

Coercive control law a step closer

COERCIVE control is one step closer to being criminalised with the NSW Government taking the significant step of releasing a draft bill for public comment ahead of introduction to Parliament.

Coercive control is a form of domestic abuse that involves patterns of behaviour which have the cumulative effect of denying victim-survivors their autonomy and independence. This abuse can involve physical, sexual, psychological or financial abuse.

Member for Cootamundra Steph Cooke said the NSW Government is consulting on a public exposure draft bill to outlaw coercive control in intimate partner relationships, as part of its ongoing response to the Parliamentary Joint Select Committee on Coercive Control.

"It's important that people have their say on these landmark reforms," Ms Cooke said.

"Coercive control is complex, is insidious and causes untold harm for its victims."

Attorney General Mark Speakman said the draft Crimes Legislation Amendment (Coercive Control) Bill 2022 would provide further protections for victim-survivors of domestic and family violence.

"Creating a stand-alone offence will strengthen our criminal justice system's responses to abuse, but consultation is critical to ensure these reforms only capture very serious incidences of abuse, avoid overreach and do not unintentionally endanger those in our community we are seeking to help," Mr Speakman said.

"The new law will create an offence to carry out repeated abusive behaviours to a current or former intimate partner and will carry a sentence of up to seven years in jail."

Minister for Women's Safety and Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Sexual Violence, Natalie Ward, who chaired the Joint Select Committee on Coercive Control, said the Exposure Draft Bill also introduces a definition of 'domestic abuse' to the Crimes (Domestic and Personal Violence) Act 2007.

"These are landmark reforms that recognise that domestic abuse isn't just about physical violence, it can and very often does include physical, sexual, psychological and financial abuse to hurt and control someone," Mrs Ward said.

"These reforms are crucial to ensuring that we recognise in law a pattern of behaviour which is identified as a precursor to domestic violence deaths."

Coercive control is a significant 'red flag' for intimate partner homicide. The Domestic Violence Death Review Team (Report 2017-2019) noted that in 111 of the 112 (99%) intimate partner domestic violence homicides that occurred in NSW between 10 March 2008 and 30 June 2016 that it reviewed, the relationship was characterised by the abuser's use of coercive and controlling behaviours toward the victim.

Submissions on the Crimes Legislation Amendment (Coercive Control) Bill 2022 can be made via the NSW Government's 'Have Your Say' website at <https://www.nsw.gov.au/have-your-say>. Consultation closes 31 August 2022.

The NSW Government provided an earlier draft to restricted legal stakeholders and NSW Police to identify and address any technical legal matters, prior to releasing an exposure draft for broader consultation.

The NSW Government is well-advanced to introduce a final Bill to Parliament in Spring 2022.

Release of the exposure draft bill follows the NSW Government's announcement in June 2022 that more women and children experiencing domestic and family violence will be supported by \$69.6 million in new funding in the 2022-23 Budget, including an initial down-payment of \$0.7 million over two years to support the NSW Government's commitment to outlaw coercive control.

This builds on the NSW Government's landmark \$484.3 million investment in housing and related services as part of the COVID-19 Economic Recovery Strategy.

If you or someone you know are in immediate danger, call the Police on Triple Zero (000). For confidential advice, support and referrals, contact 1800 RESPECT on 1800 737 732.



Lynn Hegarty (President) and Margaret Poulton (Vice President) outside the Temora Can Assist office at the Temora Community Centre.

Greenslips give Temora Can Assist a helping hand

FOR cancer support network Can Assist Temora, providing support to keep local cancer patients' cars on the road is vital because of the distances travelled to access treatment. And the grassroots branch recently received a timely donation from [greenslips.com.au](https://www.greenslips.com.au) that will help the branch continue to do this.

"It's wonderful knowing a company like [greenslips.com.au](https://www.greenslips.com.au) is supporting us, a small country town," says Lynn Hegarty, who has been an executive member of Can Assist Temora since 2009. "We certainly have clients who will benefit from this assistance to pay for their green slips. Just knowing they have this financial help means they can focus on other things."

Can Assist Temora helps clients of all ages, with different types of cancer and at different stages of their cancer journey. "Our youngest client was four and the oldest in their 90s," explains Lynn. "So far this year we have five new clients but we are also assisting ongoing clients. The number varies constantly. Unfortunately, low numbers do not mean that cancer rates are dropping, but they can also mean that people are not seeking support because of pride or shyness or the belief they won't be accepted. But Can Assist is for anybody who has cancer, regardless of how much money they have, the type of cancer and the stage of their cancer journey. We're here to assist anyone with cancer."

The branch provides practical and financial support to cancer patients in Temora and surrounding townships. Travel expenses such as fuel vouchers and accommodation are among the largest expenses Can Assist Temora helps with. They also assist with pharmacy costs, cancer medication and scans, utilities, groceries and, in exceptional circumstances, car and house payments. "We've done a bit of everything including mowing the lawn, clearing the mice away during the mice plague, getting loads of wood for patients' wood fires," says Lynn.

Lynn says it's crucial for locals to have their own cars to get around. "Most people rely on their own vehicles to get to treatment. Being in the country, we don't have access to public transport, and the bus to Wagga Wagga only goes once a week. Most patients have to travel to Wagga for treatment but it depends on the type of cancer. Melanoma, for example, might mean they have to travel to Sydney for treatment for five weeks. We also have clients who go to Canberra, Melbourne, Albury, Griffith and Young," she says.

A key point of difference

What sets Can Assist apart from other charities is that all money raised locally stays in the area to help local cancer patients across the district. The branch is funded entirely by local donations, fundraising events, and corporate support such as [greenslips.com.au](https://www.greenslips.com.au), a CTP green slip insurance price comparison and information website. "Their donation is a very welcomed addition to our assistance," Lynn adds.

Each year Can Assist Temora holds a fashion parade to raise money for the branch, and also benefits from initiatives like Butts 4 Bucks (wool sale), Regency Ramblers hot rod enthusiasts' weekend and fundraiser for Can Assist, and Bikers for Boobs (breast cancer) held in October. The branch is also supported by local services and sporting clubs.

"Our town is fantastic for getting behind Can Assist and making donations; they know it all stays locally and that everyone who works for Can Assist is a volunteer. Getting through cancer without Can Assist would be so much harder for many people," says Lynn.

Stephen Treacey, founder and owner of [greenslips.com.au](https://www.greenslips.com.au) adds, "We've been partnering with Can Assist for three years now, and I've seen time and time again how important it is for someone in rural and regional NSW to have a vehicle to travel to treatment. We're

proud to support Can Assist's country NSW patients with the cost of their green slip. Can Assist's powerhouse of volunteers and unique fundraising model, with all money raised locally staying local, ensures donations make a tangible impact with those who need it most. Can Assist provides both practical and emotional support at a time when people need it."

New volunteers needed

Volunteers are the backbone of Can Assist Temora and Lynn says the branch is looking for new members, particularly younger members who can join the branch, "gain an understanding of how the branch operates" and down the track be prepared to take on an executive position. "We're looking for people with new ideas in fundraising that will benefit Can Assist and enjoyment to the community. We love to give back to the community at the same time," she says.

Lynn was inspired to volunteer with Can Assist when her neighbour was diagnosed with cancer and passed away at just 50. "Little did I know I would have breast cancer six years later - and while I didn't need Can Assist's support, I joined the branch in 2007 after my treatment. We need to get younger people interested but like with most things, you don't think about these organisations until you're a little older," she says.

Can Assist Temora is also trying to get a forum together to learn more about the cost of cancer treatments available and the help that's available. "Some people just don't know where to go; they can't see how it will all 'slot in' and how they'll get to and through their treatment. All they see is that word 'cancer'. It's so worthwhile when someone speaks to you and helps you navigate the rollercoaster," said Lynn.

For information about donating or volunteering with Can Assist Temora, contact 0429 774 966. For further information about how to support Can Assist, visit www.canassist.org.au.