

MEDIA RELEASE

Minister for Women The Hon. Linda Burney MP
Attorney General The Hon. John Hatzistergos MLC



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PANEL SET UP TO REVIEW DOMESTIC VIOLENCE DEATHS

Minister for Women Linda Burney and Attorney General John Hatzistergos today announced the establishment of a domestic violence homicide review panel in NSW to coincide with White Ribbon Day and the United Nations Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women.

“This new model will help us find out how we can improve the system to help prevent domestic violence-related deaths,” Ms Burney said.

“I’m confident the new panel will be rigorous in its investigations and its recommendations will contribute to a reduction in these appalling deaths.

“From 2003 to 2008, 215 people died as a result of domestic violence, which equates to 42 per cent of all homicides. Most of those who died were women.

“This is a shocking statistic. One domestic violence homicide is one too many.”

Ms Burney said the Government has budgeted \$504,000 this financial year to set up the domestic violence homicide review panel, which creates a mechanism to systemically analyse all domestic violence homicides.

The NSW Government announced in late 2008 that it would consider the merits of creating a mechanism to systematically review all closed domestic violence homicides.

“An expert group – including representatives from the Government and non-Government sectors – was formed to provide the Government with advice,” Ms Burney said.

“This group examined homicides related to domestic violence that occurred over the previous five years.

“They recommended an ongoing review process be established for domestic violence homicides to ensure that laws, policies and services are effective.

“Today, I am pleased to announce that the NSW Government will implement this recommendation with the creation of the domestic homicide review panel consisting of government and non government experts with administrative and research support.

“The Government has listened to the views of women in the non-Government sector who campaigned for a review model,” she said.

Mr Hatzistergos said the legislation giving effect to the panel will allow the Coroner or a former coronial officer to Chair the panel. The NSW State Coroner Mary Jerram will be the first chair.

“Establishing a panel convened by the Coroner will mean it will have better access to information on domestic violence related deaths across Australia via the National Coroners Information System (NCIS),” Mr Hatzistergos said.

“The NCIS improves the ability of all Coroners to identify and address systematic problems

within their jurisdiction by allowing comparison with similar coronial cases in other States.

Ms Burney said the panel is another initiative of the NSW Government which addresses domestic violence.

“We have expanded two programs: *Staying Home Leaving Violence*, which helps women stay in their homes by removing the violent offender and the Women’s Domestic Violence Court Assistance Program,” she said.

“We also have the *Start Safely* rental subsidy initiative to help domestic violence victims who leave refuges or their own homes move into private accommodation.

“In addition we have implemented a range of legislative reforms to protect and support victims and make offenders more accountable,” Ms Burney said.

Ingrid Poulson, whose estranged husband killed her two children and her father in 2003, is supportive of a review panel.

“To fight our enemy, we must understand it,” she said.

“And for me, this is really the most important role for the review teams; using the painful lessons of our past to improve our knowledge and understanding, to shed light into the corners of our ignorance where women and children live in fear, where women and children die.”

Betty Green, convenor of the Domestic Violence Coalition Committee, commended the Premier and Government in their decision to establish a Domestic Violence Homicide Review in NSW.

“It is pleasing to see that the model to be established is a panel of government and non-government representatives working together in collaboration to understand why domestic violence homicides have occurred and what steps can be taken to strengthen the system,” she said.

“This is a significant step forward and one which I believe will not only make a difference in the long term but also honour the women, children and men who have been killed in the context of domestic violence.”