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**Silent pandemic: Women facing domestic violence and homelessness are even more vulnerable**

Hornsby-Ku-ring-gai Women's Shelter is calling for assistance from the community to help cope with an expected surge in demand from vulnerable women facing domestic violence or homelessness, throughout the COVID-19 crisis.

President of the Hornsby-Ku-ring-gai Women's Shelter Louise McCann said HKWS is confronting huge challenges as the service seeks to increase capacity to cope with rising demand, at the same time income is declining.

"Fundraising is extremely challenging at this time as our community comes to terms with the economic and social consequences of COVID-19," Ms McCann said.

"It comes at a time when women in need of support are even more vulnerable during this critical period of safe social distancing and isolation."

Ms McCann said social distancing and isolation throughout COVID-19 means vulnerable women in our community face greater barriers to accessing help.

"Women are confronting situations in which they along with their children are isolated at home with violent perpetrators upon whom they are financially dependent," she said.

"Fear of uncertainty, job loss and financial stress are key risks that could lead to an increase in domestic violence.

"We urge the community to be extra vigilant in looking out for the signs of domestic violence."

Ms McCann said the Shelter was preparing for a potential 30 per cent increase in demand for support services because of COVID-19.

The Shelter housed 58 clients last year, but was forced to turn away 105 women because of a lack of resources.

The Shelter has rigorous policies and procedures in place putting the physical safety and mental health of clients and staff first, she said.

"Our dedicated Shelter staff are on hand, delivering comprehensive case management plans for our clients and assisting them to access vital medical, legal and mental health services, to help them get their lives back on track," Ms McCann said.

"We are ramping up our tailored outreach program enabling us to reach out to more women including those who cannot be physically housed throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

HKWS is also planning for the provision of digital counselling services via our outreach program.

“Women facing domestic violence are often very isolated, alone and frightened for their safety and that of their children. This makes reaching out to women to provide mental health support even more important.”