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**Health professionals and domestic violence case managers partner amidst COVID-19 crisis**

Hornsby-Ku-ring-gai Women's Shelter is calling for greater collaboration between medical centres, hospitals, emergency services, pharmacists, mental health professionals and domestic violence services to cope with an expected surge in demand from women facing abuse or homelessness, throughout the COVID-19 crisis.

President of the Hornsby-Ku-ring-gai Women's Shelter Louise McCann said women at risk were especially vulnerable during this critical period of safe social distancing and isolation.

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

"It's critical that at this time that health professionals and domestic violence service providers work together to ensure women have access to the vital support services they need."

Ms McCann said HKWS is launching an awareness campaign to reach out to local and regional health professionals and services to inform them about the essential services HKWS can offer their patients.

"Women turn to doctors and nurses in emergency, often suffering critical injuries. However, health professionals often don't know where to refer their patients after they have been treated," Ms McCann said.

"HKWS has dedicated Shelter professionals on hand, delivering comprehensive case management programs to women in need, assisting them to get their lives back on track."

Ms McCann said the Shelter, along with health professionals, was preparing for a surge in domestic violence as a consequence of COVID-19.

HKWS, as part of the Women's Community Shelters network, is preparing for a potential 30 per cent increase in demand for support services because of COVID-19.

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

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

HKWS is seeking pro bono assistance from health providers including psychologists or counsellors who can provide services digitally.

"HKWS is expanding our outreach services to help more women in need during this difficult period," Ms McCann said.

"As part of this we are extending the provision of mental health support, which is even more important at this time."