

Fact Sheet – Domestic Violence in Willoughby LGA

Key insights

Domestic violence incidents in Willoughby are increasing, including:

- a. domestic Violence related assault,
- b. breach of Apprehended Violence Orders (AVO),
- c. intimidation, stalking and harassment.

Less than half of domestic violence incidents are reported to police.

Children are at greatest risk of family, domestic and sexual violence.

Police say most of their work is responding to domestic violence.

Police have established new approaches to respond to domestic violence in the form of coercive control.

Council has focused on education and awareness raising to support the community to identify and respond to domestic violence in our community.

Domestic violence incidents reported by police in the Willoughby area have increased significantly.

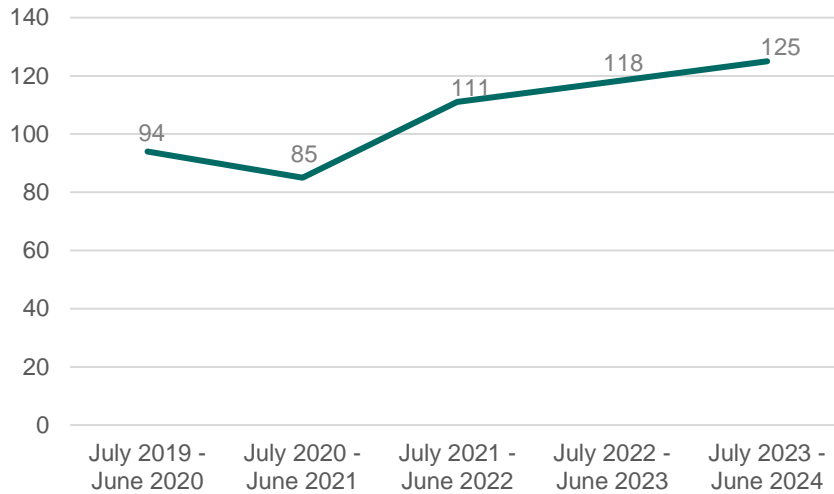
Between April 2023 and March 2024, police reported that 138 people in Willoughby LGA were victims of domestic assault. In the same period, police initiated proceedings against 72 people for assault related to domestic violence in the Willoughby LGA¹.

Police data also shows that alcohol was a factor in about one quarter of incidents of domestic violence assault and in only 14% of incidents of intimidation, stalking and harassment.

Domestic violence related assaults have been trending upward in the Willoughby crime area since 2019, as seen in Figure 1. Crime statistics for the area show an overall increase in reported incidents of 7% between 2019 and 2024. This increase is considered significant by the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (BOCSAR) who are responsible for reporting data on crime in NSW.

¹ NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, <https://bocsar.nsw.gov.au/topic-areas/domestic-violence.html>

Figure 1: Domestic violence related assaults annually in Willoughby LGA, 2019-2024



Source: NSW BOCSAR

As shown in Figure 2, there is significant change month by month in the number of incidents of domestic violence related assaults in Willoughby.

Figure 2: Domestic Violence related assault offences monthly in Willoughby LGA, April 2019-March 2024



Source: NSW BOCSAR

The incidence of Breach of Apprehended Violence Orders (AVO) has also increased. In 2024, 17% of offences against justice were for breaches of an AVO.

We know that less than half of domestic violence incidents are reported to police.

Research consistently shows that most people experiencing domestic violence do not report incidents to police. In 2020, the NSW Council of Social Service estimated that only 40% of incidents were reported to police².

This statistic underscores the high rate of underreporting in domestic violence cases, where survivors may face numerous barriers that prevent them from contacting authorities, such as

² Domestic Violence NSW, <https://www.dvnsw.org.au/resources/domestic-family-violence-statistics>

fear of reprisal or lack of support systems. The same pattern of underreporting persists in other jurisdictions across Australia, reflecting a broader issue with domestic violence disclosure.

The 2021-22 Personal Safety Survey found that there were differences in propensity to seek help, advice or support following partner violence depending on partner status and the victim's sex³:

- 1 in 2 women who had experienced physical and/or sexual violence from a current partner did not seek advice or support about the violence.
- 2 in 5 women and 2 in 5 men who had experienced physical and/or sexual violence from a previous partner did not seek advice or support about the violence.

The Survey also asked women about the most recent incidence of sexual assault by a male that occurred in the last 10 years:

- More than 2 in 5 did not seek advice or support after the most recent incident.
- 92% said that the police were not contacted.

We know that children are at greatest risk of family, domestic and sexual violence.

On the Lower North Shore, including Willoughby, children are highly vulnerable to the impacts of domestic and family violence. Specific statistics for children are limited locally, however broader NSW data shows concerning trends: a significant number of young people are exposed to domestic violence, often resulting in psychological, social, and developmental challenges.

For instance, state-level data indicates that police attend thousands of domestic violence incidents annually, where children are often present or indirectly affected. In NSW, nearly 40% of reported domestic violence incidents involve children as witnesses or secondary victims, underscoring their high risk. In Willoughby, the Lower North Shore Domestic Violence Network works with other agencies to reduce these impacts, raise awareness, and offer support to affected families.

Council has worked with the Network to produce child-specific resources such as *Bouncing Back*, a booklet designed for parents and children who have experienced family violence, and offers referral services, including the Kids Helpline, Women and Children First and Family Connect, which cater specifically to the needs of children and families impacted by domestic violence.

NSW Police have established new approaches to respond to domestic violence in the form of coercive control.

Coercive control is often a significant part of a person's experience of family and domestic violence. It is commonly used to describe a pattern of controlling behaviour used by a perpetrator to establish and maintain control over another person.

Coercive control became an offence on 1 July 2024. In an interview with ABC Stateline reported on 10 October 2024, the NSW Police Commissioner stated that more than 80 cases of coercive control were being investigated. The Commissioner said that the complexity of investigating and prosecuting coercive control offences was a job only trained detectives would be taking on. The Commissioner went on to highlight the importance of collaboration between government and non-government organisations in the response to the incidence of coercive control.

³ Australian Bureau of Statistics, Personal Safety Survey 2021-22

Council has focused on education and raising awareness to support the community to identify and respond to domestic violence in our community.

In partnership with the Lower North Shore Domestic Violence Network, Council has supported:

- Recognise, Respond and Refer workshops with a range of organisations that assist their staff to recognise and support their clients and customers who maybe victims of abuse. The workshops help staff to recognise when abuse may be occurring, respond to clients and customers who share this information and let them know what services they can refer them to for support. These workshops have been run with a number of organisations in the area including; Willoughby City library, Crows Nest Commonwealth Bank, Stanton Library, Crows Nest St Vincent de Paul and Chatswood Salvation Army.
- Public information stalls including the annual 1 Minute Silence 4 Violence, Willoughby's annual 16 days event and the Mosman Markets.
- Domestic violence resources available on the Network website that provide information on a range of subjects including children and Domestic Violence, financial abuse and counselling, Police and community resources, Coercive control checklists and youth specific resources.

Useful resources

Lower North Shore Domestic Violence Network

<https://www.northshoredomesticviolence.org.au/resources.html>

NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research

<https://bocsar.nsw.gov.au/research-evaluations/2023/bb167-summary-dfv-trends-nsw.html>

<https://data.nsw.gov.au/data/dataset/domestic-violence-statistics-for-nsw>