendations and provide oversight and accountability to ensure that all national government departments are aware of their recommendations.

It is my hope that further time to develop the VAWG strategy will ensure that government is able to fully utilise the experience and expertise of the specialist sector via the VSAB board. I have been working closely with officials and as ever stand ready to lend support and assistance to ensure that our shared ambition is met.

Yours sincerely,
Nicole Jacobs

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Nicole Jacobs', with a stylized, cursive script.

Domestic Abuse Commissioner for England and Wales