

# Women's Aid briefing for Integrated Care Systems

women's aid  
until women & children are safe

Women's Aid welcomes the recent recognition of **domestic abuse as a public health priority**, as demonstrated by: the Women's Health Strategy; the duty on Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) to address the needs of victims of abuse in Joint Forward Plans; and the introduction of Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Leads within ICBs.

**We recognise the new opportunity Integrated Care Systems have to address the needs of domestic abuse survivors and want to offer our support.**

## The cost of domestic abuse

An estimated **1.7 million women** experienced domestic abuse in England and Wales in the year ending March 2022 [1].



The economic and social cost of domestic abuse across England in 2022 was just under **seventy-eight billion pounds** [2].



Domestic abuse can cause a **range of physical and mental health issues** including depression, PTSD symptoms, brain injuries, bladder and kidney infections, gastrointestinal disorders, long-term pain, miscarriage and other pregnancy complications [3]. Annually, **the cost to the NHS is estimated at over 2.3 billion pounds** [4].



## The impact of domestic abuse on mental health

Domestic abuse has a devastating impact on survivor's mental health. **In 2020-21:**

**45.6%**

of **women in refuge** services reported feeling depressed or having **suicidal thoughts** as a direct result of the domestic abuse they had experienced [5].

**54%**

of women who have experienced '**extensive physical and sexual violence**' meet the diagnostic criteria for at least **one common mental disorder** and are also **8 times** more likely to be drug dependent than women with little experience of violence and abuse [6].

Research suggests counselling, which is integrated into **specialist domestic abuse services**, is more effective than standard mental health services, as women don't face long delays and specialist services are better able to address survivors' specific needs [7]. Access to quicker, more effective support, means women are **less likely to get trapped in a cycle of poor mental health and addiction**, reducing pressure on local health systems.

Despite this, counselling, and other types of vital mental health support provided by specialist domestic abuse services, are **not recognised as a core part of their provision**, and therefore **do not receive adequate funding**.

To better address the **mental health needs** of domestic abuse survivors, **Women's Aid recommends ICSs:**



Commission **needs-led mental health support** for survivors delivered by **local, specialist domestic abuse services**.



Ensure any **Mental Health Strategy** includes actions to address the **specific mental health needs of survivors**.

## Prevention and health inequalities

Domestic abuse is highly gendered, with **women far more likely than men** to experience abuse and be seriously hurt or killed by their abuser [8].

We know that **discrimination and a lack of cultural understanding** can prevent Black and minority survivors receiving the right mental health support [10].

Women **living in poverty** are more likely to suffer **extensive** violence and abuse [9].

Our recent **Deserve to be Heard report**, which looks at the impact of abuse on survivors' mental health, highlights that **many survivors benefit from mental health support delivered by women who share their identity**. For example, support provided by **specialist 'by and for' domestic abuse services which are run by Black and minoritised women** [11].

**Tracy's Journey** illustrates the real story of Tracy, a survivor who went to her GP for help, but **failed to get the support she needed** to leave her abuser. The map shows what Tracy's journey could have looked like, if the GP Tracy visited was able to offer the right support, **saving the NHS an estimated £152,348** [12]. Tracy's experience is a real-life demonstration of how investing in survivor support helps to safeguard women and reduce costs to local health services.

To help **prevent domestic abuse and tackle women's health inequalities**, Women's Aid recommends ICSs:



Provide **mandatory, specialist, and continuous domestic abuse training** for all healthcare professionals. The training should cover how to spot the signs of domestic abuse, how it affects the mental health of survivors, and the additional challenges faced by Black and minoritised women.



**Fund evidence based domestic abuse interventions** in health settings, including IRIS in GPs, and IDVAs or other specialist advocates in acute hospital or maternity services.



Appoint a **representative from a local specialist domestic abuse service** to sit on the ICP, with priority given to 'by and for' domestic abuse services.

**If you have any questions about this briefing, please contact [policy@womensaid.org.uk](mailto:policy@womensaid.org.uk)**

1 Office for National Statistics (2022) Domestic abuse in England and Wales overview.

2 Women's Aid (2023) Investing to save: the economic case for funding specialist domestic abuse support. Bristol: Women's Aid.

3 NICE (2023) What are the consequences of domestic violence and abuse?

4 Home Office (2019) *The economic and social costs of domestic abuse*. Published online: Home Office.

5 Women's Aid. (2022) *Are you listening? 7 Pillars for a survivor-led approach to mental health support*. Bristol: Women's Aid.

6 Scott, S. and McManus, S. (DMSS Research for Agenda). (2016) Hidden Hurt, violence, abuse and disadvantage in the lives of women. Published online: Agenda.

7 Women's Aid. (2022) *Are you listening? 7 Pillars for a survivor-led approach to mental health support*. Bristol: Women's Aid.

8 Women's Aid. (2023) *Investing to save: the economic case for funding specialist domestic abuse support*. Bristol: Women's Aid.

9 Women's Aid. (2021) *Mental health and domestic abuse: A review of the literature*. Bristol: Women's Aid.

10 Women's Aid. (2021) *Mental health and domestic abuse: A review of the literature*. Bristol: Women's Aid.

11 Women's Aid. (2022) *Are you listening? 7 Pillars for a survivor-led approach to mental health support*. Bristol: Women's Aid.

12 Women's Aid. (2023) *Investing to save: the economic case for funding specialist domestic abuse support*. Bristol: Women's Aid.