



PERFORMANCE AUDIT

4 APRIL 2022

# Police responses to domestic and family violence

NEW SOUTH WALES AUDITOR-GENERAL'S REPORT

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In accordance with section 38E of the *Government Sector Audit Act 1983*, I present a report titled '**Police responses to domestic and family violence**'.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Margaret Crawford'.

**Margaret Crawford**  
Auditor-General for New South Wales  
4 April 2022

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## RECONCILIATION COMMITMENT STATEMENT

The Audit Office of New South Wales pay our respect and recognise Aboriginal people as the traditional custodians of the land in NSW.

We recognise that Aboriginal people, as custodians, have a spiritual, social and cultural connection with their lands and waters, and have made and continue to make a rich, unique and lasting contribution to the State. We are committed to continue learning about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' history and culture.

We honour and thank the traditional owners of the land on which our office is located, the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, and the traditional owners of the lands on which our staff live and work. We pay our respects to their Elders past and present, and to the next generation of leaders.

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## **Section one**

Police responses to  
domestic and family  
violence



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# Executive summary

The NSW Police Force describes domestic and family violence as a significantly under-reported and complex crime that is mainly perpetrated by men in intimate partner relationships. It is a crime that can include one or more of the following behaviours: emotional and psychological abuse, intimidation, harassment, stalking, physical and sexual assault.

The NSW Police Force responds to over 140,000 domestic and family violence calls for assistance every year. This equates to one call every four minutes. According to NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research statistics, the number and volume of domestic and family violence crime types have increased from October 2016 to September 2021.

The NSW Police Force's responses to domestic and family violence are prescribed in legislation and its own procedural guidance. Principally, the NSW Police Force is required to:

- investigate incidents of domestic and family violence
- take out Apprehended Domestic Violence Orders on behalf of victims and children
- provide safety and support to victims, including taking offenders away from victims
- place alleged perpetrators before the courts
- investigate breaches of Apprehended Domestic Violence Orders and target repeat offenders
- work with local service providers to reduce incidents of domestic and family violence.

Domestic and family violence incident dispatches are attended by general duties police – also described in this report as frontline police.

The objective of this audit was to assess the effectiveness of the NSW Police Force in responding to domestic and family violence. To do this, we assessed whether the NSW Police Force:

- conducts capability planning to ensure its workforce can effectively respond to domestic and family violence incidents and support victim-survivors
- resources its workforce with the required systems, skills, knowledge, and administrative support to monitor, record and respond to domestic and family violence events
- assesses the effectiveness of police responses to domestic and family violence events and the effectiveness of support for victim-survivors.

## Where to get help

If you or someone you know is experiencing violence or abuse, you can contact 1800 RESPECT (1800respect.org.au or 1800 737 732).

## Conclusion

**The NSW Police Force has almost doubled its domestic violence specialist workforce in the past five years. This has enabled higher levels of risk monitoring, and increased levels of support for general duties frontline police. However, a lack of workforce and workload monitoring at the system level, has limited the ability of the NSW Police Force to assess whether specialist and frontline police are sufficient in numbers to manage workload demands in all local commands.**

The NSW Police Force does not measure the types or categories of police work that constitute the workload profiles of general duties frontline police. This limits the ability of the NSW Police Force to understand the proportion of police time that is spent managing domestic and family violence incidents and allocate resources accordingly.

While the NSW Police Force has increased the numbers of specialist domestic violence personnel, it lacks accurate data to assess whether the distribution of specialist personnel is adequate in number to support workload volumes across the different local commands. The NSW Police Force is currently expanding its use of a workforce modelling tool - Capacity Planning for Policing. This tool has the functionality to assess the distribution of the police workforce against incident dispatches by crime type, and other workload metrics.

There is potential for the NSW Police Force to use this tool to take a more proactive approach to domestic and family violence workforce planning. This could include enhanced monitoring and reporting of the domestic and family violence incident dispatches in each local command, and the levels of domestic violence specialist staff in these commands. Enhanced data reporting will assist local commanders to assess their staffing levels against crime statistics, compare to commands with similar activity levels, and ensure that staffing allocations are appropriate for workload demands.

**The NSW Police Force has dedicated additional resources to improve the levels of monitoring of police compliance with domestic and family violence policing procedures. However, rates of compliance checking of domestic violence events vary across local commands, and there is a lack of system level policy or oversight to guide this activity.**

The NSW Police Force has enhanced its quality control measures to improve domestic violence policing through a range of checking mechanisms to monitor compliance with standard operating procedures. However, there is significant variability in the levels of compliance checking across local commands and no system level data about the levels of quality assurance across commands. Some commands attempt to check 100 per cent of domestic violence events, while others check far fewer, depending on their local workload requirements. The NSW Police Force does not provide advice about what constitutes minimum or optimal levels of compliance checking, and there is no centralised reporting on this activity.

**The NSW Police Force provides a structured training program for Probationary Constables on domestic and family violence policing but does not monitor the training or skill levels of the broader workforce. This limits the ability of NSW Police Force managers to understand whether the workforce has the required skills and knowledge in this area.**

During pre-service training Probationary Constables are provided with procedural knowledge and a structured skill development program in preparation for domestic and family violence policing. They develop further proficiency and skills through mentoring and on the job experience.

The NSW Police Force has processes to ensure that probationary police officers are monitored and mentored in domestic violence procedures and practices. However, it is unable to ensure that the broader workforce is completing targeted professional development to improve and update skills and knowledge levels over time. The NSW Police Force does not consistently assess workforce capabilities or gaps in workforce skills and knowledge about domestic violence policing.

**The NSW Police Force does not have regular or consistent methods for seeking feedback from service users. As a result, it has a limited understanding of its service quality from the perspective of victim-survivors of domestic and family violence.**

The NSW Police Force is guided by its Domestic and Family Violence Code of Practice and Customer Service Guidelines to provide 'timely and appropriate victim support and referral'. These guidelines require victim follow-up within seven days of an incident where an offence is detected. The NSW Police Force has limited information to understand whether it is complying with these requirements for domestic violence incidents.

The NSW Police Force is not able to separate complaints about domestic and family violence service quality from other complaints. While the NSW Police Force participates in forums where it can receive feedback from stakeholder groups, there remains the risk that processes are not systematised, and are dependent on the commitment of local commands.

Police participation in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander feedback forums show significant variability in the levels of engagement across police regions. Through its Multicultural Plan, the NSW Police Force collects information about Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Communities. However, reporting is not specific to domestic violence, and only occurs every four years.

Performance reporting on domestic and family violence is limited, with most measures focused on activity counts rather than service quality or outcomes. Six of the seven NSW Police Force indicators for domestic and family violence are counts of incident types, rather than measures of police performance or outcomes.

## 1. Key findings

**The NSW Police Force has implemented initiatives to improve domestic violence policing, but has not allocated sufficient centralised policy resources to monitor and support them**

Domestic and family violence policing in New South Wales is supported by a policy team of six staff. This team has responsibility for developing, coordinating, and communicating domestic violence policy across the State. They support and resource 280 domestic violence specialists and provide advice and guidance to approximately 12,000 police officers across 57 local commands.

Data from the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research shows that domestic violence crimes have increased in the five years from 2016 to 2021. According to police who were interviewed for this audit, domestic violence policing takes up a significant proportion of their workload. This view was consistent amongst police who were interviewed for this audit from local commands. This includes local commanders, domestic violence specialists, and general duties frontline police. The NSW Police Force does not collect data about the proportion of police work that is dedicated to this area of policing.

The NSW Police Force has made changes to improve its responses to domestic and family violence in recent years. It has taken a number of steps to enhance its monitoring of police compliance with domestic violence standard operating procedures. To do this, it increased the numbers of domestic violence specialist positions, and tasked these specialists with conducting quality control assessments of police procedural responses to domestic violence events. However, levels of quality control assessments vary considerably across local commands. Some commands check 100 per cent of events, while others complete fewer. The NSW Police Force does not collect data on the rates of quality control checking across local commands and has not developed a policy to guide this activity.

The NSW Police Force has not dedicated the same level of resources or organisational authority to domestic violence policing as other Australian jurisdictions. While there has been no analysis of an effective model for resourcing domestic and family violence, after review processes in both Victoria and Queensland, these jurisdictions established standalone domestic and family violence commands. In Victoria, the rationale for establishing a standalone command was to 'monitor the organisational response to family violence, maintain organisational accountability and improve police responses to family violence, sexual assault and child abuse'.



### **There is limited centralised workforce planning to assess whether allocations of specialist domestic violence police and other personnel are adequate for workload demands**

The size and distribution of the NSW Police Force is not determined by formulae that calculate ratios of police numbers against volumes of crime by location. The overall size of the New South Wales police population has been largely determined by historical headcounts. Overall police numbers have increased when successive governments made commitments or announcements to enhance workforce numbers. The NSW Police Force also operates under a devolved model of workforce planning. Local commanders have significant autonomy to make staffing decisions that reflect local pressures and address local crime volumes and types.

The state-wide distribution of the 280 Domestic Violence Officers across 57 local commands is, to some extent, based on historical allocations of domestic violence positions since the 1990s. Local commanders can enhance their local domestic violence specialist workforce by converting generalist police positions to domestic violence positions. Similarly, generalist police position numbers across local commands are based on historical allocations. Additions to the total headcount of generalist police can occur when local commanders identify limited capacity and make requests for workforce enhancements.

While the command-driven model of workforce allocation allows local commanders the flexibility to augment areas of their workforce to meet changing local demands, there is no centralised quality control process to ensure that workforce allocations are equitable or appropriately distributed to meet operational requirements. The NSW Police Force does not produce reports on the numbers of domestic violence specialists in each command, relative to domestic violence event numbers.

The lack of centralised workforce modelling means that there is limited assurance that workforce distributions are appropriate for workload demands. Our audit analysis shows significant differences in the levels of domestic violence specialist personnel relative to domestic violence event numbers across local commands. For example, in some local commands, individual Domestic Violence Officers had responsibility for over 3,000 domestic violence incidents in 2020–21. In the same year, individual officers in other New South Wales commands, had less than 500 incidents to manage. There is no reporting on the disparity in these workload volumes.

A number of specialist positions support domestic violence work in local commands. There is limited workforce planning or analysis about the service demand for these positions. For example, there are 33 Multicultural Community Liaison Officers distributed across 57 local commands in New South Wales. Some commands have two or three positions, while others have none. The majority are located in metropolitan regions, and the NSW Police Force has not conducted a recent assessment to identify whether they are located in areas where there are high service demands.

Similarly, there are 55 Aboriginal Community Liaison Officers positions across New South Wales. These positions are not available in all local commands, including in some metropolitan commands. The distribution of these positions is a matter of historical allocation, and there is limited analysis or planning to ensure that these positions are distributed to meet service needs. The NSW Police Force has not assessed the impacts to service quality in areas where Aboriginal Community Liaison Officers are not available.

The NSW Police Force's Capacity Planning for Policing tool has the functionality to assess the distribution of the police workforce against incident dispatches and other workload metrics in each local command. There is potential for the NSW Police Force to use this planning tool to take a more proactive approach to workforce planning. This could include, assessing workforce numbers, crime statistics, and workload volumes across local commands, and ensuring that the overall workforce is deployed in areas where workload demands are highest.

### **The system for recording and managing domestic violence events is cumbersome and duplicative, and its replacement is at least four years away**

The NSW Police Force uses the Computerised Operational Policing System (COPS) to record and review crime events including domestic and family violence. COPS is limited in its effectiveness. Police describe the system as duplicative and time-consuming as they must enter the same information in multiple screens before they can progress through the system. These onerous data entry requirements reduce the time that police can dedicate to other tasks.

COPS is single event oriented. To identify whether individuals have been involved in prior domestic and family violence events, police must manually search through narrative summaries associated with other events. In 2019–20 the NSW Police Force designed and implemented an improved search facility in COPS that allows for 'prompt display' of an individual's prior involvement with domestic violence. However, police advise that connections between events or individuals are not displayed as automated alerts, and they must manually scroll and search for relational aspects or patterns of domestic and family violence behaviours in lengthy narrative summaries. COPS lacks functionality for efficient navigation of connected or related individuals or events.

The NSW Police Force is in the early stages of replacing COPS with the Integrated Policing Operational System (IPOS). The IPOS system has been approved and funded. It is currently in the first of three implementation phases. IPOS will be used for recording, reviewing, and managing multiple crime types. According to the NSW Police Force, activity to add domestic and family violence functionality to the IPOS system, will commence in phase two, and be implemented in June 2025.

The IPOS system is being designed to improve functionality in both data entry and retrieval. To address the limitations of the current COPS system, the new IPOS will need the functionality to display the relational aspects of domestic and family violence events. This includes functionality to identify and display alerts about domestic and family violence incidents that are part of patterns of behaviour, and the identification of individuals who have prior histories of domestic violence.

It was not possible to assess the effectiveness of IPOS as part of this audit, as it is still in the development phase.

### **The NSW Police Force lacks a framework to guide professional development and in-service training for domestic and family violence policing**

The NSW Police Force does not mandate or set expectations for domestic violence training for its officers once they have completed the first year as Probationary Constables. Probationary Constables are trained in foundational knowledge during pre-service training and develop further proficiency and skills through mentoring and experience. However, there is no framework to describe intervals at which police should receive refresher training beyond the probationary training period.

The NSW Police Force has developed a course to upskill its officers in domestic violence policing - the Domestic Violence Fundamentals course. This course comprises 16 online modules, followed by a one day in-person scenario-based session and an assessment component. Attendance at the course is voluntary. Police can nominate to attend the course if they decide to enhance their skills and knowledge, with the agreement of their local commander.

The NSW Police Force does not monitor course completion data across the 57 local commands to understand whether domestic violence specialists and general duties frontline police have completed the Domestic Violence Fundamentals course in all locations. This raises a risk that some local commands could have capability gaps in their domestic and family violence skills and knowledge.

Given that domestic and family violence is a significant component of frontline police work, there is scope for the NSW Police Force to enhance its monitoring and understanding of the levels of workforce capability in this complex area of policing.

### **The NSW Police Force has limited guidance to support its workforce with routine, informal debriefing practices in a high stress, high demand working environment**

Domestic and family violence incidents are often complex and emotionally charged events. General duties frontline police respond to high volumes of domestic violence incidents, and this carries risks of exposure to vicarious or secondary trauma. In some instances, police are directly injured in the conduct of this work.

While NSW Police Force officers have access to a range of support services, there is a lack of guidance or a framework for routine, informal debriefing practices. Support may be necessary for officers who respond to high volumes of incidents during the working week, or after individual incidents. While police have debriefing processes for critical incidents, including incidents where there are high levels of violence, it is the cumulative lower-level incident debriefing that is absent from police practices.

The NSW Police Force does not assess the impacts of domestic and family violence on workforce injury or attrition rates. In the last three years, the NSW Police Force averaged around 500 worker compensation claims per year for psychological injuries. However, there is no data to indicate the source of these injuries, including whether domestic violence police work was a contributing factor. The NSW Police Force reports that it is unable to attribute the cause of psychological injuries because of the cumulative nature of high stress policing and the potential for injury to result from multiple sources.

Given the high volumes of domestic violence work of the NSW Police Force, there is potential for the NSW Police Force to enhance its routine debriefing and post-incident debriefing practices related to domestic violence. This includes the provision of evidence-based guidance on the ways in which to mitigate the effects of secondary trauma.

**Performance reporting on domestic and family violence is limited, with most measures focused on activity rather than service quality or outcomes**

The NSW Police Force has seven Command Performance Assessment (COMPASS) indicators that relate to domestic and family violence policing. At the current time, only one of the seven indicators has targets that pertain to police performance outcomes. Six of the seven performance indicators are counts of domestic violence activity or incident types. For example, one indicator is a count of the number of domestic violence events where alcohol is a factor. Another is a count of domestic violence events where the victim is recorded in prior events. While this information is important as a measure of police activity, it is not a measure of police performance outcomes.

The sole COMPASS indicator with targets for police performance, is the measure of legal action rates for apprehended domestic violence order breaches. That is, charges resulting from reported breaches of these orders. In 2020–21, the NSW Police Force achieved a charge rate of 84 per cent against a target of 82 per cent.

The NSW Police Force collects data on other areas of its performance, including its actions to follow up on victims of crime. Seven days after police have responded to a crime, they are required to follow up with victims about matters of safety and relevant service referrals. Data on these follow-ups is reported through COMPASS at the State level in collaboration with regional police managers who are responsible for monitoring rates in their regions. However, reported data pertains to all victims of crime, and is not disaggregated to show victims of domestic violence related crime. While the NSW Police Force achieved a 90 per cent compliance rate for victim follow-ups within target timeframes in the 2021 financial year, it is not possible to determine domestic and family violence victim follow up rates.

There is scope for the NSW Police Force to increase its monitoring, reporting and analysis of a broader range of its performance activity as it pertains specifically to domestic and family violence policing.

**The NSW Police Force has procedures to investigate complaints of domestic violence against police officers, but processes are not sufficiently independent of interested parties**

The NSW Police Force monitors complaints of domestic violence against its police officers. In general, it is NSW Police Force practice to investigate complaints about police at the local command where the complainant resides. In cases where it is a domestic and family violence complaint against a former or serving police officer, there is a risk that this is the place where the complainant or respondent works or resides. In these instances, this can raise the possibility of conflicts of interest, and implications for the privacy and safety of the complainant or the respondent.

NSW Police Force Domestic and Family Violence Standard Operating Procedures do not contain guidance around risks of perceived or actual conflicts of interest for these circumstances. While there are procedures for responding to reports of domestic violence against serving police officers, such as securing of weapons of the alleged perpetrator, there is no guidance about ensuring the independence of the investigation.

**The NSW Police Force does not capture or analyse domestic and family violence service quality feedback to understand and improve the experiences of victim-survivors**

The NSW Police Force procedures do not include guidance for officers to collect feedback about their service quality. There are no internal compliance requirements for the NSW Police Force to seek feedback from individuals after domestic violence incidents. In general, the NSW Police Force has limited, formalised processes for seeking feedback from service users, stakeholders or representative groups.

The NSW Police Force's Domestic and Family Violence Policy makes an organisational commitment to victim safety and wellbeing. This Policy includes a commitment to provide a high-quality service for victims of domestic and family violence.

While the NSW Police Force has a stated commitment to work in partnership with government and non-government domestic and family violence agencies, its engagement with stakeholders is inconsistent across commands, and dependent on local priorities and relationships. In some local commands, stakeholder engagement occurs on a regular basis, while in others, it is very limited.

Stakeholder groups, including legal representatives, report that it is difficult to make complaints to police about domestic violence service quality. They told this audit that many of their clients have difficulty accessing information about how to make complaints about police practices.

When complaints are made, the NSW Police Force collates this data into broad categories of service quality analysis. There is no assessment or analysis of data that is specific to domestic and family violence complaints. Therefore, the NSW Police Force does not understand whether there are any inconsistencies or issues with its approaches to domestic and family violence policing.

The NSW Police Force does not have a mechanism to collect service quality information after its interactions with victim-survivors. It has limited channels for feedback that would allow system managers to understand or assess service quality. Improved engagement and collaboration is required to allow the NSW Police Force to better understand its service quality and identify opportunities to improve its practice. A poor experience with police can have a negative effect on victims and reduce the likelihood of reporting to police in future.

## 2. Recommendations

### **By January 2023, the NSW Police Force should:**

1. improve workforce and workload data collections, analysis and reporting on:
  - domestic and family violence workload volumes and allocations of specialist and frontline police to meet demand
  - workforce injury and attrition where domestic and family violence is a factor or a potential factor
  - demand for, and availability of Multicultural Community Liaison Officers and Aboriginal Community Liaison Officers.
2. structure and resource the domestic and family violence strategic policy function to a level that is commensurate with the workload volumes and risks associated with domestic violence policing
3. develop a framework to guide police training in domestic and family violence policing that identifies intervals for refresher training, modes for course delivery, and protocols for integrating course evaluations and workforce capability assessments into the training design
4. conduct an expert review of the debriefing protocols and procedures available to police engaged in domestic and family violence policing and implement recommendations
5. commence work on the domestic and family violence component of the Integrated Policing Operational System (IPOS) with a focus on improving functionality for streamlining event recording processes and automated alerts to identify related prior events or individuals
6. in collaboration with relevant stakeholders, such as the Safer Pathway Steering Group, design a procedure to collect, collate, and analyse service user and stakeholder feedback about police responses to domestic and family violence and ensure service improvements are made to areas of identified risk
7. review the existing activity measures and targets for domestic and family violence policing and expand to include police performance measures, service quality measures and outcomes reporting
8. review the process for investigating allegations of domestic and family violence against current and former serving police personnel and implement procedures to ensure processes are independent of interested parties and mitigate conflicts of interest.



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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Background

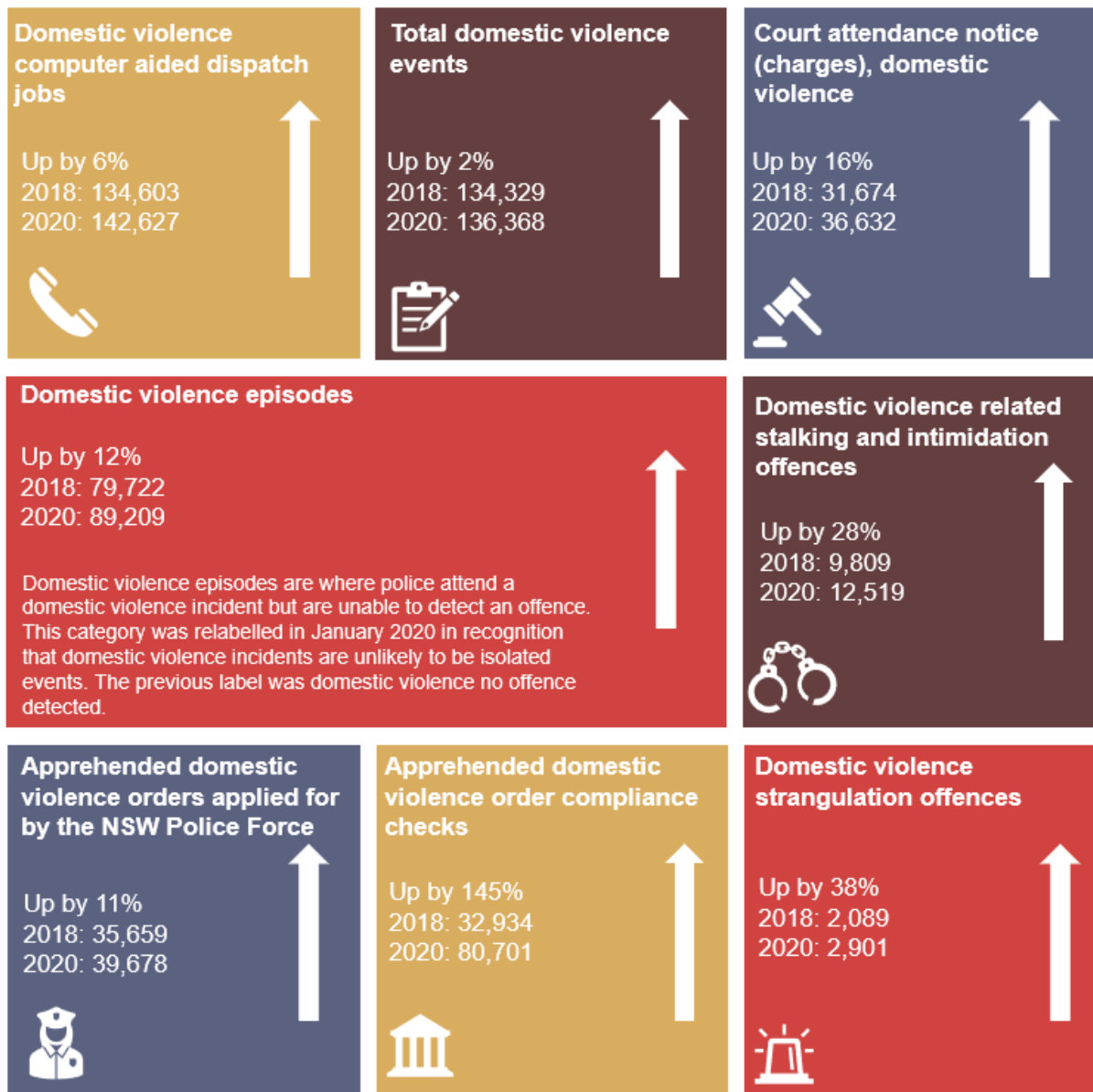
According to the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, only about half of all domestic and family violence incidents are reported to police. The reasons are complex and include some factors that are within the control of police, and others that are outside of their direct control.

Numbers and rates of domestic violence incidents have increased in New South Wales over the past five years. Increased reporting activity and heightened stressors on individuals and communities, may have had some impact on the frequency of domestic violence events. For this reason, incident data alone, is not necessarily a reflection of the NSW Police Force's responsiveness or capability in responding to domestic and family violence.

In recent years, the NSW Premier announced a priority to reduce domestic and family violence re-offending by 25 per cent by 2023. The NSW Police Force has taken action to increase its efforts to target reoffenders and place offenders before the courts. The enhanced policing in this area, has consequential impacts on the number of repeat offenders recorded in police data. This makes it difficult for police to achieve reductions in reoffending. On currently available information, the target to reduced domestic violence reoffending, is unlikely to be met.

The NSW Police Force responded to approximately 140,000 domestic violence calls annually, in the past three years. This equates to one call every four minutes. Key statistics outlining the work of the NSW Police Force in relation to domestic violence are at Exhibit 1.

## Exhibit 1: Domestic and family violence statistical snapshot at 2018 and 2020

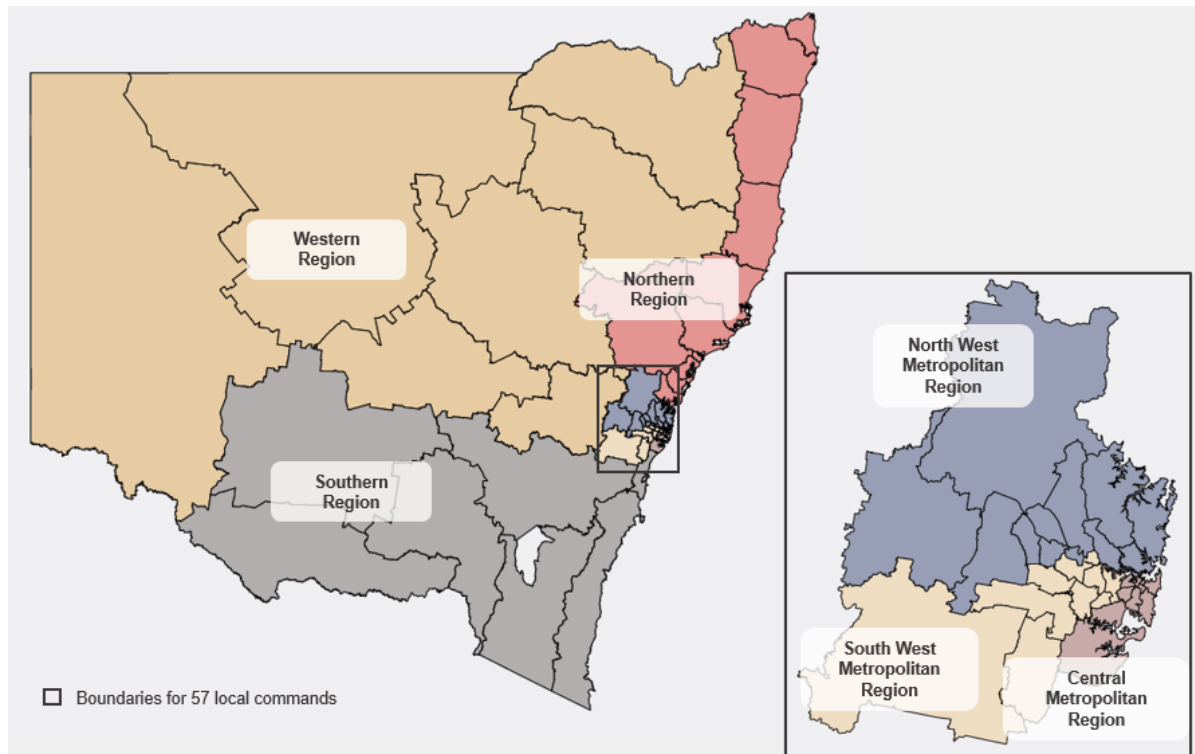


Source: Audit Office analysis of NSW Police Force data.

## 1.2 NSW Police Force organisation

The first responders to domestic and family violence events are general duties frontline police. General duties frontline police are trained to respond to a range of crime types and callouts, not just domestic and family violence incidents. There are approximately 12,000 general duties police officers operating across 57 Police Area Commands and Police Districts (local commands) and the six police regions in New South Wales as in Exhibit 2.

**Exhibit 2: NSW Police Force region and local command boundaries**



Source: Audit Office analysis of NSW Police Force data.

The NSW Police Force employs approximately 280 domestic and family violence specialists at local commands across the State and just over 40 specialists at the police region level. There are two types of domestic violence specialist:

- Domestic Violence Officers
- Domestic Violence Operatives.

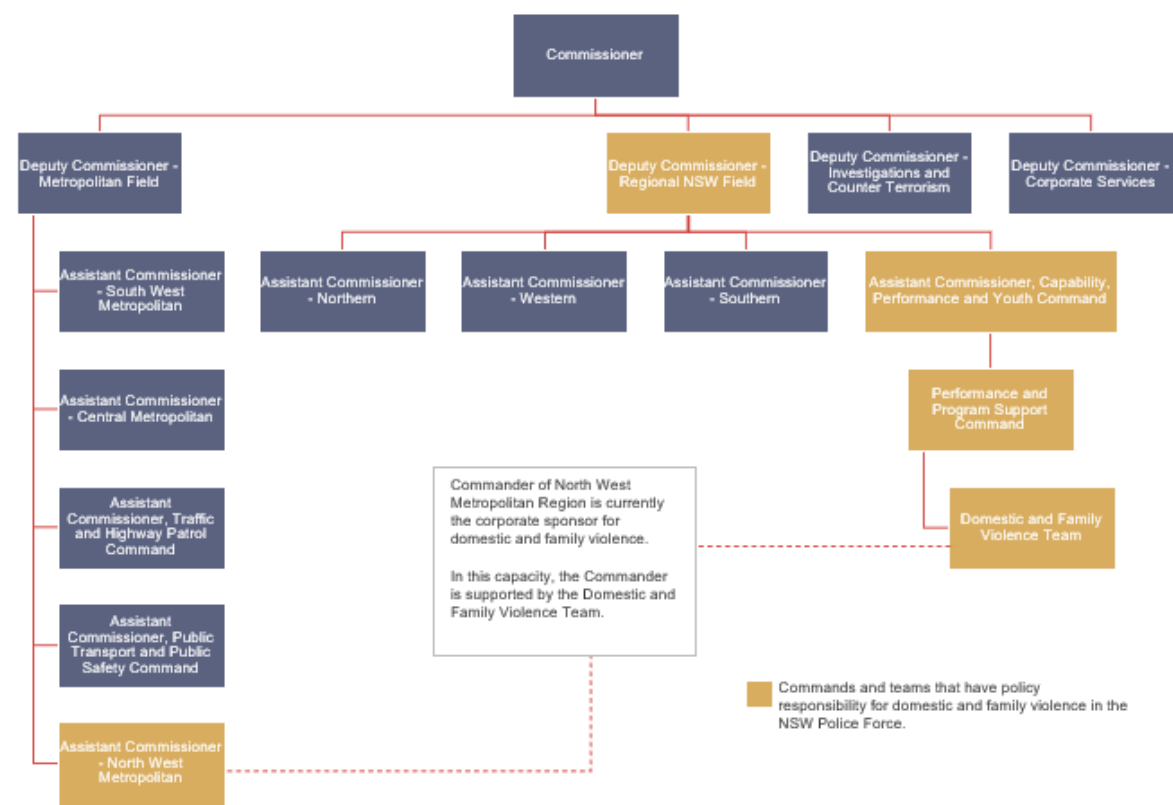
Domestic Violence Officers provide support in local commands by providing linkages with community stakeholders, collecting information and intelligence, conducting compliance checks to ensure that police comply with standard operating procedures, and providing support and follow-up for victims.

Domestic Violence Operatives are tasked with identifying and targeting repeat offenders of domestic and family violence crime. Their role is to reduce re-offending, coordinate bail and apprehended domestic violence orders, conduct compliance operations, and assist Domestic Violence Officers.

The NSW Police Force has a central Domestic and Family Violence Policy team of six personnel. These staff support domestic and family violence police responses across the State.

A Domestic Violence Corporate Sponsor is responsible for leading NSW Police Force's policy, strategy, and practice in this area. The Domestic and Family Violence Corporate Sponsor portfolio is currently held by the Assistant Commissioner of the North-West Metropolitan Region.

**Exhibit 3: NSW Police Force organisational chart showing responsibility for domestic and family violence policy and strategic direction**



Source: NSW Police Force.

## 1.3 General features of the police response to domestic and family violence

Members of the public can make reports of domestic and family violence to the NSW Police Force through the following methods:

- telephone calls to triple zero, to the Police Assistance Line, or to a local police station
- in-person reports at a police station.

After a report of, or attendance at a domestic and family violence incident, the NSW Police Force have a number of responsibilities to record and investigate the event. These responsibilities are described in their standard operating procedures. In broad terms the police are required to:

- record details of the event in the relevant police database
- establish whether an offence has occurred and if there are grounds for an Apprehended Domestic Violence Order
- administer a risk assessment questionnaire (the Domestic Violence Safety Assessment Tool)
- make services referrals for victims and perpetrators
- commence gathering evidence if the matter is to be presented before the courts for adjudication
- prepare information for Safety Action Meetings along with Safer Pathway program partners
- present information at Safety Action Meetings where local service agencies design safety action plans for those victims and families considered to be at serious threat
- follow up with the victim within seven days of the report or incident, and in cases where there is court action, maintain contact at least every 30 days thereafter
- contact victims and perpetrators at key points in the legal process, such as at the point of issue of an Apprehended Domestic Violence Order, at court appearance dates, or at the finalisation of a court matter.



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## 2. Capability planning

### 2.1 Police workforce planning to respond to domestic and family violence

#### **The NSW Police Force has made changes to improve its policing of domestic and family violence**

The NSW Police Force has implemented changes to its policing of domestic and family violence over the past decade, with a particular focus on monitoring police compliance with its standard operating procedures, increasing support to victims, and enhancing the monitoring of high risk offenders. To operationalise these changes, the NSW Police Force made some workforce changes, in particular, it increased the roles and numbers of specialist Domestic Violence Officers.

Domestic Violence Officers conduct quality assurance checks on officer compliance with standard operating procedures. They check the records of domestic violence events in the operational policing system and follow up on incomplete actions or deviations from operating procedures. Domestic Violence Officers are also responsible for community engagement. They maintain connections with local communities and support general duties frontline police in actions to refer and connect families to appropriate services.

In 2016, the NSW Police Force commenced the staged introduction of six Domestic Violence High Risk Offender Teams. These Teams are tasked with taking a proactive approach to identifying, targeting, and monitoring repeat offenders of domestic and family violence. An evaluation of this initiative in 2019 by the NSW Police Force policy team found that the Domestic Violence High Risk Offender Teams had been effective in reducing reoffending in the cohorts it targeted.

Since 2015, the NSW Police Force has participated in the government's Safer Pathway reform including administering the Domestic Violence Safety Assessment Tool and chairing Safety Action Meetings. The Domestic Violence Safety Assessment Tool was introduced to assist in the identification of risks to victims. This whole-of-government initiative was developed after an assessment of the associated risks to victims along the criminal justice journey. The Tool is mandatorily applied in every domestic violence event to identify the level of risk of future domestic violence harm. Police use a checklist and assess against a range of indicators. If a serious threat is present, this information is brought to Safety Action Meetings where government and non-government service providers develop safety action plans and coordinate efforts to enhance the safety of victims and their children. See Appendix three for additional initiatives.

Within its executive ranks, the NSW Police Force introduced a Domestic and Family Violence Corporate Sponsor at the Assistant Commissioner level. The level of seniority was intended to accord sufficient authority to influence practice across local commands. The Corporate Sponsor is responsible for elevating the status of domestic and family violence and leading improvement through innovation. The Corporate Sponsor is also required to assist in the implementation of new initiatives across the NSW Police Force and present an external face to the NSW public on the issue or portfolio. The Corporate Sponsor is supported by the small policy team of six personnel but does not have a dedicated command to assist with operationalising new corporate directions.

#### **Overall police workforce numbers are largely driven by historical headcounts and government commitments, rather than crime data, demographics, or workload data**

The size of the NSW Police Force is largely the result of historical headcounts. Overall police numbers have been enhanced from time to time, after government commitments to increase the police force numbers. The NSW Police Force population is not determined by formulae that calculate ratios of police against volumes of crime by location.

The NSW Police Force has centralised workforce modelling tools and can analyse workload volumes by crime types in each local command. However, workforce planning data is not being used to allocate generalist and specialist police positions from a centralised or strategic level. The centralised workforce planning activity of the NSW Police Force is predominantly focussed on maintaining a state-wide police headcount to a pre-determined level.

When government decisions or election commitments result in increases to police workforce numbers, the NSW Police Force uses its data modelling tools for strategic workforce planning. However, data modelling is not the sole determinant in the decisions about workforce allocations. The Commissioner of Police has discretion to allocate personnel to commands or activities, including to special taskforces or high-profile crime types. These decisions are made according to tactical and strategic priorities, and not by workforce or workload data analysis.

In 2018, the NSW Government announced an increase of 1,500 new police as part of an election commitment. This is the single largest increase to the NSW Police Force in 30 years. The distribution of the additional police from the 2018 commitment is currently being assessed by the Commissioner of Police. As part of the 2018 commitment, 12 Aged Crime Prevention Officers were introduced to respond to elder abuse as a component of domestic and family violence.

The NSW Police Force's Capacity Planning for Policing tool has the functionality to assess the distribution of police workforce against incident dispatches and other workload metrics in each local command. There is potential for the NSW Police Force to make greater use of this planning tool for the equitable allocation of the police workforce. This could include, assessing workforce numbers, crime statistics, and workload volumes across commands, and ensuring that the overall workforce is deployed in areas where the workload demand is highest.

### **The NSW Police Force provides its officers with detailed information and guidance about the expected roles and responsibilities for responding to domestic and family violence**

The roles and responsibilities of the NSW Police Force for responding to domestic and family violence events are described in legislation and in the Domestic and Family Violence Standard Operating Procedures. The procedures contain detailed information and guidance about police powers for entry and arrest, the requirements for documenting domestic violence events, the responsibilities of specialist personnel, and the roles of police in domestic violence court proceedings.

The NSW Police Force has effective workplace processes and practices to inform, guide and mentor junior police in the operational skills required for responding to domestic and family violence incidents. In the early stages of a police officer's career, more experienced police supervise and manage junior staff. Policing skills are learned through reference to academy training, guidance described in the standard operating procedures, observation of more senior officers, and following direct instructions.

In recent years, the NSW Police Force has strengthened its domestic violence specialist workforce. There are currently 280 Domestic Violence Officers and Operatives across New South Wales. Of these, approximately half are Domestic Violence Officers and half are Operatives. Domestic Violence Officers are responsible for enhancing the skill and knowledge levels of frontline police and providing assurance that police are complying with standard operating procedures. They support local command members by identifying training opportunities for local police, and updates on legislative changes and contemporary research. They maintain lists of victim referral services and liaise with local community organisations to understand the issues affecting vulnerable community groups.

Domestic Violence Officers conduct quality assurance checks on domestic violence incidents in their local commands. They assess incident records to ensure that documented activity is compliant with standard operating procedures. Domestic Violence Officers are not the only personnel checking compliance with standard operating procedures. Team leaders and local commanders also conduct compliance checks and identify omissions or mistakes in incident documentation. If mistakes or omissions are discovered, the responding officer is notified, and required to remediate processes and practices. These multiple review processes assist in training individual police. They can also be used to identify any gaps in the knowledge of the broader local command workforce and assist managers to target professional development and training opportunities.

**The central policy team is not sufficiently resourced to monitor domestic violence practices or ensure state-wide initiatives are implemented consistently across the State**

It is not possible to determine the percentage of frontline police work that is dedicated to domestic and family violence because the NSW Police Force does not collect data or quantify its crime response activity. Without exception, frontline police and police managers who were interviewed for this audit, reported that domestic and family violence work constitutes 50 per cent or more of the workload of general duties frontline police.

NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research statistics show increases in a range of domestic violence crime types from October 2016 to September 2021. For example, intimidation, stalking, and harassment increased by 9.4 per cent; domestic violence related sexual offences increased by at least ten per cent; and breaches of apprehended domestic violence orders increased by 9.2 per cent.

The NSW Police Force does not have a stand-alone domestic and family violence command. Instead, domestic and family violence policy is coordinated through a small, centralised policy team of six staff, managed by an Inspector in the Capability, Performance and Youth Command. The policy team is responsible for providing advice and guidance to approximately 12,000 police officers across 57 local commands. They are also responsible for monitoring the strategic direction of the NSW Police Force in domestic and family violence. The policy team supports the Corporate Sponsor for Domestic Violence, liaises with specialist Domestic Violence Officers across the State, provides information and advice to Police Prosecutors, and information to other specialist commands.

The personnel dedicated to domestic and family violence policy do not reflect the volume or complexity of domestic and family violence work across New South Wales. Other areas of the NSW Police Force have dedicated commands that allow for more direct monitoring and resourcing of crime activity. For example, the Public Transport and Rural Crime portfolios are established commands in their own right. They have direct reporting lines, allowing for the monitoring of policy, and for formal communication channels with regional and local commands.

The size of the domestic violence policy team is not commensurate with policy resource levels in other Australian jurisdictions. For example, both Victoria and Queensland have established commands to govern domestic and family violence policing. In both jurisdictions, the domestic violence commands were established after review processes. Victoria Police justified its decision to establish a command in order to 'maintain organisational accountability' across this complex area of police work. In Victoria the Domestic Violence Command supports 530 specialist domestic and family violence staff, including 415 Family Violence Officers and 115 unsworn domestic violence personnel. This workforce is significantly larger than the specialist domestic violence workforce in NSW of 280 Domestic Violence Officers and Operatives, 48 Domestic Violence High Risk Offender Team members, and nine Regional Domestic and Family Violence Coordinators.

Over the last six years, the numbers of domestic violence specialist positions have almost doubled in the NSW Police Force. Most of this growth has occurred through the focus on perpetrator accountability and the creation of Domestic Violence High Risk Offender Teams. The additional specialists are Domestic Violence Operatives, and they are tasked with operationalising the Domestic Violence Suspect Target Management Plan. This includes surveillance of high risk offenders and monitoring compliance with Apprehended Domestic Violence Orders.

There are no formal reporting relationships between the centralised Domestic and Family Violence Policy Team and domestic violence specialist personnel in local commands. This raises the risk that centralised policy advice is not shared across all 57 local commands. The limited size of the team, and the lack of direct reporting lines with local commands, means there is limited assurance about the effectiveness of implementation practices and information sharing with frontline police.

**The NSW Police Force has not implemented a workforce strategy to guide activity aimed at meeting current and future workforce needs**

The NSW Police Force has not implemented an overarching strategy to guide its workforce development. The NSW Police Force is in the process of finalising a ten-year strategic workforce plan, but at the time for writing this report, it is yet to be approved and implemented. According to text in the draft Strategic Workforce Plan 2022–2032, there is a need for workforce planning to 'continuously identify future workforce risks and actions' and to 'prepare for the future of policing'. The draft Plan was developed in consultation with leaders from across the NSW Police Force.

The NSW Police Force acknowledges that workforce planning is essential for sustaining and responding to evolving patterns in crime. While the Draft Strategic Workforce Plan 2022–2032 is designed to address this issue, to date, the NSW Police Force has not been in a position to take a strategic approach to identify areas where particular skills are needed, and to enhance resources to those areas.

The NSW Police Force does have strategies to guide workforce planning in segments of the workforce. These include the Inclusion and Diversity 2020–23 Strategy and the Aboriginal Employment Strategy of the NSW Police Force. These strategies focus on increasing a culturally and linguistically diverse workforce and the representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the workforce.

**There is insufficient analysis of workforce data to understand whether domestic violence specialists are appropriate in numbers and locations to meet workload demands**

The NSW Police Force does not conduct centralised, strategic workforce planning to assess and assign specialist domestic violence personnel to New South Wales commands. The model for workforce planning is devolved to the local command level. Local commanders have responsibility to manage the allocation of specialist positions to areas of crime.

Local commanders have discretion to reassign or convert general duties frontline police positions to specialist domestic violence positions within their local workforce. If specialist police are required, local commanders can adjust the ratios of specialists according to assessments of their local needs. Each local command receives crime statistics data and is able to assess local trends in the patterns of crime. Through this process, changes in workforce profiles can be driven on case-by-case assessments at the local level.

If local commanders identify the need for additional personnel to supplement the overall headcount at their local command, they make a request to the central Human Resources Command of the NSW Police Force. These requests are assessed against operational or tactical requirements, and decisions are made after an analysis of workload volumes and workforce data.

According to the NSW Police Force, each local command is managed like small business. Local leaders are expected to manage local resources and performance. Aside from designated positions within each local command, commanders have discretion to move positions as they see fit. Local commanders can convert positions to new roles within commands to reflect changing priorities. For example, from 2016 to 2021, 16 authorised general duties police positions were converted from frontline police to domestic and family violence positions across New South Wales.

While the command-driven model of workforce allocation allows for local flexibility and the ability to meet changing local demands, there is no centralised quality control process to ensure that workforce allocations are equitable or appropriately distributed to meet operational requirements. Human resource managers do not produce reports on the numbers of specialist domestic violence personnel in each local command against the domestic violence crime statistics or events in these commands. This means that central managers have limited oversight of the human resource levels and workload demands across the 57 local commands. Similarly, local commanders cannot see whether their allocation of domestic violence specialists equates with workforce resource levels in other local commands. While crime incident data is available on police databases, workforce information is not available.

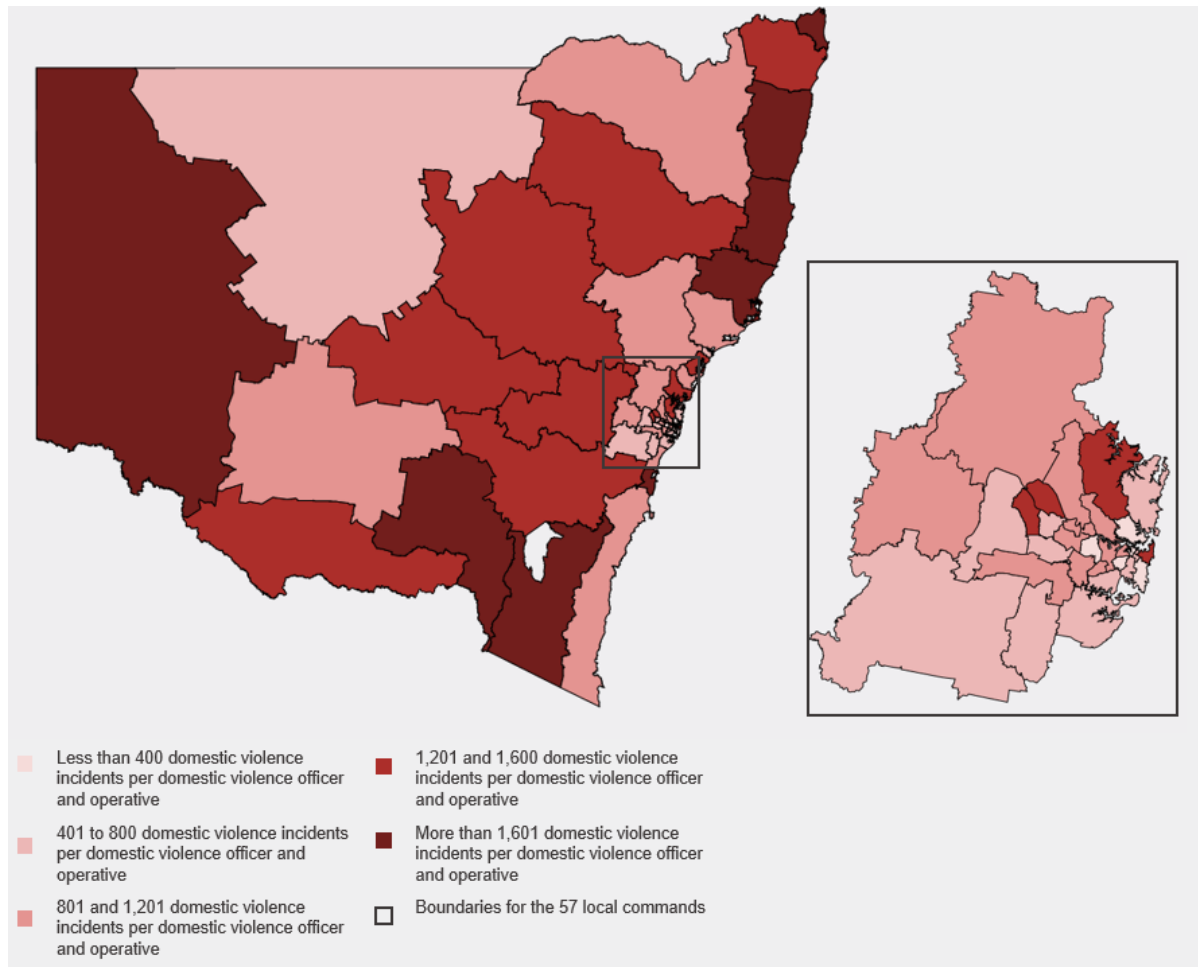
Our audit analysis shows significant differences in the levels of resourcing of domestic violence specialist personnel across local commands. For example, in some local commands, individual domestic violence specialists had over 3,000 domestic violence incidents to manage in 2020–21. In the same year, individual domestic violence specialists in other New South Wales commands, had less than 500 incidents to manage. There is no reporting on the disparity in these workload volumes. There is no routine reporting that would allow local commanders to see if, or when their staff workload volumes are significantly higher or lower than those in other commands across the State.

A lack of central oversight of workload distributions, means that system managers are unable to see whether there are workload risks for personnel. It also means they are unable to see risks to service quality. A consequence of an overloaded Domestic Violence Specialist for example, is the likelihood that they will do fewer quality assurance checks of domestic violence events. In commands where specialists have manageable workloads, they are able to complete quality assurance checking of all domestic violence events. Some commands check 100 per cent of events, while others complete fewer, and compliance assurance varies across commands.

Regular reporting on domestic violence crime statistics that is correlated with the numbers of domestic violence specialists in each local command, would assist managers at all levels of the NSW Police Force to make informed assessments and decisions about workforce resourcing.



**Exhibit 4: The numbers of Domestic Violence Officers and Operatives in relation to the volume of domestic violence incidents in 2020–21**



Source: NSW Audit Office analysis of NSW Police Force data.

**The NSW Police Force does not collect accurate data on the numbers of domestic violence specialist police in the State**

At the centralised, system level, the NSW Police Force data does not accurately reflect the number of Domestic Violence specialists across the State. The data held at the central level was shown to be incorrect after a stocktake of domestic violence specialist positions, conducted in 2021 by the Domestic Violence Policy Team. The 2020 stocktake found there were 281 specialists working across New South Wales commands, while the centralised human resources databases recorded 196 specialists.

The following Exhibit 5 indicates the discrepancies in the NSW Police Force's data records of domestic violence specialist numbers compared with those identified in the Domestic Violence Policy Team stocktake of 2021.

**Exhibit 5: Discrepancy in the Human Resources database staffing count for 2020–21 compared with a November 2020 stocktake of Domestic Violence Officers and Operatives**

| Region                  | DFV specialist FTE - from HR database | DFV specialist FTE - November 2020 stocktake | Discrepancies in recorded FTE between the HR database and the 2020 DFV staffing stocktake by the policy team |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------------|--|--|
| Central Metropolitan    | 25.95                                 | 48.75  | 22.80  |
| North West Metropolitan | 40.78                                 | 59.50  | 18.72  |
| Northern                | 34.68                                 | 50.00  | 15.32  |
| South West Metropolitan | 47.26                                 | 68.00  | 20.74  |
| Southern                | 21.11                                 | 25.00  | 3.89   |
| Western                 | 26.60                                 | 30.00  | 3.40   |
| <b>Total</b>            | <b>196.38</b>                         | <b>281.25</b>                                | <b>84.87</b>   |

Source: NSW Audit Office analysis of NSW Police Force data.

The incorrect data records at the central or strategic level, indicate that the NSW Police Force is not able to accurately assess its workload volumes. At the strategic level, the NSW Police Force lacks a mechanism or a process for accurate assessment of workforce capacity across local commands. The NSW Police Force does not collect or update its data to understand the workforce distributions of domestic violence specialists or to assess the workload volumes. Centralised managers are not able to compare staffing levels across local commands to ensure that staffing levels are equitable across New South Wales.

The NSW Police Force does not have precise information about staff turnover in the specialist domestic violence workforce, as the workforce data is not updated and not an accurate record of workforce numbers. The NSW Police Force reported that it conducts staffing reviews of local commands, and so far, has reviewed only two of the 57 local commands.

**Domestic violence administrative tasks take longer to process than other crime types according to frontline police, but this is not factored into workload assessments**

A 2011 NSW Audit Office report entitled Responding to Domestic and Family Violence, estimated that the NSW Police Force spent an average of 50–70 per cent of their time on domestic and family violence matters. In this report, we recommended that the NSW Police Force assess and report on workload volumes. This work has not occurred to date.

While there is no reliable data about domestic violence workload volumes, all local commands that were consulted during this audit, estimated that general duties frontline police spend upwards of 50 per cent of time on domestic violence in any given week. Some described significantly higher workload volumes. At the central level, domestic violence policy personnel estimate that 40 per cent of police time in local commands is spent on domestic and family violence. These estimates are not used for workforce modelling and the NSW Police Force is not factoring workload volumes into workforce planning. The NSW Police Force argues that it does not undertake this analysis because workforce resource allocations and decisions are managed at the local command level, and decisions are tactical rather than strategic.

According to the police who were consulted for this audit, domestic violence incidents take longer to process and respond to, than other crime types. This view was consistent across local commands. For example, police estimated that it takes about four to five hours to attend and complete all reporting and recording tasks associated with a domestic violence assault, while a non-domestic violence assault might take half this time. The presence of children and firearms will increase the time that it takes to complete administrative tasks related to a single incident. According to police personnel, some serious domestic and family violence incidents may consume an entire shift of 10–12 hours.

### **Multicultural Community Liaison Officer positions are not allocated to locations according to the size or needs of diverse communities**

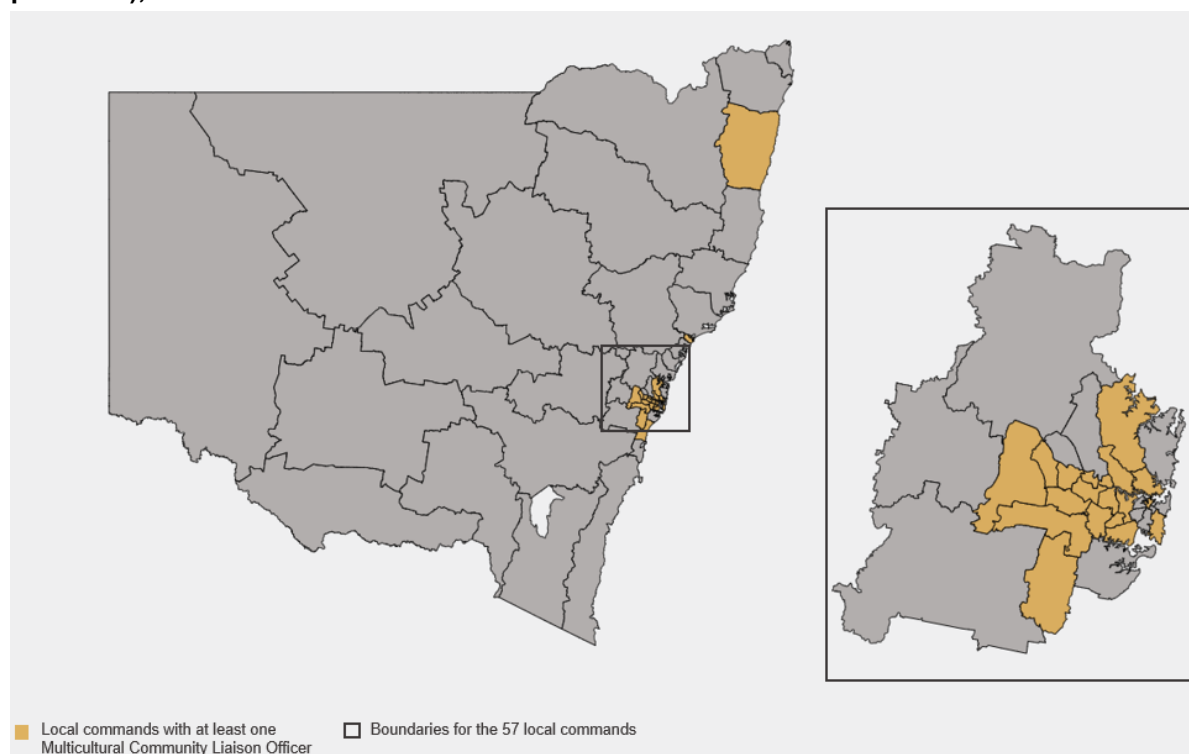
The role of Multicultural Community Liaison Officers is primarily to support and engage with diverse language groups and cultural groups in the local communities that form part of their local command. While Multicultural Community Liaison Officers do not attend domestic violence incidents, they may facilitate access to language services and follow up with families after incidents have occurred. Their primary role is to assist in facilitating communication between cultural groups in the community, and the police. Police commanders who were consulted for this audit, advised that Multicultural Community Liaison Officers play a valuable role in providing cultural insights into the sensitivities of different cultural or language groups. They inform police of any new information that may affect the safety of different community groups.

There are 33 Multicultural Community Liaison Officers distributed across 57 local commands in New South Wales. The distribution of Multicultural Community Liaison Officers is uneven. Some local commands do not have any, while others have two or three. The majority are located in metropolitan regions, and the NSW Police Force has not conducted a recent assessment to identify whether they are located in areas where there are high service demands. The location of Multicultural Community Liaison Officers is largely based on historical allocations when the role was first introduced. The last activity to assess the allocation of positions was in 2011 and resulted in some reallocations. In 2019, a Regional Support Strategy was drafted to assist police in allocating positions. The NSW Police Force advises that its planned implementation was disrupted due to the COVID pandemic and plans to implement the strategy after the next census data becomes available.

The NSW Police Force acknowledges that communities change over time and that there is a need to revisit the locations of Multicultural Community Liaison Officers. However, additions or changes to headcount can only be revisited when a Multicultural Community Liaison Officer retires or resigns. In these instances, the central strategic policy unit may negotiate with Commands to transfer the resource. Where staffing resources are lacking, policy and protocols have been developed to make sharing of Multicultural Community Liaison Officers possible across local command boundaries.

The NSW Police Force does not carry out formal or systematic processes to ensure that Multicultural Community Liaison Officers are deployed to the locations where the needs are greatest. Resources are shared or redeployed when they come to the attention of the police. For example, the NSW Police Force advised, that the recent arrival of Afghan asylum seekers into the Castle Hills area has necessitated additional multicultural support in this region. The local command does not have a Multicultural Community Liaison Officer, and formal arrangements have been made to share the Multicultural Community Liaison Officer from the Cumberland Command.

## Exhibit 6: Locations of Multicultural Community Liaison Officers (authorised positions), June 2021



Source: NSW Audit Office analysis of NSW Police Force data.

### Aboriginal Community Liaison Officer positions are not allocated according to assessments of population requirements

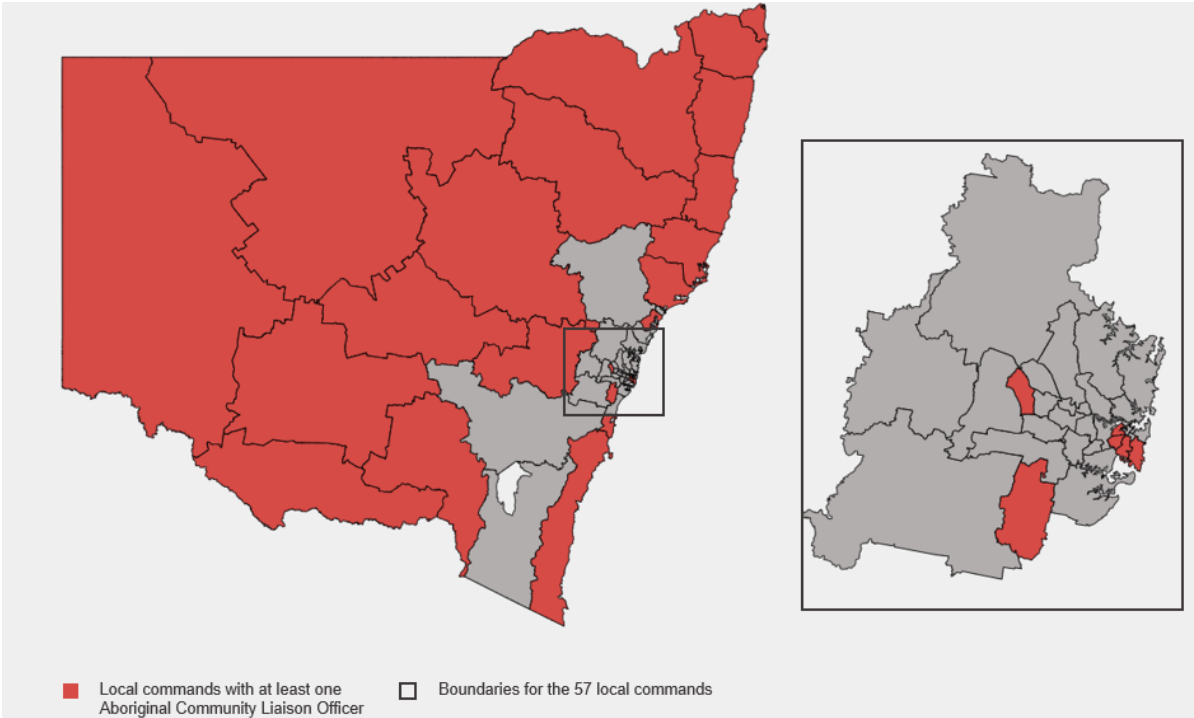
Aboriginal Community Liaison Officers are employed to engage with local Aboriginal communities, and to assist communication between community members and the local police. They have a role to advise Aboriginal communities about the functions of the NSW Police Force and to identify barriers that prevent open communication and consultation. Aboriginal Community Liaison Officers do not attend domestic and family violence incidents. Their role is to follow up with families after incidents and provide support and information to assist in domestic and family violence processes.

There are approximately 55 Aboriginal Community Liaison Officers positions across the State. These positions are not available in all local commands, and not all positions are filled. Some local commands have more than one Aboriginal Community Liaison Officer, and others have none. A number of metropolitan commands and those just outside the metropolitan region, do not have an Aboriginal Community Liaison Officer. According to the NSW Police Force, the distribution of personnel is appropriate, and not all commands have sufficient Aboriginal populations to justify an Aboriginal Community Liaison Officer. However, interviews with operational segments of the NSW Police Force indicate that the distribution of these positions is a matter of historical allocation, and position locations are only revisited through an ad hoc basis. The NSW Police Force has not assessed the impacts to service quality in local commands where an Aboriginal Community Liaison Officer is not available.

Our audit interviews with local commanders reveal that there is difficulty in recruiting Aboriginal Community Liaison Officers to advertised positions. The reasons for this are many. Firstly, the positions are at Grade 3/4 and are at a low level on the police administrative pay scale. In addition, commanders indicated that the role is complex, and some Aboriginal recruits have difficulty negotiating the family and relational aspects of domestic violence policing.

Local Police commanders advised our audit team that Aboriginal Community Liaison Officers make valuable contributions to domestic and family violence policing and provide local information to assist with community safety activity.

**Exhibit 7: Locations of Aboriginal Community Liaison Officers (authorised positions), June 2021**



Source: NSW Audit Office analysis of NSW Police Force data.

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## 3. Resourcing responses to domestic violence

### 3.1 Recruitment, training, and development

**Most new recruits to the NSW Police Force are selected and trained to be generalist police and there is scope to recruit for more specialised domestic violence skills and knowledge**

Recruitment through the NSW Police Academy is the primary means of entry into the NSW Police Force. For the most part, police officers are recruited and trained to be generalist frontline police.

Prior to entering the NSW Police Force Academy, new recruits complete a four-week online course focused on the legal framework and communication skills. New recruits are also subject to criminal checks, fitness, and psychometric tests to determine basic suitability.

The training of new recruits includes a series of online and in-person training sessions over a 32 week period. At this point, recruits become Probationary Constables and are stationed at local commands for the next 12 months. At the completion of all requirements, the recruits will have completed an Associate Degree in Policing Practice.

There is limited direct recruitment to domestic violence specialist positions. The NSW Police Force recruits nine Regional Domestic Violence Coordinators and one policy officer in the Domestic and Family Violence Policy Team. These are the only specialist positions recruited from outside the police force.

There is scope for NSW Police Force to recruit for additional skills to enhance its domestic and family violence policing. For example, there is scope to enhance technology skills as digital media is increasingly becoming a feature in domestic violence crimes. Digital technology is being used for control, entrapment, intimidation, and stalking. In addition, there is scope to enhance the workforce with experts who have victim support skills, community engagement techniques and workforce training capabilities. The NSW Police Force does not conduct targeted recruitment for these skills or expertise to enhance its domestic and family violence policing.

**Pre-service police training is designed around the procedural aspects of domestic violence policing**

The NSW Police Force's pre-service training in domestic and family violence is focused on standard operating procedures for handling incidents.

Domestic and family violence is taught as a stand-alone module for the in-person component of pre-service training at the Academy. It is taught at the end of the Academy program and integrates much of the content taught over the preceding weeks. Over the course of a week and about 30 hours of face-to-face contact, new recruits are taught procedural elements of responding to domestic and family violence incidents including legal basis for powers. New recruits are also introduced to victim care concepts and explore behaviour of victims of domestic and family violence through case studies. The Domestic and Family Violence Policy Team provides advice to keep this module current.

During their time at the Academy, recruits also undertake cultural competency and awareness training including for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, culturally and linguistically diverse communities and LGBTIQ+ communities. These sessions are delivered as part of discrete components of modules undertaken at the academy.



### **Probationary officers are supported and mentored in most of the required knowledge and practice for responding to domestic and family violence incidents**

Probationary Constables are trained in procedural elements for responding to domestic and family violence during pre-service training and develop further proficiency and skills through mentoring and experience. These relationships and experiences are a key factor in shaping a new Constable's appreciation and attitude towards domestic and family violence throughout their career.

Over the course of the first year on the job, Probationary Constables are given more responsibility in responding to domestic and family violence incidents before they are confirmed as full Constables:

- Weeks 1–16: Probationary Constables observe a domestic and family violence response
- Weeks 17–32: Probationary Constables assist in a domestic and family violence response
- Weeks 33–48: Probationary Constables lead a domestic and family violence response.

At each of these stages, Probationary Constables are assessed on their competency in responding to domestic and family violence incidents by a Field Training and Assessment Officer which is then endorsed by the local commander. Domestic and family violence is one of five core competencies assessed in this way and the only competency related to a specific incident type.

Some police regions set an expectation that newer recruits will rotate through domestic and family violence teams in their local commands, but this is not a centrally set requirement or expectation. Commands that do rotate newer recruits through domestic violence teams report that it helps general duties police officers get a better understanding of the overall importance of domestic and family violence work.

Probationary Constables are expected to familiarise themselves with the Domestic and Family Violence Standard Operating Procedures. These procedures include guidance on engaging with Aboriginal communities, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, and other diverse groups. Probationary Constables are expected to learn community engagement skills on-the-job as they complete their initial three-year requirement as general duties frontline police.

### **The NSW Police Force has limited mandatory or routine refresher training in domestic and family violence policing skills for frontline police**

The NSW Police Force does not mandate refresher training in domestic and family violence policing once new recruits have completed probationary training and been confirmed as Constables. The available training on domestic violence policing is discretionary. With the agreement of their commander, police officers can volunteer to attend a workshop known as Domestic Violence Fundamentals. This course comprises 16 online modules followed by a one day in-person scenario-based session and an assessment component.

Police must complete training when there are legislative updates or changes to police practices. While these may include updates to domestic violence legislation, they are not a substitute for comprehensive refresher training in this complex area of policing. It became mandatory for example, for police to receive training in using cameras when practices changed in relation to the collection of evidence from witnesses. This included training in collecting video statements from witnesses immediately after domestic violence events.

There is benefit in the NSW Police Force mandating training on key domestic violence concepts for all frontline police. For example, research indicates that police forces across Australia, and internationally, have difficulty in identifying the primary aggressor, and practices are inconsistent. The Domestic Violence Fundamentals course includes modules on identifying the primary aggressor in a domestic violence incident. While local commands can provide scenario training exercises at daily briefings, there is no assurance that these sessions include training on domestic violence. Local training exercises occur at the discretion of local command managers.

Police publications can be a source of information to guide police in their practices. In August 2018, the NSW Police Force published Domestic Violence Insights. These short papers provide clarification for police on common points of confusion in responding to domestic and family violence. The Domestic Violence Insights papers are a resource for Domestic Violence Officers and are available to all staff via the intranet.

The NSW Police Force also provides stand-alone professional development to address domestic and family violence within diverse communities. These are focussed on the cultural practices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, LGBTQI+ communities, and CALD communities. According to the Aboriginal Strategic Direction policy, 80 per cent of operational police in the NSW Police Force must have completed a training course focussed on working with Aboriginal communities. Most commands meet this requirement, though it is not known whether these cultural awareness training courses were directed to domestic and family violence.

Some local commands have developed their own training on domestic violence. For example, the South West Metropolitan region developed a training module on dowry abuse. This training has been converted into an online course and is available to all police officers. Similarly, some inner-city local commands invite a local community service providers to deliver training on domestic and family violence in the context of LGBTQI+ relationships. These training options can be effective in their limited contexts, but they are not mandatory across the State.

Mandating the Domestic Violence Fundamentals course at significant intervals during the careers of frontline police, would help embed core policing skills across the workforce. This includes training on areas that require complex judgements, such as identifying primary aggressors in domestic violence situations. The relevant components of the Domestic Violence Fundamentals course on identifying primary aggressors are described in Exhibit 8.

#### **Exhibit 8: Training to identify primary aggressor**

The domestic and family violence fundamentals course contains guidance for officers on identifying primary aggressors and persons in need of protection. The current training contains learning objectives that focus on identifying the primary aggressor. Officers are advised to consider factors such as:

- history of domestic violence between parties
- witness statements
- patterns of behaviour
- fear observed by persons
- whether there have been threats of harm
- any current or previous orders
- acts of defence, retaliation, or both.

Note: According to the Domestic Violence Standard Operating Procedures, a victim striking back in self-defence, is not engaged in a mutual act of domestic violence. NSW Police Force advise that they do, however, have obligations to respond to criminal offences where self-defence is not applicable, including legislated obligations to commence application proceedings for ADVOs.

Source: NSW Audit Office analysis of NSW Police Force information.

#### **The NSW Police Force has not developed a framework or capability map to guide refresher or in-service training on domestic and family violence and does not monitor completions**

The NSW Police Force does not have a capability map for general duties frontline police that sets out guidance on refresher training intervals for domestic and family violence policing. This raises the risk that some officers may have capability gaps in their domestic and family violence skills and knowledge.

The NSW Police Force does not set state-wide targets for the numbers of general duties frontline police expected to complete domestic and family violence training each year. Instead, local commanders manage training, capability assessments and information updates in consultation with their local command leadership team.

While the localised model allows for a needs-based approach to professional development, there is limited identification of development gaps at a system level. There is no visibility across local commands to identify areas where refresher training has been lacking. In 2021, the Police Prosecutions Command conducted a limited mapping exercise to understand the geographical distribution of employees with specialist domestic and family violence training. See Exhibit 9.

#### **Exhibit 9: Mapping specialist domestic and family violence training for Police Prosecutors**

Stand-alone training for Police Prosecutors was introduced in 2013 by the Domestic and Family Violence Policy Team and is now delivered by the Police Prosecutions Command. The course features further training on material covered in the introductory police prosecutors course and is a preferred achievement for Police Prosecutors running domestic violence clinics.

Stakeholders who were interviewed as part of this audit, reported that Police Prosecutors who had completed the training demonstrated a greater understanding of domestic and family violence and victim care. Around a third of the almost 400 Police Prosecutors in the State have completed this training.

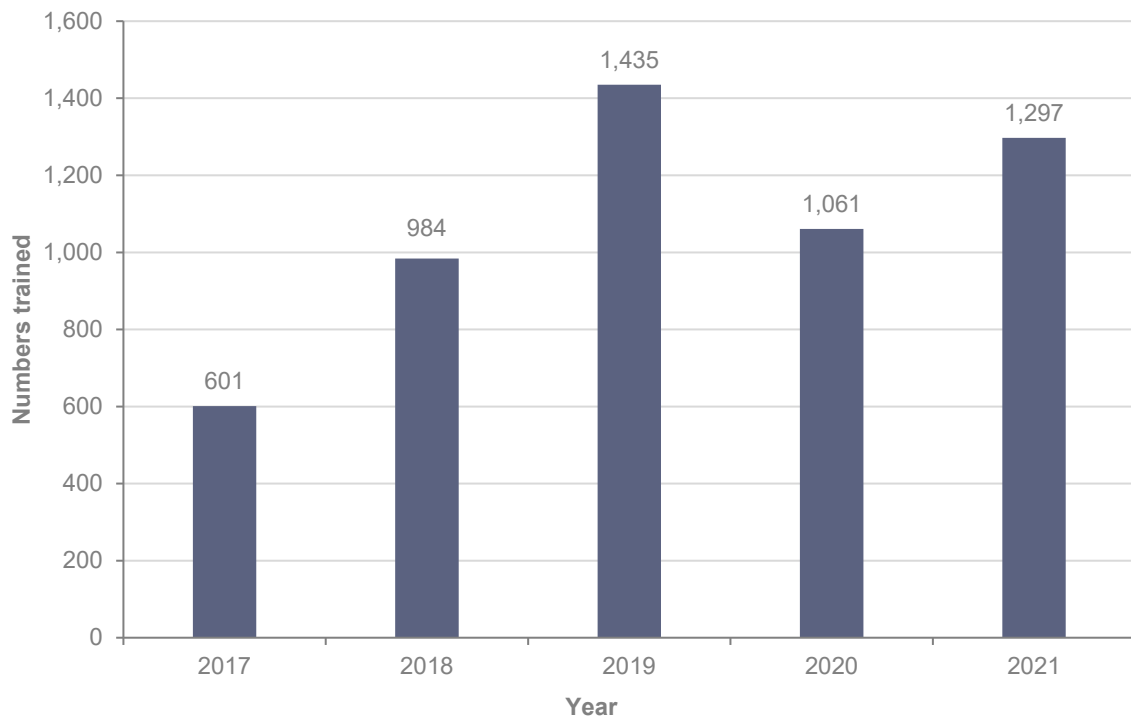
In 2021, the NSW Police Force reports that it has recently assessed the geographical spread of Police Prosecutors who have completed the training to obtain a better balance across the State in the future.

Source: NSW Audit Office research.

In 2021, as part of its promotions system, the NSW Police Force introduced knowledge checkpoints for policing. This included testing for knowledge on domestic and family violence policing. While this is suitable for identifying readiness or otherwise for rank and promotion, it is not a system that can be proactively applied to all New South Wales police. Checkpoint testing for promotion does not replace mandatory training across the NSW Police Force. It is not a mechanism to ensure that long-serving officers have access to current information and policing practices in domestic and family violence responses.

There are approximately 12,000 officers in local commands across New South Wales. Exhibit 10 shows the number of officers who have completed Domestic Violence Fundamentals training.

#### **Exhibit 10: Numbers of police who have completed the Domestic Violence Fundamentals course from 2017 to 2021**



Source: NSW, Questions and Answers, Legislative Assembly, 20 August 2021 (No. 119).

The NSW Police Force reports that it evaluates its training courses through post-course surveys of learner engagement. However, it was unable to provide any evidence of these training evaluations. Police managers reported that they are exploring evaluation activities that include surveys of supervisors to discover whether learners have achieved course objectives.

**Most domestic and family violence in-service training is now conducted online with limited face-to-face instruction or interaction with expert instructors**

The NSW Police Force is re-assessing its training offerings to determine which training can be moved to an online, or partially online environment, with the rationale that online learning is more widely accessible, especially in regional and remote areas. This trend continues with the mixed online and in-person Domestic Violence Fundamentals course replacing a wholly in-person course from July 2021 onwards.

Police officers told this audit that they prefer in-person training for most training topics and emphasised that it is especially important for domestic and family violence training. Police who were interviewed for this audit and other stakeholders indicated that some domestic and family violence concepts do not lend themselves to an online learning environment. The NSW Police Force does not have a policy to guide its learning environments, including advice on topics that warrant face-to-face interaction, and those that may be taught in an online environment.

The NSW Police Force is attempting to increase the levels of police engagement in new online learning courses. Previous offerings have been online slideshows that users can click through to complete a course. However, newer offerings include dynamic quizzes and scenarios, and other assessment elements.

COVID-related restrictions have disrupted the face-to-face training calendar, restricting the delivery of domestic and family violence related training sessions. This includes the introductory training for Domestic Violence Officers and the in-person component of Domestic Violence Fundamentals course. The NSW Police Force advises that it has revised its course for Domestic Violence Officers, and training is due to be delivered in the first half of 2022.

## 3.2 Police workplace injuries and mental health support

**The NSW Police Force offers its staff a range of support services to assist with stress and trauma, but there is inconsistent practice in debriefing after incidents**

Domestic and family violence incidents are often complex and emotionally charged incidents. National and international research indicates that these incidents can individually or cumulatively result in stress and secondary trauma. This includes compassion fatigue, burnout, and vicarious trauma. Compassion fatigue is the profound emotional and physical erosion that takes place when helpers are unable to refuel and regenerate. Burnout is the physical and emotional exhaustion that workers can experience when they have low job satisfaction and feel powerless and overwhelmed at work. Vicarious trauma is the effect of indirect exposure to difficult, disturbing, or traumatic images and stories about the suffering of others, which results in a significant change to the individual's world view.

At local commands, NSW Police Force officers have access to a range of support services including the Employee Assistance Program and Incident Support. Following a serious incident, Incident Support will be provided. This includes domestic and family violence incidents where there has been serious injury or death. The NSW Police Force reports that Peer Support Officers, Chaplains and Domestic Violence Officers can be important sources of support for officers after they have attended domestic and family violence incidents.

Specialist Domestic Violence Officers have the option of enrolling in a WellCheck program that provides enhanced support and access to regular psychological check-ins. This program is not available to the wider police workforce due to cost considerations. In our 2016 report on Preventing and Managing Worker Injuries, we reported that the NSW Police Force was exploring ways of electronically referring police officers to WellCheck, based on the profile of the jobs attended by the individual. The NSW Police Force reports it is still exploring this possibility, but that the referral program has not been implemented to date.

The NSW Police Force officers who were interviewed for this audit, reported varying degrees of collegiate post-incident debriefing following domestic and family violence events. Officers reported that they often rush between tasks, and this presents barriers to immediate post-incident debriefings.

In other professions, where trauma is routinely encountered in the workplace, systematic informal debriefing is routinely provided to colleagues. These occur at intervals that are proximate to the event, for example, immediately afterwards, or at the end of a shift. They are generally conducted by peers or work colleagues who have received training in debriefing. This form of regular, structured, post-incident debriefing has been shown to address the risks of secondary trauma.

**The NSW Police Force does not maintain sufficiently detailed data to determine the impacts of domestic and family violence policing on workforce injury and attrition**

The NSW Police Force averaged around 500 worker compensation claims relating to psychological injuries over the last three years from 2018–19 to 2020–21. According to the NSW Police Force, it is unable to assess the numbers of police claims or separations that are caused by attending domestic and family violence incidents, due to the cumulative nature of psychological injuries.

Domestic and family violence incidents are amongst the most physically dangerous jobs to attend, according to police who were interviewed for this audit. They describe domestic violence incidents as complex and unpredictable. Accordingly, the NSW Police Force regards domestic and family violence incidents as high risk and has introduced a number of protocols to mitigate the risks. Police told audit staff that in instances where there is a known violent offender a more senior officer or supervisor usually attends to oversee the domestic and family violence incident.

The NSW Police Force does not maintain data on the number or type of physical injuries incurred during domestic and family violence police responses, or the number of police who leave due to trauma related to domestic and family violence policing.

The NSW Police Force has not undertaken other action to assess the workforce injury and attrition impacts of domestic and family violence on police officers.

### 3.3 Police administrative and support systems

**The system used to record domestic and family violence events (COPS), is cumbersome and time consuming, and has limitations in displaying connected events and individuals**

The Computerised Operational Policing System (COPS) is the NSW Police Force's system for recording details of incidents. It is now over 27 years old. The police officers who spoke with us as part of this audit indicated that the data entry requirements of the COPS systems are a significant component of responding to domestic and family violence events.

Police officers reported to this audit that it can take an hour to enter data into the system for incidents of domestic violence assault where children were present. Police told audit staff that the laborious and time-consuming nature of data entry had negative impacts on their view of domestic violence incident reporting. Time spent on purely administrative activities takes officers away from other policing activities. Police questioned the worthiness of the data entry activity, and some take short cuts to save time.

Over several years, the Domestic and Family Violence Policy Team identified and implemented efficiency improvements to COPS as well as adding features to comply with legislative changes. In 2019, for example, the Domestic and Family Violence Policy Team funded a change to the COPS database to produce a summary of a person's domestic violence history. Viewing this screen is now mandatory before finalising an event. This assists police officers with making suitable bail recommendations and recommendations for the length of apprehended domestic violence orders.

Despite improvements to the COPS system over the years, police advise that the system cannot make connections between related events or individuals. The system does not automatically identify repeat offenders for example, and related information is not displayed as automated alerts in COPS. In order to identify related individuals or events, police must manually scroll and read through narrative summaries. These can be lengthy according to police who were interviewed for this audit.

The NSW Police Force advises that it is in the early stages of replacing COPS with a new database - the Integrated Policing Operational System (IPOS). As part of the replacement project, the NSW Police Force assessed the data entry requirements of the two systems. It determined that it could achieve at least a 15–20 per cent reduction in the time taken to record domestic and family violence incidents in the new system. The NSW Police Force expect that the IPOS component used to record and display domestic and family violence incidents will be fully functional in June 2025.

The IPOS system is being designed to improve functionality in both data entry and retrieval. To address the limitations of the current COPS system, the new IPOS will need the functionality to display the relational aspects of domestic and family violence events. This includes alerts for domestic and family violence events that are linked, or for individuals recorded in prior events.

This audit was not able to assess the efficacy of the IPOS. The NSW Police Force advise that the new system will have improved functionality for displaying relational and connected domestic and family violence incidents and individuals.

### **The NSW Police Force has implemented a range of new practices, but has limited funds to support and evaluate strategic project work related to domestic and family violence**

Over the last five years the Domestic and Family Violence Policy Team has been responsible for the implementation of significant state-wide initiatives to improve police responses to domestic and family violence. Some of the significant initiatives include:

- an enhanced focus on policing perpetrators of domestic and family violence through the implementation of the Domestic Violence Suspect Target Management Plan (DV-STMP), Apprehended Domestic Violence Order compliance check program, and the creation of the Domestic Violence High Risk Offender Team
- a process to communicate with local commands through Domestic Violence Insights reports
- video evidence of witness statements after domestic violence events. The video evidence, known as 'Domestic Violence Evidence in Chief', can be used in court processes in place of victim-survivors providing evidence from memory, during court hearings. This aims to reduce the burden of evidence on victim-survivors during the court processes.

The NSW Police Force allocates limited funds to support and evaluate these state-wide initiatives. Most policy teams do not have access to dedicated funds for this purpose and must apply for common funds managed by the Capability, Performance and Youth Command. They are not always successful.

Regional Domestic Violence Coordinators have no discretionary funds to support local initiatives and instead must apply for external grants. While this encourages collaboration with local government and other government services, it may also limit police-initiated actions and the evaluation, sharing and embedding of successful local initiatives across other local commands.

In some instances, projects have been stalled due to a lack of evaluation capability. For example, a combination of COVID-related barriers and a lack of evaluation capability has impacted on the commencement of an initiative to co-locate members of the Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service in police stations. Since 2021, the NSW Police Force has been working to source funds to set up an independent evaluation framework for this program. The NSW Police Force advise that the initiative to co-locate the domestic violence advocacy services in police stations will commence in 2022. It aims to assist women and children affected by domestic and family violence with safety planning, advocacy and referrals.



### **Demand has increased for translating and interpreting services, but the NSW Police Force cannot provide assurance that services are being used when needed**

The NSW Police Force does not separate its spending on language services for domestic violence events from other crime types. Therefore, it is not possible to know exactly how much has been spent on domestic violence-related services. Across all police activity, spending on language translation services has almost doubled since 2016–17. Police report that in 2016–17, \$1.4 million was spent on language services, and this has increased to \$2.8 million in 2020–21.

It is critical that translating and interpreting services are available and used when needed during domestic violence incidents. Stakeholders reported to this audit that even if some victims have transactional English skills that are sufficient for shopping and navigation, these are unlikely to be sufficient to understand police questions, especially during a traumatic and emotional episode. Further, while reporting rates for domestic and family violence are low, about 50 per cent, they are lower for diverse communities. Police acknowledge that language barriers are a key barrier to the reporting of domestic and family violence.

The NSW Police Force identified this risk in its 2017–2020 Multicultural Policies and Services Plan. To address this risk the NSW Police Force implemented a number of initiatives including:

- issuing a policy statement in September 2018 that was updated in January 2022, enforcing the need for local commanders, who are held directly accountable for language service expenditure, to use translating and interpreting services
- development and release of online training modules about effective use of interpreters and promotion of these services during in-person diversity training
- development and dissemination of other communications materials.

The NSW Police Force is currently working towards developing a software application for police issued smart-phones (MobiPOL) to further promote and encourage the use of translating and interpreting services.

NSW Police Force managers told this audit that they monitor ongoing usage patterns of translating and interpreters services at regular, quarterly meetings with the corporate sponsor responsible for culturally and linguistically diverse communities. Individual local commands have information to assist them to conduct compliance exercises in relation to language services and do so at their discretion. However, the NSW Police Force does not mandate a standard check to obtain assurance that language services are used when they are needed.

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## 4. Effectiveness of police responses to domestic and family violence

### 4.1 Domestic violence performance reporting

**The NSW Police Force has a limited number of domestic violence performance measures, and could do more to expand its performance monitoring activity**

The NSW Police Force uses a mechanism known as the Command Performance Assessment System (COMPASS) to monitor its performance against its business plan and corporate targets. Data stored in the COMPASS system is largely sourced from the NSW Police Force database, COPS. There are seven indicators in COMPASS that relate to domestic and family violence. Most of these indicators are descriptions of event types, rather than indicators of police performance in responding to domestic violence. For example, one indicator is a count of the number of domestic violence events where alcohol is a factor. Another is a count of events where the victim is recorded in prior domestic violence records. Only one indicator assesses police performance in responding to domestic violence.

The target used by the NSW Police Force to measure its performance is focused on legal action rates for apprehended domestic violence order breaches. That is, charges resulting from reported breaches of these orders. In 2020–21, the NSW Police Force achieved a legal action rate of apprehended domestic violence orders of 84 per cent against a target of 82 per cent.

The NSW Police Force collects data on a range of other activity and performance areas, but these measures do not specifically relate to domestic violence. For example, NSW Police Force collects data on its actions to follow up on victims of crime. Seven days after police have responded to a crime, they are required to follow up with victims about safety and relevant service referrals. The reported data on victim follow ups currently pertains to all victims of crime and is not disaggregated to show victims of domestic violence related crime. While the NSW Police Force achieved a 90 per cent compliance rate for victim follow-ups within target timeframes in the 2021 financial year, it is not possible to determine domestic and family violence victim follow up rates.

There is scope for the NSW Police Force to enhance its monitoring, reporting and analysis of a broader range of domestic and family violence performance activities. COMPASS reporting occurs at the State and Regional levels, and these are appropriate forums through which the NSW Police Force can assess and potentially enhance its performance in domestic and family violence.

## 4.2 Police engagement with victims and services

### **The NSW Police Force has requirements for victim follow up post domestic violence incidents, but there is limited assurance that officers conduct these follow ups**

The Code of Practice for the NSW Police Force's Response to Domestic Violence emphasises the importance of 'continued provision of timely and appropriate victim support and referral to appropriate services'. The NSW Police Force is bound by procedures and guidelines that mandate specific contact points when officers must communicate with domestic and family violence victim-survivors. This includes timeframes to check on levels of safety, to provide referrals and updates about possible court hearings. These actions are described in the NSW Police Force Customer Service Guidelines:

- ensure victim follow up within seven days of an incident where an offence is detected, to ensure safety of the victim and answer their questions, and provide referral to domestic violence services
- when matters become cases which require investigation, update victims and witnesses at least every 28 days if matters become court proceedings.

All communication between police and victim-survivors must be recorded in the COPS system. Local command supervisors monitor these activities through random audits of COPS events after they have been completed and updated by the Officer in Charge. NSW Police Force procedures and guidelines do not set a baseline for the number of audits that local command supervisors should perform, meaning that the level of oversight varies from command to command.

The NSW Police Force does not collate or analyse outcomes data from audits to understand whether officers across the NSW Police Force are consistently implementing victim follow-up guidelines, or to gauge the effectiveness of these efforts and its impacts on victim safety.

### **Local commands do not collect feedback from victims after domestic and family violence incidents**

A number of policies and procedures of the NSW Police Force highlight the importance of providing high quality service to domestic and family violence victims. According to the NSW Police Force Customer Service Guidelines, feedback is taken seriously and 'used to improve service quality'. This includes an organisational commitment to victim safety and wellbeing, and an acknowledgment that a poor experience can have negative impacts on victims.

The NSW Police Force does not request feedback from victims of 'personal violence crimes' such as domestic and family violence. According to the NSW Police Force, they do not contact victims in order to avoid retraumatising them. They also advised that police officers are not trained in victim support.

NSW Police Force policies and procedures do not require police officers to collect feedback about service quality. However, the Code of Practice for the NSW Police Force Response to Domestic Violence contains a commitment that police will continue 'providing assurance for victims' who make domestic violence reports, 'taking appropriate action to ensure victim safety'. Without service user feedback, the NSW Police Force is unable to ensure it is meeting the standard described in this commitment. Service user feedback would allow the NSW Police Force to measure its performance and to better understand the experiences of victim-survivors, including the reasons they do not report to police.

The NSW Police Force acknowledges that a person seeking police support following a domestic and family violence incident may be reporting for the 'first, only, or last time'. According to the NSW Police Force, this necessitates a high standard of service to ensure 'every interaction and response matters'.

The Charter of Victim's Rights is a statutory set of service standards that apply to all NSW Government agencies working with victims of crime. Agencies are not required to meet the service standards outlined in the Charter to the letter but are expected to implement the Charter to an extent that is practical and appropriate. Over the review period of this audit, the NSW Police Force implemented a mandatory activity to inform victims of crime about their rights, and to provide referral options. These actions meet some of the commitments of the Charter. In 2021, the NSW Police Force released a new victim's card after a consultation process. The new card provides a direct link to the NSW Police Force website and provides information on referrals to the Safer Pathways service partners and to the victims of crime webpage.

While the NSW Police Force is taking action to improve its services to victims of crime, more can be done to assess the performance of police in relation to domestic and family violence policing. Feedback about service quality from the perspective of domestic violence victims, can assist police to understand and manage these relationships. Relationships can impact on the levels of cooperation between police and other parties, ensure that victims provide accurate information about their safety, and ensure future cooperation during further investigations and court processes. The quality of service also impacts on the likelihood that a victim will report to police in future.

### **The NSW Police Force is inconsistent in its efforts to seek and receive feedback from domestic and family violence stakeholders and partner agencies**

The NSW Police Force has a stated commitment to work in partnership with government and non-government domestic and family violence agencies. However, stakeholders who were consulted for this audit, report that the NSW Police Force does not always seek advice or input about police responses to domestic and family violence. For example, a number of agencies reported that they would like to collaborate with police on domestic and family violence training to improve service quality. Improved engagement and collaboration would allow the NSW Police Force to better understand its service quality and identify opportunities to improve its practice.

Local commands participate in Safety Action Meetings that are chaired by a senior officer from each local command. Safety Action Meetings can provide an opportunity for service organisations and government agencies to raise issues or complaints about the police response to domestic and family violence incidents. However, membership at these meetings does not include all stakeholders. Some stakeholders reported that, for the most part, government service providers are invited to participate, but non-government organisations are not routinely invited. A number of Aboriginal domestic violence service providers told this audit that they have important information to contribute to these meetings, but they are not able to attend without an invitation.

The coordination of the Safety Action Meetings occurs through consultation between local commands and the Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service. According to the NSW Police Force, the Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service have responsibility for managing the participation lists for Safety Action Meetings.

The NSW Police Force participates in a range of regional, state-wide and national collaborative and cross-agency forums on domestic and family violence and has recently enhanced its participation in stakeholder forums. For example, the Corporate Sponsor, Domestic and Family Violence meets regularly with domestic violence sector stakeholder organisations such as Domestic Violence NSW in a process which has moved from an ad hoc basis to formalised quarterly meetings, beginning in 2021.

### **The NSW Police Force is not consistently engaging with Aboriginal organisations to support and monitor community safety**

Police Aboriginal Consultative Committees operate in some, but not all local commands. These committees provide an advisory forum for police and local Aboriginal community groups to address crime, crime prevention and community safety. According to the Aboriginal Strategic Direction policy, local commands are responsible for establishing and inviting members of local Aboriginal community groups to quarterly meetings.

As part of this audit, we conducted interviews with nine Aboriginal stakeholder groups to identify levels of police engagement and consultation with Aboriginal communities. Of the nine stakeholder groups, one organisation reported attendance at an Aboriginal Consultative Committee. Two of the nine stakeholder groups reported effective processes for communication with local police. In the two regions where effective engagement was reported, the same local police commander had significant involvement. All nine Aboriginal organisations who were interviewed for this audit, reported that police responsiveness and engagement with their agencies is predominantly driven by the personalities of those in charge.

The Maranguka Community Hub at Bourke and the YUIN Protocol at the South Coast of New South Wales were both described as effective models to guide collaboration between Aboriginal communities and the police. The Maranguka Community Hub is led by a Tribal Council and governed by locally developed principles. This structure guides collaborative processes between government agencies, the Shire Council, non-government agencies, and the police. A key aim of the Hub is the coordination and sharing of information so that services support families and communities to prevent domestic and family violence. The YUIN Protocol in the South Coast Police District is a similarly designed project in the pilot phase. The Protocol is being co-designed by Aboriginal community members, service agencies and the police. A key aim of the Protocol is to guide culturally appropriate prevention strategies to address domestic and family violence.

Six of the nine Aboriginal stakeholder groups we spoke to for this audit, reported that police are not appropriately trained to work with Aboriginal communities. According to these stakeholders, police have access to cultural awareness training, but this cultural knowledge is not evident in the ways in which they engage with Aboriginal communities. Stakeholders also reported that in some cases, community members will not contact the police in relation to domestic and family violence events, due to poor historical treatment of community members.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people represent about 3.4 per cent of the New South Wales population. In 2021, 8.9 per cent of victims of domestic violence-related crime were Aboriginal people, meaning they were over-represented at rates that were approximately two and a half times that of the non-Aboriginal population. Domestic and family violence disproportionately affects Aboriginal women and children.

## 4.3 Domestic violence complaints management

### **The NSW Police Force has procedures to investigate and respond to complaints about its domestic violence service quality, but they are not always effective**

There is a legislative requirement for the NSW Police Force to facilitate processes for the public to make complaints. The webpage of the NSW Police Force provides options for the public to submit a complaint. First, citizens may attend a local police station to try to resolve less serious complaints, such as rudeness or poor customer service. For more serious complaints, citizens are directed to submit their complaint to the Commissioner of Police, or the Law Enforcement Conduct Commission.

Formal complaints to the Commissioner of Police must be lodged in writing, either using an online complaint form linked at the NSW Police Force website, or a form which can be downloaded at the same page and mailed via post or emailed to the NSW Police Force Customer Assistance Unit. Formal complaints submitted to the Law Enforcement Conduct Commission can be submitted via its website using its online complaints form.

Stakeholder groups reported to this audit that it is difficult to make complaints to police, advising that many of their clients have difficulty making complaints. A risk to making complaints is if the complainant has to make the complaint to the station where the service or response was provided. The unequal power structure makes it difficult for complainants to be fearless and frank in their feedback. They also fear negative repercussions in the investigation and in the management of their domestic violence matter.

### **The NSW Police Force does not collate or analyse complaints data related to domestic and family violence incidents**

The NSW Police Force does not conduct in-depth analysis of the complaints it receives to better understand inconsistencies or trends in its approach to domestic and family violence incidents. Complaints data can be an effective tool for organisations to use to identify trends and gaps in service quality, training needs, disciplinary actions, and workforce requirements.

The system the NSW Police Force uses to capture complaints data does not specify the crime type to which the complaint relates. In order to understand the numbers of complaints related to domestic and family violence policing, it is necessary to manually review all complaints to determine which are related to domestic and family violence. This means that, to date, the NSW Police Force is unable to aggregate complaints data to identify trends, gaps, and risks.

The NSW Police Force advises that it has made system improvements in response to this audit, and the Professional Standards Command is now reviewing complaints data specific to domestic and family violence.

### **Allegations of domestic violence against police employees can be investigated at the local commands where the affected police officers are stationed, raising risks of confidentiality and conflict of interest**

According to the Domestic and Family Violence Standard Operating Procedures, incidents involving police officers in domestic violence matters, are to be investigated in the same way as any other domestic violence incident. There is a risk that investigations of domestic violence complaints are made at the local command where the complainant or the respondent currently resides. Managing complaints of domestic and family violence at the current or former workplace of the complainant or respondent, potentially raises a conflict of interest. This complaints process requires safeguards and has implications for the privacy and safety of the complainant or respondent.

Police involved in investigating complaints against current or former serving officers, are required to complete conflict of interest statements and notify more senior officers at their local command. There is no other specific guidance about 'arms-length' or independence in the management of conflicts of interest in domestic violence matters involving police. Practices for investigating complaints vary across local commands. Some refer investigations to other commands, and others manage the investigation in the command where the complainant or respondent is stationed.

The NSW Police Force monitors complaints of domestic violence against serving police officers. Between January 2017 and April 2021, there were a total of 166 complaints of domestic violence against police. About a quarter of these were sustained, meaning they were either proved in court or sufficient for internal disciplinary action.

The Domestic and Family Violence Standard Operating Procedures do include instructions for conducting investigations when serving police are involved. This includes the securing of service weapons, making Apprehended Domestic Violence Order applications, risk assessments and legal representation. NSW Police Force officers who are subject to Apprehended Domestic Violence Orders are currently able to respond to domestic and family violence incidents in the course of their duties. The NSW Police Force is working on a project to prevent officers with Apprehended Domestic Violence Orders from responding to domestic and family violence incidents.

The NSW Police Force acknowledges that there can be a perceived or actual conflict of interest in managing complaints of domestic violence at the workplace of either party. To this end, it is in the process of reviewing the domestic violence standard operating procedures. The NSW Police Force is currently considering a proposal to address two areas of concern:

1. The introduction of a degree of oversight by Professional Standards Command of allegations/incidents involving police officers and police employees.
2. The introduction of procedures to address the issue of who should investigate allegations of domestic violence against police officers or police employees. In particular, it is proposed that Commands/Districts should not investigate matters involving subject officers or employees who are part of the same Command/District.



## 4.4 Outcomes measurements

### **The NSW Police Force identifies and shares a range of good practice domestic violence initiatives, but could do more to expand good practice responses in Aboriginal communities**

Local commands have implemented initiatives to improve responses to domestic and family violence, and there is evidence that local commands are sharing successful domestic violence initiatives. There are forums for local commands to find out about the practices of other commands, and the NSW Police Force has developed processes for sharing new initiatives across the State. Forums include bi-monthly meetings of Regional Domestic Violence Coordinators, where Coordinators share challenges, lessons, and successes with one another. The strategic domestic violence policy team has a standing invitation to attend and share corporate and legislative updates at these meetings.

One example of shared practice involves the management of firearms. The Nepean domestic violence team developed a firearms powers card to assist operational police with their management. As a result, the strategic domestic violence policy team is now making this a state-wide tool for all commands. While there has been wider distribution of some practices and initiatives, this process is not systematised for all initiatives. In particular, there is scope for the NSW Police Force to be more proactive in collecting, evaluating, and systematising effective responses to policing domestic and family violence in Aboriginal communities.

The NSW Police Force has good examples for domestic and family violence policing in Aboriginal communities. For example, the Yuin Protocol in the South Coast Police District, and the Maranguka Community Hub in Bourke are local programs that focus on multi-agency partnerships to address domestic and family violence in Aboriginal communities. Both the Yuin Protocol and police involvement with the Maranguka Community Hub have been led and implemented by the same commander. There is currently no strategic process to share these practices across other New South Wales commands where they can benefit Aboriginal communities more broadly.

The NSW Police Force routinely completes evaluations of state-wide initiatives, such as the Domestic Violence Suspect Target Management Plan (DV-STMP) and the Domestic Violence Evidence in Chief (DVEC) programs. Similarly, the upcoming pilot to co-locate Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service workers in local commands includes an evaluation plan. However, not all local and regional initiatives are evaluated with the same level of consistency, which could lead to missed opportunities to share and embed effective responses to domestic and family violence across the State.

### **At the system-level, the NSW Police Force does not monitor rates of domestic violence compliance checking across commands or set a benchmark to ensure consistent levels of assurance**

Each local command determines its own levels of activity in checking that domestic violence procedures are completed in compliance with standard operating procedures. The NSW Police Force does not set a benchmark or collect information on the rates of compliance checks that are being completed by local commands. Domestic and family violence compliance reporting is not one of the 11 mandatory areas for local command reporting. Under the devolved model of New South Wales policing, local commands make decisions about the numbers or rates of compliance checks of domestic violence incidents.

All domestic violence events have a baseline review by a shift supervisor to ensure information is recorded accurately and that a full investigation has been performed. Domestic Violence Officers from each local command then perform an additional detailed review of the event. Local commands are completing between ten per cent and 100 per cent of these detailed reviews, depending on decisions and resource levels at each local command. These reviews occur 24–48 hours after the event has been created.

There is no centralised guidance on the level of compliance assurance that is required at the local command level. Compliance checking largely corresponds to command-level workloads and not levels of identified risk. Most Domestic Violence Officers we spoke to for this audit indicated a preference to complete 100 per cent compliance checks of events as this ensures compliance with procedures and mitigates risks. Some police regions have made 100 per cent compliance checks a mandatory activity.

The results of compliance checks are not visible to police headquarters, but local commanders have visibility over compliance checks through discussions with Domestic Violence Officers and command supervisors. These personnel inform them of recurring issues and potential gaps in compliance or training. While records on compliance for each incident record the number of reviews performed, there is no activity to monitor and report on compliance check activity by local commands.

At the regional level, Regional Coordinators review a sample of events every month. However, the form, content and extent of these reviews differs across the six police regions. Regional Coordinators are currently considering a common approach to this compliance review function. These reviews do not provide the level of local compliance checking that can potentially lead to changed practices in frontline policing.

At the central level, the Domestic and Family Violence policy team maintains contact with the network of domestic violence specialists to understand areas of non-compliance. However, without data on compliance rates, and an inability to perform in-depth analysis of the data to find trends, it is difficult for policy officers to have a full understanding of areas where there may be risks of non-compliant practice.

The NSW Police Force has limited capacity to strategically address trends related to non-compliance, such as developing training materials, targeting training in specific areas of repeat non-compliance across local commands, or undertaking performance management activities for officers routinely engaging in non-compliance with operating procedures.

The NSW Police Force advise that in response to a 2021 coronial inquest, they are undertaking a body of work to determine a potential new model for auditing compliance with domestic violence standard operating procedures.

## **Section two**

### Appendices

# Appendix one – Response from agency



**NSW Police Force**

**OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER**

Ms Margaret Crawford  
NSW Auditor-General  
Audit Office of NSW  
GPO Box 12  
Sydney NSW 2001

**Our ref: F/2022/4120**

## **Performance Audit – Police responses to Domestic and Family Violence (DFV)**

Dear Ms Crawford,

I refer to your correspondence sent from the Audit Office of NSW on the 11 March 2022, inviting NSW Police Force to provide a formal response to the final audit report to be tabled on 31 March 2022.

Domestic and Family Violence is a complex crime that occurs within a domestic setting. NSW Police Force responds to a significant number of Domestic and Family Violence incidents each year. NSW Police Force appreciates the efforts of the Audit Office in understanding the complexities and acknowledges the eight recommendations made.

NSW Police Force accept the recommendations in the report dated March 2022. Attached to this letter is the response by the NSW Police Force.

We note the timeframe to implement these recommendations is January 2023. NSW Police Force will work towards implementing the recommendations within the time frame nominated, however system enhancements such as the Integrated Policing Operational System (IPOS) Domestic Violence framework, is not scheduled for release until 2025.

We have carefully considered the recommendations of the report and will continue to work with our partner agencies to improve our response to Domestic and Family Violence.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Karen Webb'.

**Commissioner Karen Webb, APM**

**New South Wales Police Force**

24 March 2022



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| Recommendation  |  | NSW Police Force Response | Comment  |
|---|--|---------------------------|--|
| By January 2023, the New South Wales Police Force should: |  |                           |  |
| 1   | Improve workforce and workload data collections, analysis and reporting on:<br>* domestic and family violence workload volumes and allocations of specialist and frontline police to meet demand<br>* workforce injury and attrition where domestic and family violence is a factor or potential factor<br>* demand for, and availability of Multicultural Community Liaison Officers and Aboriginal Community Liaison Officers. | Accepted                  | NSW Police Force utilise the Capacity Planning for Policing (CPP) tool, to inform workforce planning, allocation and capability. This recommendation will assist to inform changes in the use of the tool to drive more informed decision making regarding workforce resourcing.   |
| 2   | Structure and resource the domestic and family violence strategic policy function to a level that is commensurate with the workload volumes and risks associated with domestic violence policing.  | Accepted                  | NSW Police Force has commenced exploration of options regarding the structure and resourcing requirements of the Corporate Domestic and Family Violence Team aligned with scope and functionality.   |
| 3   | Develop a framework to guide police training in domestic and family violence policing that identifies intervals for refresher training, modes for course delivery, and protocols for integrating course evaluations and workforce capability assessments into the training design.   | Accepted                  | NSW Police Force are reviewing this recommendation with a view to improving police training and development. NSW Police Force already includes course evaluations and assessments in its Domestic and Family Violence courses.   |
| 4   | Conduct an expert review of the de-briefing protocols and procedures available to police engaged in domestic and family violence policing and implement recommendations.   | Accepted                  | The NSWPF does not currently capture data in relation to injuries to Police from domestic related matters, however the impact is acknowledged.<br><br>NSWPF is strategically investing in the development of a Potentially Traumatic Event policy which will outline how the organisation will monitor potentially traumatic events and the organisational response to these events. (DV included)<br><br>The Wellbeing Information Management System (WIMS) is in its infancy and aimed at building a system to enable proactive monitoring of an officer's trauma experience (cumulative or critical) with integration to other Police systems such as COPs which will generate automatic alerts for wellbeing corrective actions. Reporting capability will be part of the build. This project is under development by the Workforce Improvement Program and has been approved by Commissioners Executive Team (CET). |
| 5   | Commence work on the domestic and family violence component of the Integrated Policing Operational System (IPOS) with a focus on improving functionality for streamlining event recording processes and automated alerts to identify related prior events or individuals.  | Accepted                  | The Domestic and Family Violence Team has worked with the WebCOPS replacement program and has already articulate to the Integrated Policing Operational System (IPOS) team the high level concept required, that will allow police to better focus on actions to address the dynamics of Domestic Violence relationships as opposed to dealing with Domestic Violence reports as individual incidents. The IPOS DV framework is scheduled for release in 2025.   |
| 6   | In collaboration with relevant stakeholders, such as the Safer Pathway Steering Group, design a procedure to collect, collate and analyse service user and stakeholder feedback about police responses to domestic and family violence and ensure service improvements are made to areas of identified risk.   | Accepted                  | NSW Police Force have strong relationships with Safer Pathways partners and currently receive and respond to feedback from these partners. NSW Police Force is committed to enhancing our response to victims and to using feedback for this purpose. NSWPF will consider other mechanisms for seeking and receiving feedback facilitating continued improvements to victim response.  |
| 7   | Review the existing activity measures and targets for domestic and family violence policing and expand to include police performance measures, service quality measures and outcomes reporting.  | Accepted                  | NSWPF is currently reviewing the COMPASS DV reporting measures that will improve standardised reporting to occur across all regions, enabling centralised visibility of activity and strengthen accountability.<br>The NSW Police Force have made changes to the complaints recording database whereby a Domestic Violence specific complaints categories have now been added.   |
| 8   | Review the process for investigation allegations of domestic and family violence against current and former serving police personnel and implement procedures to ensure processes are independent of interested parties and mitigate conflicts and interest.   | Accepted                  | NSWPF continues to review its response to allegations of Domestic and Family Violence concerning its employees. Professional Standards Command have been working with stakeholders on investigation processes to mitigate concerns regarding conflicts of interest and to ensure independence of interested parties.   |

# Appendix two – Workload and workforce numbers in 2020–21 supporting Exhibits 4, 6 and 7

**Exhibit 11: Workload and workforce numbers in 2020–21 supporting Exhibits 4, 6 and 7**

| Police Area<br>Command or<br>Police District<br>(local commands) | All domestic<br>violence<br>incidents,<br>2020–21 | Domestic<br>Violence<br>Officers and<br>Operatives | Incidents /<br>Domestic<br>Violence<br>Officers and<br>Operatives | Multicultural<br>Community<br>Liaison<br>Officers | Aboriginal<br>Community<br>Liaison<br>Officers |
|--|---|--|---|---|--|
| <b>Central Metropolitan</b>                                      |   |  |   |   |  |
| Eastern Beaches<br>PAC   | 3,312   | 9.00   | 368.00  | 1   | 1  |
| Eastern Suburbs<br>PAC   | 1,691   | 1.25   | 1,352.80  | --  | --   |
| Inner West PAC   | 1,945   | 5.00   | 389.00  | --  | 1  |
| Kings Cross PAC  | 653   | 1.00   | 653.00  | --  | --   |
| Leichhardt PAC   | 1,840   | 2.00   | 920.00  | --  | 1  |
| South Sydney PAC   | 3,322   | 5.50   | 604.00  | --  | 1  |
| St George PAC  | 5,139   | 10.00  | 513.90  | 2   | --   |
| Surry Hills PAC  | 587   | 1.00   | 587.00  | --  | --   |
| Sutherland Shire<br>PAC  | 4,880   | 10.00  | 488.00  | --  | --   |
| Sydney City PAC  | 1,542   | 4.00   | 385.50  | 1   | --   |
| <b>North West Metropolitan</b>                                   |   |  |   |   |  |
| Blacktown PAC  | 5,370   | 7.00   | 767.14  | 1   | --   |
| Blue Mountains<br>PAC  | 1,673   | 2.00   | 836.50  | --  | --   |
| Hawkesbury PAC   | 2,176   | 2.00   | 1,088.00  | --  | --   |
| Ku-ring-gai PAC  | 2,371   | 1.50   | 1,580.67  | 1   | --   |
| Mt Druitt PAC  | 7,342   | 6.00   | 1,223.67  | 1   | 2  |
| Nepean PAC   | 10,670  | 14.00  | 762.14  | 1   | --   |
| North Shore PAC  | 2,508   | 7.00   | 358.29  | 1   | --   |
| Northern Beaches<br>PAC  | 3,318   | 6.00   | 553.00  | --  | --   |
| Parramatta PAC   | 2,321   | 2.00   | 1,160.50  | 2   | --   |
| Riverstone PAC   | 3,700   | 3.00   | 1,233.33  | --  | --   |
| Ryde PAC   | 3,228   | 4.00   | 807.00  | 1   | --   |
| The Hills PAC  | 3,024   | 3.00   | 1,008.00  | --  | --   |



| Police Area<br>Command or<br>Police District<br>(local commands) | All domestic<br>violence<br>incidents,<br>2020–21 | Domestic<br>Violence<br>Officers and<br>Operatives | Incidents /<br>Domestic<br>Violence<br>Officers and<br>Operatives | Multicultural<br>Community<br>Liaison<br>Officers | Aboriginal<br>Community<br>Liaison<br>Officers |
|--|---|--|---|---|--|
| <b>Northern</b>  |   |  |   |   |  |
| Brisbane Water PD  | 5,454   | 4.00   | 1,363.50  | --  | --   |
| Coffs/clarence PD  | 6,179   | 3.00   | 2,059.67  | 1   | 2  |
| Hunter Valley PD   | 5,072   | 5.00   | 1,014.40  | --  | --   |
| Lake Macquarie<br>PD   | 6,517   | 5.00   | 1,303.40  | --  | 1  |
| Manning/great<br>Lakes PD  | 3,720   | 2.00   | 1,860.00  | --  | 2  |
| Mid North Coast<br>PD  | 6,785   | 2.00   | 3,392.50  | --  | 3  |
| Newcastle City PD  | 5,284   | 7.00   | 754.86  | 1   | --   |
| Port Stephens<br>Hunter PD                                       | 6,573   | 6.00   | 1,095.50  | --  | 1  |
| Richmond PD  | 4,706   | 3.00   | 1,568.67  | --  | 3  |
| Tuggerah Lakes<br>PD   | 7,874   | 8.00   | 984.25  | --  | --   |
| Tweed/Byron PD   | 3,477   | 2.00   | 1,738.50  | --  | 1  |
| <b>South West Metropolitan</b>                                   |   |  |   |   |  |
| Auburn PAC   | 2,574   | 7.00   | 367.71  | 2   | --   |
| Bankstown PAC  | 6,541   | 7.00   | 934.43  | 2   | --   |
| Burwood PAC  | 2,734   | 3.00   | 911.33  | 1   | --   |
| Camden PAC   | 3,857   | 7.00   | 551.00  | --  | --   |
| Campbelltown City<br>PAC   | 7,844   | 15.00  | 522.93  | 2   | 3  |
| Campsie PAC  | 2,814   | 3.20   | 879.38  | 2   | --   |
| Cumberland PAC   | 6,540   | 7.00   | 934.29  | 2   | --   |
| Fairfield City PAC   | 5,663   | 9.00   | 629.22  | 5   | --   |
| Liverpool City PAC   | 7,159   | 8.00   | 894.88  |   | --   |
| <b>Southern</b>  |   |  |   |   |  |
| Lake Illawarra PD  | 6,146   | 2.00   | 3,073.00  | --  | 1  |
| Monaro PD  | 2,515   | 1.00   | 2,515.00  | --  | --   |
| Murray River PD  | 4,740   | 3.00   | 1,580.00  | --  | 2  |
| Murrumbidgee PD  | 3,560   | 3.00   | 1,186.67  | --  | 2  |
| Riverina PD  | 5,648   | 2.00   | 2,824.00  | --  | 1  |
| South Coast PD   | 6,890   | 7.00   | 984.29  | --  | 2  |
| The Hume PD  | 3,718   | 3.00   | 1,239.33  | --  | --   |
| Wollongong PD  | 3,366   | 4.00   | 841.50  | 1   | --   |

| Police Area<br>Command or<br>Police District<br>(local commands) | All domestic<br>violence<br>incidents,<br>2020–21 | Domestic<br>Violence<br>Officers and<br>Operatives | Incidents /<br>Domestic<br>Violence<br>Officers and<br>Operatives | Multicultural<br>Community<br>Liaison<br>Officers | Aboriginal<br>Community<br>Liaison<br>Officers |
|--|---|--|---|---|--|
| <b>Western</b>   |   |  |   |   |  |
| Barrier PD   | 3,413   | 2.00   | 1,706.50  | --  | 6  |
| Central North PD   | 3,262   | 5.00   | 652.40  | --  | 6  |
| Central West PD  | 4,851   | 4.00   | 1,212.75  | --  | 2  |
| Chifley PD   | 4,585   | 3.00   | 1,528.33  | --  | 1  |
| New England PD   | 5,578   | 6.00   | 929.67  | --  | 5  |
| Orana  |   |  |   |   |  |
| Mid-Western PD   | 8,237   | 6.00   | 1,372.83  | --  | 4  |
| Oxley PD   | 5,940   | 4.00   | 1,485.00  | --  | 1  |

\* Domestic Violence Officer and Operative numbers are from the stocktake performed in November 2020.

\*\* Full Time Equivalent numbers for Multicultural and Aboriginal Community Liaison Officers are authorised positions, not actual numbers, at June 2021.

Source: Audit Office analysis of NSW Police Force data.

## Appendix three – Key NSW Police Force initiatives, July 2016–present

The NSW Police Force has implemented a range of initiatives aimed at improving domestic violence policing over the last several years. The review period for this audit is from July 2016 and the table following highlights some key initiatives corresponding to areas of the NSW Police Force corporate plan domains. Some key initiatives developed prior to the period of review include:

- In 2014, the NSW Police Force commenced the operation of domestic violence clinics to reduce the apprehension that domestic violence victim-survivors feel when attending court.
- In 2015, the NSW Police Force introduced Domestic Violence Evidence in Chief, an audio or video statement taken shortly after the commission of a domestic violence offence that is admissible in court as all or part of the victim's evidence in chief at court.
- From 2015, the NSW Police Force has participated in the government's Safer Pathway reform including administering the Domestic Violence Safety Assessment Tool and chairing Safety Action Meetings.

### Exhibit 12: Key NSW Police Force initiatives, July 2016 to present

| Prevention  | Disruption  |
|---|---|
| <p>Over the review period, the NSW Police Force funded several <b>community service announcement campaigns</b> to support prevention of domestic and family violence.</p> <p>In March 2020, the Domestic and Family Violence team prepared a <b>COVID action plan</b> to address the anticipated increases in volume or intensity of domestic and family violence. Key components of the plan included greatly increased Apprehended Domestic Violence Order compliance checks. The NSW Police Force co-chaired the Domestic Violence and COVID-19 multi-agency group to enhance coordination with other government agencies in response to COVID-19.</p> | <p>Over the period of review the NSW Police Force designed and implemented a structured approach to perpetrator accountability. There are now three tiers to this approach:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. <b>Domestic Violence High Risk Offender Teams:</b> introduced in August 2016 and state-wide by 2019. High Risk Offender Teams operate at region level. High risk offenders are referred to them by local commands in the region to manage. NSW Police Force have found that the High Risk Offender Teams are often able to provide enhanced victim support as well as perpetrator accountability.</li><li>2. <b>Suspect Target Management Plan:</b> version two commenced in February 2016. Local commands are expected to maintain a certain number of Suspect Target Management Plans. Version three of the Suspect Target Management Plan program commenced in November 2020 and includes enhanced options to refer targets to services as well as surveillance measures. The NSW Police Force is piloting an iteration of STMPIII focused on domestic violence offending.</li><li>3. <b>Apprehended Domestic Violence Order Compliance Checks:</b> state-wide commenced in May 2017. All local commands are expected to incorporate a regime of enhanced Apprehended Domestic Violence Order Compliance Checks into daily taskings to improve offender accountability.</li></ol> |

| Prevention   | Disruption   |
|--|--|
| <p>The NSW Police Force changed its practice around <b>default Apprehended Domestic Violence Order lengths</b>. Apprehended Domestic Violence Order lengths sought by police are influential in determining final orders and in flagging the seriousness of the underlying concern to police and offenders. In 2018, the default was increased to two years for persons without domestic violence history, and five years otherwise.</p> <p>Formation of <b>domestic violence teams at local commands</b> encouraged from May 2017. Some commands operate with this model.</p> | <p>The NSW Police Force reviewed <b>training</b> packages at entry level and for domestic violence officers and multicultural community liaison officers.</p> <p>In 2018, the NSW Police Force conducted a pilot aimed at enhancing officer's <b>social responses to victims to improve service and quality of evidence gathered</b>. While favourably reviewed, the pilot has not been incorporated into mainstream training to date.</p> |

Source: Audit Office analysis of NSW Police Force data.

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# Appendix four – About the audit

## Audit objective

To assess the effectiveness of the NSW Police Force in responding to domestic and family violence; and supporting victim-survivors.

## Audit criteria

We addressed the audit objective by answering the following questions:

1. Does the NSW Police Force effectively conduct capability planning for responding to domestic and family violence and support victim-survivors?
2. Has NSW Police Force effectively resourced its approach to respond to domestic and family violence and support victim-survivors with the required capability?
3. Is the effectiveness of domestic and family violence policing and NSW Police Force support to victim-survivors improving over time?

## Audit scope and focus

In assessing the criteria, we checked the following aspects:

1. workforce planning
2. recruitment, training and development
3. other supports for officers responding to domestic and family violence
4. reporting and accountability
5. compliance activities
6. complaints and other feedback on service.

The audit examined the period from 2016 to 2021.

## Audit exclusions

The audit did not:

- include a detailed inspection of misconduct or other complaints
- include a detailed inspection of the response to sexual assault separate from the domestic and family violence response.

## Audit approach

Our procedures included:

1. interviewing:
  - a) relevant NSW Police Force staff
  - b) key government and non-government stakeholders
2. examining:
  - a) relevant documents
  - b) research into relevant practices in other jurisdictions
3. analysing:
  - a) workforce data
  - b) police administrative data.

The audit approach was complemented by quality assurance processes within the Audit Office to ensure compliance with professional standards.

## **Audit methodology**

Our performance audit methodology is designed to satisfy Australian Audit Standard ASAE 3500 'Performance Engagements' and other professional standards. The standards require the audit team to comply with relevant ethical requirements and plan and perform the audit to obtain reasonable assurance and draw a conclusion on the audit objective. Our processes have also been designed to comply with requirements specified in the *Government Sector Audit Act 1983* and the *Local Government Act 1993*.

## **Acknowledgements**

We gratefully acknowledge the co-operation and assistance provided by the NSW Police Force and the many community stakeholder groups we spoke with about this topic.

## **Audit cost**

Including staff costs, travel and overheads, the estimated cost of the audit is \$749,000.

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# Appendix five – Performance auditing

## What are performance audits?

Performance audits determine whether State or local government entities carry out their activities effectively, and do so economically and efficiently and in compliance with all relevant laws.

The activities examined by a performance audit may include a government program, all or part of an audited entity, or more than one entity. They can also consider particular issues which affect the whole public sector and/or the whole local government sector. They cannot question the merits of government policy objectives.

The Auditor-General's mandate to undertake performance audits is set out in section 38B of the *Government Sector Audit Act 1983* for State government entities, and in section 421B of the *Local Government Act 1993* for local government entities.

## Why do we conduct performance audits?

Performance audits provide independent assurance to the NSW Parliament and the public.

Through their recommendations, performance audits seek to improve the value for money the community receives from government services.

Performance audits are selected at the discretion of the Auditor-General who seeks input from parliamentarians, State and local government entities, other interested stakeholders and Audit Office research.

## How are performance audits selected?

When selecting and scoping topics, we aim to choose topics that reflect the interests of Parliament in holding the government to account. Performance audits are selected at the discretion of the Auditor-General based on our own research, suggestions from the public, and consultation with parliamentarians, agency heads and key government stakeholders. Our three-year performance audit program is published on the website and is reviewed annually to ensure it continues to address significant issues of interest to Parliament, aligns with government priorities, and reflects contemporary thinking on public sector management. Our program is sufficiently flexible to allow us to respond readily to any emerging issues.

## What happens during the phases of a performance audit?

Performance audits have three key phases: planning, fieldwork and report writing.

During the planning phase, the audit team develops an understanding of the audit topic and responsible entities and defines the objective and scope of the audit.

The planning phase also identifies the audit criteria. These are standards of performance against which the audited entity, program or activities are assessed. Criteria may be based on relevant legislation, internal policies and procedures, industry standards, best practice, government targets, benchmarks or published guidelines.

At the completion of fieldwork, the audit team meets with management representatives to discuss all significant matters arising out of the audit. Following this, a draft performance audit report is prepared.



The audit team then meets with management representatives to check that facts presented in the draft report are accurate and to seek input in developing practical recommendations on areas of improvement.

A final report is then provided to the head of the audited entity who is invited to formally respond to the report. The report presented to the NSW Parliament includes any response from the head of the audited entity. The relevant minister and the Treasurer are also provided with a copy of the final report. In performance audits that involve multiple entities, there may be responses from more than one audited entity or from a nominated coordinating entity.

## **Who checks to see if recommendations have been implemented?**

After the report is presented to the NSW Parliament, it is usual for the entity's Audit and Risk Committee / Audit Risk and Improvement Committee to monitor progress with the implementation of recommendations.

In addition, it is the practice of Parliament's Public Accounts Committee to conduct reviews or hold inquiries into matters raised in performance audit reports. The reviews and inquiries are usually held 12 months after the report received by the NSW Parliament. These reports are available on the NSW Parliament website.

## **Who audits the auditors?**

Our performance audits are subject to internal and external quality reviews against relevant Australian standards.

The Public Accounts Committee appoints an independent reviewer to report on compliance with auditing practices and standards every four years. The reviewer's report is presented to the NSW Parliament and available on its website.

Periodic peer reviews by other Audit Offices test our activities against relevant standards and better practice.

Each audit is subject to internal review prior to its release.

## **Who pays for performance audits?**

No fee is charged to entities for performance audits. Our performance audit services are funded by the NSW Parliament.

## **Further information and copies of reports**

For further information, including copies of performance audit reports and a list of audits currently in-progress, please see our website [www.audit.nsw.gov.au](http://www.audit.nsw.gov.au) or contact us on 9275 7100.

## OUR VISION

Our insights inform and challenge government to improve outcomes for citizens.

## OUR PURPOSE

To help Parliament hold government accountable for its use of public resources.

## OUR VALUES

Pride in purpose  
Curious and open-minded  
Valuing people  
Contagious integrity  
Courage (even when it's uncomfortable)

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