



MEDIA RELEASE

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EXPERT TEAM WILL HELP REDUCE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE DEATHS

Laws that pave the way to establish *The Domestic Violence Death Review Team* commence from today with the Attorney General John Hatzistergos announcing the first appointment to the team.

The *Domestic Violence Death Review Team* will be made up of a panel of experts with new powers to review deaths caused by domestic violence.

The team, to be based at Glebe Coroners Court, will also recommend ways to reduce the incidence of domestic violence deaths.

About 42 per cent of homicides each year result from domestic violence situations according to research conducted by The Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research.

NSW Attorney General, John Hatzistergos today announced that Anna Butler, the former Executive Officer of the Sentencing Council and DNA Review Panel, has been appointed as Manager and will be responsible for managing the operational requirements of the Team.

“She brings a wealth of experience in producing high level research reports and providing secretariat support to a panel.”

The panel of experts made up of representatives from law enforcement, justice, health, social services and non-government agencies will be assembled and announced later in the year.

“These new laws mean that the team will be able to search for trends or systemic issues that have led to domestic violence deaths and identify how systems or services can be improved to protect people living in fear,” Mr Hatzistergos said.

“The laws expanded the definition of ‘domestic violence death’ to enable the team to not only examine homicides, but also other deaths such as accidents and suicides that are related to domestic violence.”

Member for Balmain Verity Firth said the ability to look at all deaths relating to domestic violence, whether they are suicides or fatal accidents will help reduce the number of tragedies.

“Up until now these types of associated deaths have not been included in official domestic violence figures - despite the fact they are often caused by domestic violence,” Ms Firth said.

“Already around 42 per cent of all homicides in NSW are attributed to some form of domestic violence.”

“This is a tragically high number and the Government needs to do everything it can to prevent and reduce domestic violence related deaths.”

Minister for Women Jodi McKay said *The Domestic Violence Death Review Team* will include representatives from law enforcement, justice, health, social services and non-government agencies. It will:

- be chaired by NSW State Coroner Mary Jerram;
- exchange information with similar bodies in other states and territories as well as the *NSW Child Death Review Team*;
- have the power to review closed cases of domestic violence-related deaths in NSW including:
 - Homicide of a spouse, partner or child;
 - Suicides; and
 - Fatal accidents
- establish and maintain a database of these deaths;
- undertake research that aims to prevent and reduce the likelihood of such deaths; and
- produce an annual report on their findings.

Mr Hatzistergos said the changes would also ensure the team was chaired by a current or former State Coroner or Deputy State Coroner.

“The role of the State Coroner in the team is crucial as she is experienced in investigating causes of death and has access to coronial networks across Australia, such as the National Coroners Information System,” Mr Hatzistergos said.

The Keneally Government is providing \$500,000 recurrent funding for the project.

Convenor of the Domestic Violence Coalition Committee, Ms Betty Green, commended the Government’s initiative in establishing the Domestic Violence Death Review Team.

“This is a significant step forward in understanding more about domestic violence, domestic violence deaths and what steps need to be taken to prevent similar deaths.” Ms Green said.

END

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE FACTS

- There were 215 victims of domestic homicide in NSW;
- Approximately 18 per cent of all homicides were intimate partner homicides;
- The rate of domestic homicide per year remained stable, ranging from a low of 0.46 per 100,000 population in 2004 to a high of 0.63 per 100,000 population in 2006;
- Approximately 42 per cent of all homicides were domestic, defined with reference to the Crimes (Domestic and Personal Violence) Act 2007;
- For every one domestic homicide there were over 620 domestic violence related assaults;
- Forty-three per cent of domestic homicide victims (70 females and 22 males) were killed by intimate partners;
- Stabbing was the most common act causing death, with knives used in over one third of domestic homicides;
- Twenty-six per cent of offenders were persons of interest in a violence related incident in the 12 months prior to the homicide;
- Ten per cent of victims were recorded by police as having been involved in an incident of domestic violence involving the same alleged homicide offender in the 12 months prior to the homicide;
- Compared with the offenders in the non-lethal assault group, a higher proportion of femicide offenders were ex-spouses or ex-partners of the victim (27% vs 16%);
- In the five years prior to the event, a greater proportion of offenders in the nonlethal assault group had had contact with the police for a violence related incident (70% vs 53%); and
- In the 12 months prior to the homicide or non-lethal assault, similar proportions of offenders in these groups (around 1 in 4) had had contact with the police in relation to a violence related incident against the victim.

NB: BOCSAR figures for the period between January 2003 and June 2008