

The RT Hon Yvette Cooper MP, Secretary of State for the Home Office
The RT Hon Wes Streeting MP, Secretary of State for Health and Social Care

Copied:

The RT Hon Rachel Reeves MP, Chancellor of the Exchequer
Baroness Merron, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Patient Safety,
Women's Health and Mental Health
Jess Phillips MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Safeguarding and
Violence Against Women and Girls

9 May 2025

Dear Secretaries of State,

Prioritise the mental health of women and children survivors of domestic abuse

We welcome the government's ambition to half Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) in a decade and the Home Secretary's commitment to develop a new VAWG Strategy, with measurable outcomes and funding to deliver this. We also welcome the Health Secretary's priority to reform the health response, focusing on community services rather than hospitals and prevention rather than treatment.

Since July 2024, the new Government and the National Police Chiefs Council recognised **domestic abuse as a national emergency**. It devastates the lives of over 4 million people, including 1 in 4 women and 1 in 5 children (ONS, 2024). Over the last decade, the Government's work has focused on the criminal justice and housing responses to domestic abuse, which are vital for responding to survivors' need for physical safety. Yet, despite the law in 2021 recognising the emotional and psychological abuse that victims experience, there has been **no response to address the impact of the trauma on survivors' mental health**.

The recent heartbreaking deaths of Jessie Laverack, Kiena Dawes, Chloe Holland and so many others by suicide, has highlighted what thousands of survivors have been telling Woman's Trust and the women's VAWG sector for decades. **More women die by suicide than homicide due to domestic abuse** by a partner/ex-partner (NPCC, 2025); 83% of survivors consider counselling as their biggest need, which remains largely unmet, as reported by the Domestic Abuse Commissioner in 'Patchwork of Provision' (DAC, 2022).

The recent report 'Living without hope'¹ (2025) by Woman's Trust, the leading mental health specialist for domestic abuse, presents **evidence and the case for an improved mental health response for survivors of domestic abuse**. It summarises the numerous recent government consultations and taskforce reviews on women's health and the impact of domestic abuse by the previous government. It also provides an overview of research by academics and charities, including the recent report on the mental health of black and

¹ <https://womanstrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Living-without-hope-Full-Report-March-2025.pdf>

minoritised women survivors ²(Thiara, R. (University of Warwick), Imkaan, and Women and Girls Network, 2024).

Moreover, there is **an economic case for a community-based mental health response**, as there is a saving of up to £11 for every £1 invested in the health response for women (NHS Confederation, 2023), with significant benefits to her family and wider community. Without adequate and appropriate mental health support, survivors are often unable to maintain their housing and employment, or to support their children effectively - all priorities in the Prime Minister's and Government's Plan for Change.

Despite this, the Woman's Trust report found that NHS England and the Home Office have not taken action to date, to respond to the mental health needs of survivors and patients, and specifically women and children. The recent National Audit Office report (Tackling VAWG, 2025) found that the Government VAWG Strategies developed in the last decade were not based on an understanding of what works, nor did they make the most of the available expertise and knowledge to inform the Strategy.

We ask you to **take immediate action**:

- Make the mental health of domestic abuse survivors, particularly women and children, a key priority and focus of both the Mental Health and VAWG Strategies, planned to be launched by your Departments in May 2025.
- Provide funding of at least £27.5m per year to deliver specialist counselling and therapeutic support in the community, for women and girls affected by domestic abuse, in the Spending Review in June 2025.

We urge you not to continue to prioritise the agenda set by the perpetrator, by focusing only on survivors' physical safety. It is vital that we respond to survivors' mental health needs and safeguard them from the psychological damage and trauma, to enable them to recover and rebuild their lives.

We look forward to continuing to support the Government's work in responding to this national priority.

Yours sincerely,

Heidi Riedel, Woman's Trust

Abi Billingham, Abianda

Liz Mack, Advance

Indy Cross, Agenda Alliance

Souad Talsi MBE, Al-Hasaniya Moroccan Women's Centre

Jacqui Fray, Amadudu Women's Refuge

Joy Doal, Anawim

Sarbjit Ganger, Asian Women's Resource Centre (AWRC)

Shaminder Ubhi, Ashiana Network

Dr Shonagh Dillon, Aurora New Dawn

Alix Simpson, Berkshire Women's Aid

Clair Johnson, Bexley Women's Aid

Jigisha Patel, Birmingham & Solihull Women's Aid

² <https://www.imkaan.org.uk/why-should-our-rage-be-tidy>

Naomi Delap, Birth Companions
Lisa Dando, Brighton Women's Centre
Constanze Sen, Bromley & Croydon Women's Aid
Colette Bryne, Broxtowe Women's Centre Project
Angie Steward, Cambridge Women's Aid
Andy Bell, Centre for Mental Health
Harriet Wistrich, Centre for Women's Justice
Jacqueline Stewart, Clean Break
Vicky Bunnage, Crossroads Derbyshire
Michelle Blunsom, East Surrey Domestic Abuse Services
Amanda Elwen, Emily Davison Centre
Andrea Simon, Ending Violence Against Women (EVAW)
Bridget Symonds, Galop
Elisabeth Sheppard, Gilgal Birmingham
Yasmin Khan, Halo Project Charity
Sarah Pascoe, Haven Domestic Abuse Service
Debbie Fawcett, HARV Domestic Abuse Services
Ashleigh Walsh, HARV Housing
Keasha Kellam, Honour Thy Woman Group
Zaiba Qureshi, Housing for Women
Sarah Hill, IDAS
Diana Nammi, IKWRO
Medina Johnson, IRISI
Ghadah Alnasseri, Imkaan
Sam Clifford, Jewish Women's Aid
Paula Clarke, Juno Women's Aid
Sawsan Salim, Kurdish and Middle Eastern Women's Organisation - KMEWO
Tori O'Callaghan-Lake, Springfield Domestic Abuse Support Services
Gisela Valle, LAWRS
Nik Peasgood, Leeds Women's Aid
Paula Nolan, Liverpool Domestic Abuse Service
Shani Lee, London VAWG Consortium
Kate Lawrence, Lotus Families in East Sussex
Sarah O'Leary, Missing Link, Next Link and Safe Link
Lesley Storey, My Sisters Place
Rukhsana Ismail, NIDAS
Hannah Ashford, North Devon Against Domestic Abuse Ltd
Claire Williams, Oasis Domestic Abuse Service
Claire Hubberstey, One Small Thing
Aneta Mackell, OPOKA CIO
Claire Bennett, PAC – Be Free Services
Louise Neville, Paladin NSAS

Pia Sinha, Prison Reform Trust
Rachael Grey, Project Lighthouse
Gemma Sherrington, Refuge
Jo Todd CBE, Respect
Jo Gough, Rise UK
Fran Ellis, Rising Sun Domestic Violence and Abuse Service
Surwat Sohail, ROSHNI
Liz Thompson, SafeLives
Naomi Wood, Safer
Janet Dalrymple, Safer Places
Jasmine Mohammad, Safety4Sisters Northwest
Jo Charleson, Salford Women's Aid
Carey Philpott, SATEDA
Hollie Venn, Sheffield Women's Aid
Sukhvinder Kaur, Sikh Women's Aid
Kate Rowland, Society Without Abuse
Nahar Choudhury, Solace
Selma Taha, Southall Black Sisters (SBS)
Charlotte Almond, Staffordshire Women's Aid
Sam Booth, Staffordshire Pathway project
Jackie Hyland, Standing Together Against Domestic Abuse (STADA)
Angie Airlie, Stay Safe East
Yasmin Khan, Staying Put
Samantah Higginbottom, Stockport Without Abuse
Claire Lambon, Stop Domestic Abuse
Jill Cooper, Stroud Women's Refuge
Gemma Magee-Herd, St Albans and Hertsmere Women's Refuge
Heather Smiles, Sutton Women's Centre
Saskia Garner, Suzy Lamplugh Trust
Gail Heath, The Pankhurst Trust
Lisa Larsen, The Liberty Centre
Shigufta Khan, The Wish Centre
Rokaiya Khan, Together Women
Karen Hague MBE, Vida Sheffield
Farah Nazeer, Women's Aid
Jackie May, Women's Centre Cornwall
Natasha Finlayson, Working Chance
Laura Seebohm, WWIN Specialist Domestic Abuse Service
Sara Britnell, Wycombe Women's Aid
Fiamma Pather, Your Sanctuary