

Safer Pathway – Support for domestic violence victims Information for General Practitioners

Safer Pathway

Safer Pathway is the NSW Government's coordinated approach to supporting domestic violence victims and their children. Safer Pathway aims to ensure that all victims receive a timely, effective response in order to secure their safety and support their recovery.

Safer Pathway involves consistently identifying the level of threat to victims, ensuring a streamlined pathway for connecting victims with wrap-around support, and providing an interagency response to victims at serious threat of further injury or death.

Role of General Practitioners

Many domestic violence victims do not report the violence they are experiencing to Police or other specialist services. However, they often seek medical attention and guidance from their General Practitioner. Therefore, General Practitioners are uniquely positioned to connect victims with specialist support.

A key component of Safer Pathway is a state-wide network of Local Coordination Points. These are locally based, specialist domestic violence services that assist victims with safety planning, information, referrals and other support. General Practitioners are encouraged to refer patients experiencing domestic violence to their nearest Local Coordination Point.

Victims at serious threat

It is particularly important that victims at serious threat of further injury or death due to domestic violence are connected with specialist support. You can assess the level of threat to a victim using:

- The Domestic Violence Safety Assessment Tool (DVSAT); OR
- Your professional judgement (including information about a victim's own perception of the threat to their safety).

The DVSAT and a guide to how to use it are available here [insert link].

As part of Safer Pathway, victims at serious threat are considered at a Safety Action Meeting (SAM). SAMs are fortnightly meetings of key service providers in local areas aimed at reducing serious threats to victims and their children through targeted information sharing and service coordination. These meetings are being implemented across NSW in stages.

How to refer patients to Safer Pathway

General Practitioners can make refer patients experiencing domestic violence by completing the Safer Pathway Referral Form (attached).

If possible, you should complete the DVSAT with each patient experiencing domestic violence and attach it to the Referral Form. However, you can make a referral on the basis of your professional judgement alone.

Female victims

Email completed Safer Pathway Referral Forms to wdvcap@legalaid.nsw.gov.au

Male victims

Email completed Safer Pathway Referral Forms to crp@justice.nsw.gov.au.

Consent-based referrals

You should always seek a patient's consent to refer them to Safer Pathway. A consent-based referral can be made to Safer Pathway when:

You have identified that the patient is at threat of domestic violence.

You have sought and obtained the patient's informed consent.

You may include personal and health information about the patient and the perpetrator in the referral. The consent of the perpetrator is not required.

You should inform the patient that their information is being shared to make a referral for the purpose of providing domestic violence support services. Accepting the services offered is voluntary. You should also advise the patient that information will not be disclosed to the perpetrator.

Information about the process for obtaining informed consent and making a referral can be found the [Domestic and Family Violence Information Sharing Protocol](#)

Circumstances where referrals can be made to Safer Pathway without consent

You can make a referral without consent where:

Based on the DVSAT and/or your professional judgment you identify there is a serious threat to the life, health or safety of the patient due to domestic violence; and

It is unreasonable or impractical to obtain consent or the patient has refused to consent; and

You believe that it is necessary to share personal or health information in order to prevent or lessen this domestic violence threat to the patient, a child or another person.

It is important to inform the patient that you have made a decision to share their information without consent. The only exception is where you determine that this may increase the threat.

Guidance about sharing information where there is a serious domestic violence threat can be found in Chapter 13 of the [Domestic and Family Violence Information Sharing Protocol](#)

Children

Safer Pathway does not replace child protection practices or processes. Service providers must comply with their child protection obligations under the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998. Refer to the [Domestic Violence and Child Protection Guidelines](#)

Outcomes for victims

All victims who are referred through this process will receive a phone call from their Local Coordination Point with an offer of coordinated support.

Victims can be connected with a range of services including:

- Counselling
- Housing
- Financial assistance
- Legal assistance
- Court advocacy
- Security and safety upgrades
- Safety planning
- Health services

Further information

For more information about Safer Pathway, visit www.domesticviolence.nsw.gov.au/for-service-providers.

For more information on understanding Domestic Violence, visit <http://www.wlsnsw.org.au/wp-content/uploads/GP-Toolkit-2014.pdf>