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MEDIA RELEASE

Thursday, 26 November 2020

HOSPITALS TO CONDUCT DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SCREENING

NSW has taken another step to improve women's safety and wellbeing, launching a \$1.8 million pilot program to screen for domestic violence in six hospital emergency departments.

The *Domestic Violence Screening and Response in Emergency Departments* pilot program has been funded by the Commonwealth Government under the national Health Innovation Fund.

Attorney General and Minister for the Prevention of Domestic Violence Mark Speakman said the program offers the widest scale of domestic violence screening of its kind in Australian emergency departments.

"This program will help identify domestic violence so that crucial steps can be taken to protect victim-survivors from harm. And we couldn't launch it at a better time – as the 16 Days of Activism to help eradicate gender-based violence continues," Mr Speakman said.

One in four women has experienced physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner, and on average, one woman is killed in Australia every nine days by a current or former partner.

Domestic violence is more prevalent among emergency department users than in most other healthcare and community settings, as it's a 24-hour service with relative anonymity.

Health Minister Brad Hazzard said women who experienced domestic violence could be assured of the best possible care and discretion in emergency departments.

"Our emergency department staff are there to help so if a woman is identified as experiencing domestic violence, health workers will speak with her to better understand her needs and any concerns around wellbeing and safety," Mr Hazzard said.

"Depending on her individual needs, she may also be provided with further support from NSW Health, or be referred to other support services that can help provide protection and break the cycle of violence."

As part of the process, health workers will also ask about the safety and wellbeing of children and ensure that any risks are appropriately responded to in partnership with the woman.

Minister for Women Bronnie Taylor said the pilot project was a welcome addition to routine screening services already available in other areas including mental health, maternity, child and family health services.

“This ground-breaking pilot means we will be able identify more instances of domestic violence and intervene early to protect women and save lives,” Mrs Taylor said.

The pilot program will run for 12 months in six public hospital emergency departments – that cannot be identified for safety reasons – with a view to expanding it statewide, depending on the evaluation findings.

For more information on NSW Health services and programs that prevent and respond to violence, abuse and neglect, visit <https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/covid-19/Pages/violence-abuse-neglect.aspx>.