



# DOMESTIC & FAMILY VIOLENCE STRATEGY

2025-2028

A photograph of a woman with long, curly brown hair, wearing a light blue button-down shirt, hugging a young girl with long brown hair, wearing a red top. They are both smiling and looking towards the camera. The background is a bright, indoor setting with a window and a plant.

DRAFT VERSION FOR PUBLIC EXHIBITION

# Acknowledgement of Country

Willoughby City Council acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the lands on which we stand, the Gamaragal people. We pay our respects to their Elders past and present.

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# Foreword from the Mayor



**D**omestic and family violence is one of the most serious and confronting challenges facing our community. It can happen to anyone, and its impact reaches into families, workplaces and neighbourhoods, leaving a deep mark on our collective sense of safety and belonging.

Council has a powerful role to play in preventing violence before it occurs, raising awareness, and ensuring our city's spaces, programs, services and events all contribute to a culture of respect and inclusion. Through education, advocacy, strong partnerships and planning our city with safety in mind, we can help create the conditions for safety and wellbeing to be protected.

This Domestic and Family Violence Strategy 2025-2028 reflects the input of local services,

community leaders and residents who have shared their experiences and ideas. Their contributions have shaped a plan that is both practical and ambitious, one that builds on our city's strengths and addresses the specific needs of our local area.

The strategy focuses on prevention, early intervention and community-led solutions. Preventing domestic and family violence is a challenge that no single organisation or level of government can tackle alone. It demands a united and sustained effort from the whole community, guided by our shared values of respect, safety and equality.

Willoughby is a caring, diverse and resilient city. By working together, Council, local support services, community organisations and every person who lives or works in our city, we can help break the cycle of violence, support those affected by domestic or family violence and create a future where everyone can live with respect, safety and dignity.

**Cr Tanya Taylor**  
*Mayor, Willoughby City Council*

# About this Strategy

## Purpose

Domestic and family violence (DFV) is a complex, widespread issue that affects individuals, families, and entire communities. While local government is often not a direct service provider in this space, councils have an important role to play in prevention, education, advocacy, and the creation of safe, inclusive environments.

This Strategy sets out Willoughby City Council's commitment to addressing DFV through coordinated, place-based action. It outlines how Council will work alongside local services, community leaders, and residents to increase awareness, strengthen partnerships, build capacity, and advocate for systemic change. The Strategy identifies Council's unique levers of influence - such as advocacy, community education, urban planning, events, facilities and community programs - and positions these as tools for positive social impact.

The Strategy also recognises the importance of early intervention and prevention. By embedding DFV prevention into everyday community life, through education campaigns, inclusive public spaces, support for local networks and staff training, Council can contribute to long-term cultural and behavioural change.

## How we developed the Strategy

This Strategy was developed in consultation with key stakeholders, including local DFV services, community organisations, Council staff and members of the Lower North Shore Domestic and Family Violence Network (LNS DFVN). Input was also gathered through community surveys and focus groups to ensure the Strategy reflects local needs, priorities, and lived experiences.

## Timeline

This is Council's first dedicated DFV Strategy. It will guide planning, partnerships, and community-led initiatives from 2025 to 2028, with regular progress reviews and opportunities for refinement.

The Strategy is supported by a 3-year action plan, which translates its strategic pillars into practical, measurable steps. While the document provides a 3-year framework, it is designed to be flexible and responsive. Council will review progress annually, adapt to emerging needs and strengthen its approach through collaboration with the local DFV sector and community stakeholders.

## Who is it for?

This Strategy is intended for everyone who lives, works, studies or visits the Willoughby Local Government Area (LGA). It speaks to the whole community, including:

- Community members seeking information, support or safer public spaces
- Children, young people, families and other vulnerable people who may be directly or indirectly affected by DFV
- Council staff and volunteers who interact with the public or manage community assets
- Local organisations and services involved in prevention, early intervention and crisis response
- Educators, health workers, faith leaders and community leaders who shape attitudes and provide frontline support
- Regional and state-level stakeholders who influence funding, policy and system reform

The Strategy acknowledges that preventing DFV is not the responsibility of any one agency or level of government. It requires collective, sustained effort - and a shared commitment to equity, respect, and safety for all.



## What is domestic and family violence?

Domestic and family violence refers to behaviour by one person that causes fear, harm or control over another person within a domestic, family or intimate relationship. While physical violence is often the most visible form, DFV includes a wide range of abusive behaviours - many of which are ongoing, hidden and deeply damaging.

### TYPES OF ABUSE

#### PHYSICAL ABUSE

Hitting, choking, pushing, or using weapons

#### EMOTIONAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL ABUSE

Intimidation, threats, constant criticism, gaslighting

#### VERBAL ABUSE

Yelling, name-calling, degrading comments

#### SEXUAL ABUSE

Any unwanted sexual activity, coercion or assault

#### FINANCIAL ABUSE

Controlling or misusing money, including restricting access to finances, restricting employment, stealing or withholding funds, or incurring debts or financial losses through gambling without consent

#### SOCIAL ABUSE

Isolating someone from friends, family or community

#### TECHNOLOGY – FACILITATED ABUSE

Surveillance, harassment or threats using phones, email or social media

#### SPIRITUAL OR CULTURAL ABUSE

Preventing someone from practicing their faith or cultural identity

#### REPRODUCTIVE ABUSE

Controlling decisions about contraception, pregnancy, or parenting

#### ELDER ABUSE

Harm or mistreatment of an older person by someone they trust, including physical, emotional, financial, or neglectful abuse

## Coercive control

At the core of many DFV experiences is coercive control - a persistent pattern of domination involving emotional, psychological and social abuse that traps victims in fear and dependency. Coercive control is not always obvious. It may not involve physical violence at all. Instead, it is characterised by tactics such as:

- Monitoring movements and communication
- Restricting access to money or transport
- Making degrading comments or threats
- Micromanaging everyday decisions
- Gaslighting and blame
- Using children, pets or institutions to reinforce control

The purpose of coercive control is to strip away the other person's autonomy and sense of self. It can escalate gradually, making it difficult to recognise or name. Victims often describe feeling as if they are "walking on eggshells" or "losing themselves". This form of abuse can have lifelong impacts on mental health, confidence, safety and freedom.

In NSW, coercive control is now recognised in criminal law. From July 2024, it is a criminal offence when part of a broader pattern of behaviour in an intimate partner relationship.

## Why domestic and family violence is a gendered issue

While DFV can affect anyone, evidence overwhelmingly shows that it is a gendered issue - one driven by gender inequality, power imbalances and rigid norms about masculinity, femininity and relationships.



Women are far more likely than men to experience DFV, especially severe, repeated or controlling violence.



Men are far more likely to be perpetrators, particularly in intimate partner violence.



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, women with disability, LGBTIQ+ people and culturally and linguistically diverse women experience DFV at disproportionate rates, often with unique barriers to support.



1 in 4 has experienced violence by a current or former partner

DFV is a leading cause of homelessness and health issues among women and children



One woman is killed by a current or former partner approximately every 10 days.

These patterns are not coincidental - they are linked to broader societal factors, including:

- Attitudes that condone violence or blame victims
- Gender stereotypes that support male dominance and female submission
- Structural inequality that limits women's economic and social power
- Lack of accountability in systems meant to protect people

Recognising DFV as a gendered issue does not mean all victims are women or all perpetrators are men. It means that gender plays a key role in shaping patterns of abuse, risk, harm and access to safety.

To prevent DFV, we must promote gender equality, challenge disrespectful attitudes and behaviours, and create communities where everyone – regardless of gender – can live free from fear or harm.

## What is primary prevention?

Primary prevention is about stopping domestic and family violence before it starts. It focuses on the whole community and aims to change the attitudes, behaviours and structures that lead to violence - especially those related to gender inequality and the misuse of power and control.

Rather than responding to violence after it has happened, primary prevention looks at the root causes and works to create safer, more respectful environments for everyone.

### Council's role in primary prevention

Local councils are well placed to lead and support primary prevention because we are close to the community and shape many aspects of daily life. Councils manage community spaces, run events, support local groups, communicate with residents, and work closely with schools, services and other organisations.

Through these everyday activities, we can:

- Promote respectful relationships and equal treatment of women and men
- Support programs that challenge harmful stereotypes and attitudes
- Create safe, inclusive public spaces and community facilities
- Share messages that raise awareness and prevent violence
- Build the skills and confidence of local leaders to speak out against abuse
- Make sure our own staff are trained and supported to recognise and respond to DFV

## Why it matters

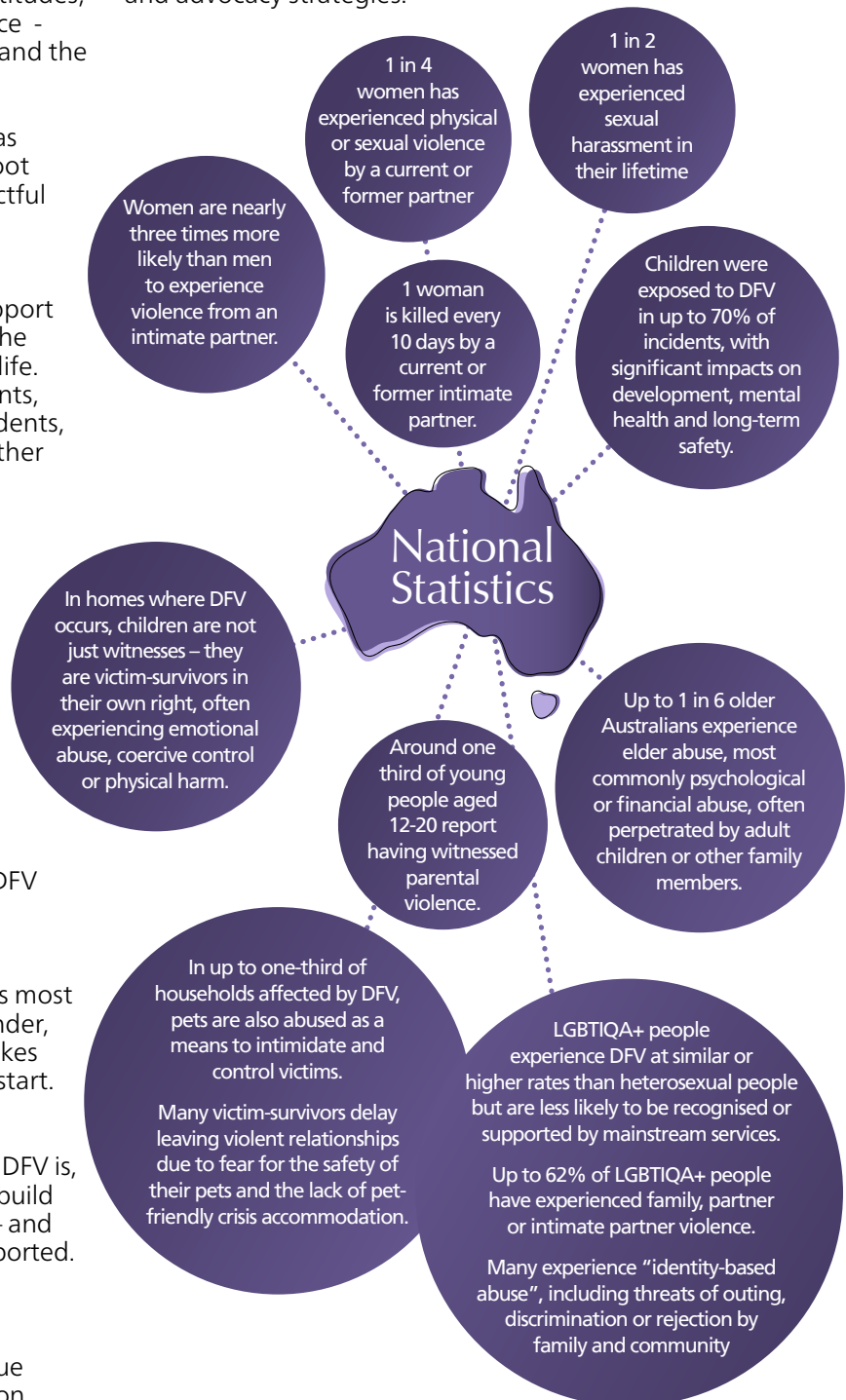
We know that domestic and family violence is most often driven by deeply held beliefs about gender, power and control. Changing these beliefs takes time – but local action is a powerful place to start.

Primary prevention is long-term work, but it is essential. By helping people understand what DFV is, what causes it, and how to prevent it, we can build a community where violence is not tolerated – and where everyone feels safe, respected and supported.

## DFV in our community

Domestic and family violence is a significant issue across Australia – and Willoughby is no exception. While the North Shore is often viewed as an area of relative social advantage, DFV occurs in every postcode, across all communities' cultures and income levels. It is often hidden, under-reported and shaped by complex barriers to disclosure and help seeking.

Understanding the local context is essential to building effective prevention, support, and advocacy strategies.



These figures highlight the broad reach of DFV and the need for inclusive, trauma-informed and culturally safe responses – especially for children, LGBTIQ+ communities and those with strong emotional bonds to animals.

## DFV in Willoughby

While Willoughby has a lower reported rate of domestic and family violence than many other parts of NSW, underreporting remains a serious issue – especially among culturally and linguistically diverse communities, older people, people with disability and LGBTIQ+ residents.

Between April 2024 and March 2025:

- 115 domestic and family violence offences were recorded by NSW Police in the Willoughby LGA.
- Approximately 70% of victims were female and 30% were male.
- 13% of victims were under the age of 18.
- 21% of the 115 DFV incidents were flagged by NSW Police as alcohol-related.
- Local DFV services report rising demand, particularly related to coercive control, financial abuse and housing insecurity.
- Emergency accommodation and legal support are in short supply across the North Shore, placing pressure on services and limiting safe options for victim-survivors.

## At-risk groups in Willoughby

Some community members face great risk of DFV or additional barriers to accessing support. The following groups face elevated risk and often require tailored support:

### Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) residents:

almost half of Willoughby's residents speak a language other than English at home. Language barriers, visa insecurity and cultural stigma can delay help-seeking

### Older people:

Willoughby has a large ageing population. Older women may experience abuse from adult children or partners, often hidden as "elder abuse"

### LGBTIQ+ people:

May face discrimination or lack of inclusive local services. Identity-based abuse and family rejection are key issues

### Women with disability:

At greater risk of coercion and abuse from intimate partners or caregivers, with complex access needs for support

### Children and young people:

Often present in DFV-affected households and vulnerable to long-term harm.

## What this tells us

The data shows that DFV is both a local and national concern, shaped by broader inequalities and personal circumstances. In Willoughby, DFV is often hidden and under-reported, especially among marginalised groups. Prevention and response efforts must be tailored to our local demographics and must prioritise inclusion, access, cultural safety and early intervention.

Through this Strategy, Willoughby City Council is committed to working with partners to better understand, prevent and respond to DFV in our community - so that everyone can live free from violence, fear and control.

## Council's role and commitment

Local councils are not frontline DFV services, but have a vital role to play in creating safer, more inclusive communities where DFV is not tolerated. As the level of government closest to the community, councils are uniquely positioned to support early intervention, prevention and place-based responses to DFV. We influence how people connect, access information, use public space and engage with local services.

## Willoughby City Council's role

Willoughby City Council contributes to DFV prevention and response through four main roles:

### Facilitator:

strengthening local partnerships, supporting networks and hosting initiatives that connect services, communities and decision-makers

### Educator:

sharing clear, accessible information to raise community awareness about DFV, respectful relationships, coercive control and support options

### Advocate:

amplifying the voices of local services and communities and advocating for improved resources, housing and system reforms

### Place-maker:

designing and maintaining safe, welcoming public spaces, facilities and events where all people feel secure and included

Council also provides direct support through community programs, libraries, facilities, communications, cultural events, youth services and engagement with vulnerable groups.

## Our Commitment

Willoughby City Council is committed to:

- Preventing violence before it starts, by addressing the attitudes, norms and inequalities that drive DFV (Pillar 1 – Community Awareness and Prevention Education).
- Supporting people affected by violence, through inclusive information, safe spaces and clear referral pathways (Pillar 2 – Promote Safe and Inclusive Environments)
- Listening to local services, survivors and under-represented groups and ensuring our actions reflect their needs and expertise (Pillar 3 – Strengthen Local Partnerships and Sector Collaboration).
- Building the capacity of staff and community leaders to recognise and respond to DFV safely and appropriately (Pillar 4 – Build Capacity of Council Staff and Community Leaders).
- Partnering with others to strengthen systems, close service gaps, and create lasting change (Pillar 5 – Advocate for Systems Change and Resource Access).

While this is Council's first dedicated DFV Strategy, it builds on our existing work and reflects our ongoing commitment to a whole-of-community approach. Over the next three years, Council will implement a structured action plan with targeted, time-bound, and measurable actions. Each action includes clear outputs to track delivery and assess progress. The Strategy is guided by local evidence, best-practice frameworks and the voices of those with lived experience.

Through this Strategy, Willoughby City Council affirms its role in helping to build a safer, more respectful and inclusive community for all. Our action plan 2025-2028

## Action plan overview

This action plan outlines the key activities Willoughby City Council will undertake to implement its DFV Strategy. It translates the Strategy's five pillars into practical, time-bound actions aligned with Council's role as a facilitator, educator, advocate and place-maker.

Actions focus on prevention, community education, collaboration, capacity-building and advocacy. The plan has been informed by local data, stakeholder input and best-practice frameworks, and will continue to evolve as partnerships strengthen and priorities shift.

Each action identifies responsible teams, delivery timeframes, and clear outputs to track progress and ensure accountability. Together, these actions lay the foundation for a safer, more inclusive community where DFV is not tolerated and those affected are supported.



## Action plan 2025-2028

### PILLAR 1 - COMMUNITY AWARENESS AND PREVENTION EDUCATION

Goal: Increase community understanding of DFV, coercive control, and respectful relationships

Action	Responsibility	Timeframe	Outputs
1.1 Deliver DFV and respectful relationships education through existing Council events and campaigns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Community Development</li> <li>Youth Services</li> </ul>	2026 - ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Minimum of four events per year (e.g. 16 Days of Activism, Solidarity Walk, Youth Week)</li> <li>Post-event surveys collected to measure increased awareness or engagement</li> <li>DFV resources distributed (physical or digital) tracked annually</li> </ul>
1.2 Develop multilingual DFV materials with local services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Community Development</li> <li>Communications</li> <li>Multicultural Officer</li> </ul>	End of 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>DFV flyers and posters available in top three local languages</li> <li>Materials co-designed or reviewed with community representatives or bilingual workers</li> <li>Digital version of materials hosted on Council website with analytics tracked</li> </ul>
1.3 Promote DFV prevention messaging via Council's platforms and signage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Communications</li> <li>Library Services</li> <li>Community Development</li> </ul>	Quarterly from 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Four campaigns per year across digital, library and outdoor signage</li> <li>Social media reach or engagement rates monitored annually</li> </ul>

## PILLAR 2: PROMOTE SAFE AND INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENTS

Goal: Embed DFV prevention and gender equity into Council’s public spaces and planning

Action	Responsibility	Timeframe	Outputs
2.1 Conduct gendered safety and inclusion audits of key public spaces (e.g. parks, facilities, transport hubs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community Development</li> <li>• Urban Design</li> <li>• Safe Cities</li> </ul>	One audit per year from 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minimum of one locations audited per year with recommendations documented</li> <li>• Summary report shared with relevant Council units and stakeholders</li> </ul>
2.2 Promote and support the creation of “safe spaces” in Council facilities (e.g. Chatswood Library, community centres, change rooms)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community Development</li> <li>• Facilities</li> <li>• Library Services</li> <li>• Leisure and Aquatic Services</li> <li>• Community Centres</li> <li>• LNS DFV Network and/ or Local DFV Services</li> </ul>	From 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Safe space signage, DFV info points or safe/quiet rooms piloted in two locations by 2028</li> <li>• Pilot evaluated with learnings used to guide future expansion</li> </ul>
2.3 Collaborate with local housing and DFV services to identify gaps and advocate for crisis and transitional accommodation in the LGA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communications</li> <li>• Library Services</li> <li>• Community Development</li> </ul>	2026-2027	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local DFV housing gap summary developed and shared with regional housing or planning bodies</li> <li>• Joint workshop or roundtable held with DFV and housing stakeholders by 2027</li> </ul>



## PILLAR 3: STRENGTHEN LOCAL PARTNERSHIPS AND SECTOR COLLABORATION

Goal: Improve coordination and support among local DFV stakeholders

Action	Responsibility	Timeframe	Outputs
3.1 Host and maintain a local DFV Network collaboration platform	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community Development</li> <li>• LNS DFV Network</li> </ul>	Quarterly, ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minimum 4 meetings per year</li> </ul>
3.2 Identify and engage key DFV services for collaborative initiatives and information-sharing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community Development</li> </ul>	2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• List of key DFV service contacts developed and maintained</li> </ul>
3.3 Partner with the LNS DFV Network to host a DFV sector forum every two years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LNS DFV Network</li> <li>• Community Development</li> </ul>	One every two years from 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One forum every two years with post-event evaluation</li> </ul>
3.4 Collaborate with the LNS DFV Network and local service providers to explore and implement a consistent method for capturing de-identified DFV incident data at the local level.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community Development</li> <li>• LNS DFV Network</li> </ul>	2026-2027	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engagement with network and services on data needs</li> <li>• Framework or protocol for local data collection developed</li> <li>• Agreed method trialled or adopted by at least two local agencies</li> </ul>



## PILLAR 4: BUILD CAPACITY OF COUNCIL STAFF AND COMMUNITY LEADERS

Goal: Equip staff and local leaders to respond appropriately to DFV issues

Action	Responsibility	Timeframe	Outputs
4.1 Deliver DFV and referral pathway training to Council's customer-facing staff (e.g. libraries, customer service, rangers)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People and Culture</li> <li>• Community Development</li> </ul>	2027	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 90% of relevant staff trained by end 2027</li> <li>• Internal resource or referral guide distributed to all trained teams</li> <li>• Annual refresher or update session offered for staff from 2028</li> </ul>
4.2 Provide DFV education to local leaders (e.g. sports, faith, youth groups)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community Development</li> <li>• LNS DFV Network</li> <li>• Local DFV Services</li> </ul>	Two sessions per year from 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Four workshops delivered by 2028 with feedback collected</li> </ul>

## PILLAR 5: STRENGTHEN ORGANISATIONAL RESPONSE AND ADVOCACY

Goal: Advocate for improved services, housing and responses to DFV in the LGA

Action	Responsibility	Timeframe	Outputs
5.1 Review and align Council's DFV-related practices with state/national frameworks (e.g. NSW DFV Plan, Our Watch)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community Development</li> <li>• Governance Risk and Compliance</li> <li>• Executive Leadership Team</li> </ul>	2026-2027	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Internal DFV guidance note or practice framework developed by 2028</li> </ul>
5.2 Establish a DFV internal working group to drive whole-of-Council implementation and learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community Development</li> <li>• Community Life</li> <li>• People and culture</li> <li>• Facilities</li> <li>• Library Services</li> <li>• Leisure and Aquatic Services</li> <li>• Community Centres</li> <li>• Communications</li> </ul>	2027	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quarterly meetings held</li> </ul>

This action plan provides a strong foundation for Council's work in preventing and responding to DFV. Through ongoing collaboration, reflection, and commitment, these actions will support a safer, more inclusive community and help drive long-term cultural and systemic change.

## Monitoring and evaluation

This Strategy will be implemented through a detailed action plan with measurable outcomes and deliverables. As community needs, sector priorities and best practice in domestic and family violence prevention evolve, Council's actions will remain responsive and adaptive. Progress will be monitored in collaboration with stakeholders and reviewed regularly to ensure the Strategy continues to reflect local priorities and drive meaningful change.

## RESOURCES AND SUPPORT

### IN AN EMERGENCY

IF YOU OR SOMEONE ELSE IS  
IN IMMEDIATE DANGER,  
**CALL 000**

FOR 24/7 CONFIDENTIAL  
SUPPORT, CONTACT:

**1800 RESPECT**  
**1800 737 732**

(NATIONAL SEXUAL ASSAULT,  
DOMESTIC FAMILY VIOLENCE  
COUNSELLING SERVICE)

NSW DOMESTIC VIOLENCE LINE :  
**1800 65 64 63**

## Accessing help through Council venues

Willoughby City Council is not a crisis service, but we are committed to being a safe, supportive point of connection for anyone experiencing DFV.

If you or someone you know needs help:

### At Council Facilities

You can speak confidentially to staff at Council-operated venues including:

- Libraries
- Community Centres
- Youth Services
- Customer Service Centre

Our staff are trained to respond respectfully and discreetly. While they are not counsellors, they can:

- Help you access printed or digital information about support services
- Direct you to local organisations that provide crisis accommodation, legal advice, counselling and safety planning
- Offer a safe space to pause or make a phone call
- Provide access to multilingual resources or interpreters if needed

Look for "safe space" signage, information displays or ask quietly for support at the front desk. Staff will respect your privacy.

### Online Information and Referrals

The Willoughby City Council website provides links to:

- Local DFV support services
- 24/7 helplines and legal support
- Resources in multiple languages
- Information about how to support a friend, colleague, or community member experiencing DFV

**Visit: Domestic & Family Violence  
Willoughby City Council**



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WILLOUGHBY  
CITY COUNCIL

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