

# Wrapping up the family violence workshop series for energy retailers

**18 December 2018**

*Electricity and gas*

We have wrapped up a series of workshops on family violence for energy retailers.

Since August this year we've been building the capacity of the energy industry to understand family violence and exploring issues specific to the sector in responding to family violence. We've held four workshops in four months, with 27 presenters and 140 attendees. These included representatives from 19 energy retailers as well as water, debt collection, connection services, banking, insurance, telecommunications and the community sector.



Attendees at our fourth workshop

## We looked at family violence and how it relates to the energy industry

In November and December our workshops focused on the principles for safe and effective responses presented in our consultation paper. We also looked at debt practices and the financial impact of family violence, and how these issues can be reflected in our regulatory framework.

In groups we explored where the new [payment difficulty framework](#) would provide support for people experiencing family violence, and what the commission should consider in its draft and final decisions on the framework. We also heard from [Women's Information and Referral Exchange](#) about new research on women's experiences of family violence and their finances – what is it like for someone at a crisis point or in their long-term recovery from violence? How is that compounded when their partner uses debt and joint accounts to control them?

A common theme in the discussions was how to support leadership from the top in developing safe and effective responses to family violence. We explored the challenges and opportunities in securing high-level commitment to this issue in our session on putting principles into practice, including how to ensure the momentum stays strong over time.

Not long after this workshop was the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, and the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence. Senior staff at the commission, including Chairperson Dr Ron Ben-David and CEO John Hamill attended the Walk Against Family Violence at Federation Square, following a session for all commission staff by speaker, educator and family violence survivor Lisa McAdams. We were pleased to walk with many representatives from energy and water businesses who came to show their support.

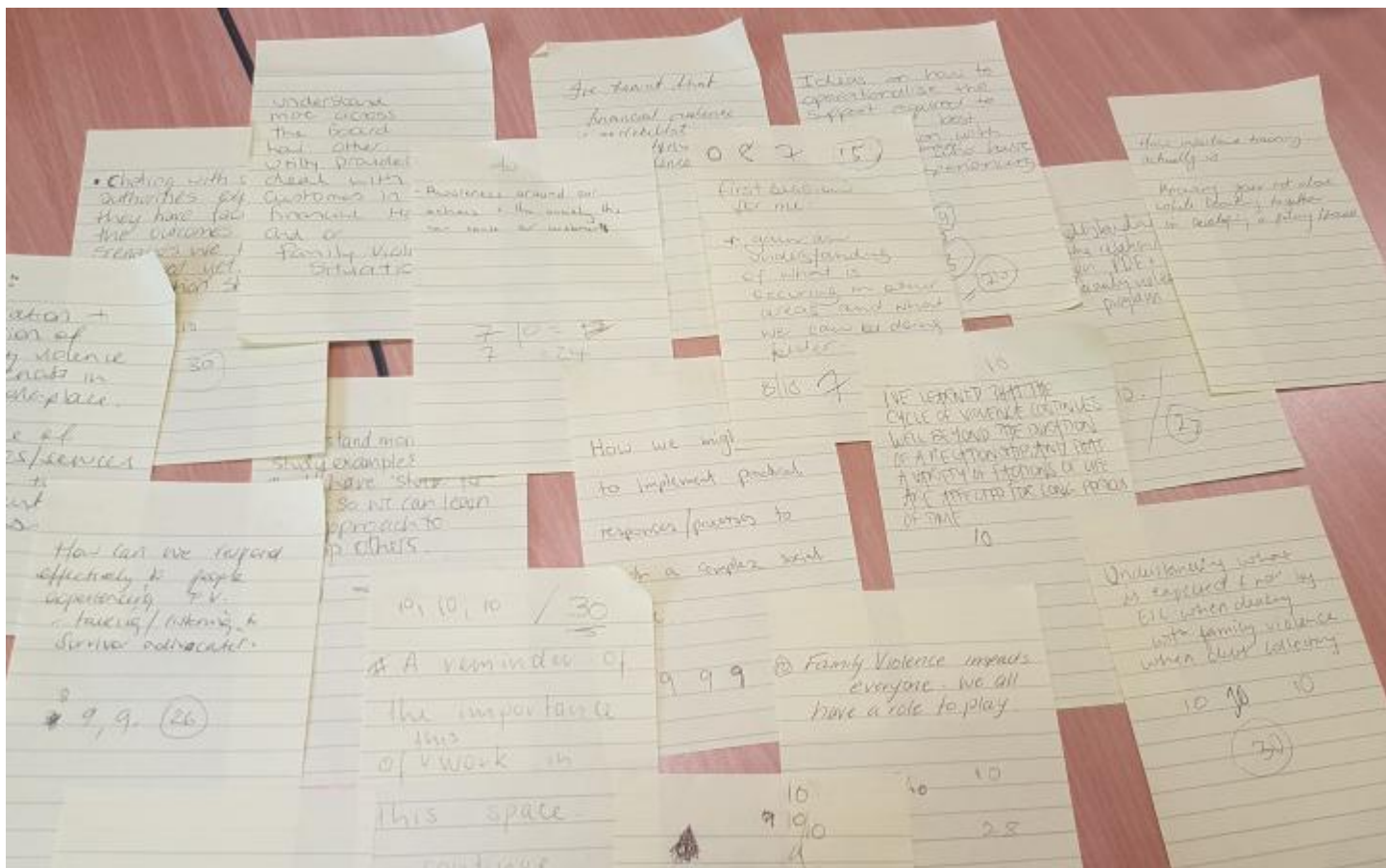


Showing leadership from the top at the Walk Against Family Violence. Photo: Paul Jeffers

# Using new methods and activities to support constructive conversations

Each workshop began with a session called 35-shuffle, where people shared their expectations for the day and lessons and voted on their peers' suggestions. Given the mix of industries in the room it was a chance for attendees to meet new faces, make connections and help us understand what people wanted to get from the session.

In our case study and group activities we asked like-sized businesses to sit together so they could work through similar challenges together. We also brought together representatives from energy and water businesses and other sectors at each table to enrich conversations and encourage attendees to share insights and lessons from their own experiences in this work.



Post-it notes from our 35-shuffle activity



In all of the workshops people listened respectfully, asked thoughtful questions and sat with uncomfortable issues. Family violence can be a confronting topic to talk about, and there was a genuine interest in the room to think about how and where change can happen.

## Stand-out sessions that challenged our thinking

Scott Mills from No To Violence presented at our third workshop on working with perpetrators of family violence. He spoke about the complexity of challenging the behaviour of, and working with men who use violence, and how gender stereotypes and assumptions lead some men to think that it's acceptable to want to control their partner. Scott answered tricky questions from the audience and gave advice about considerations businesses should make when looking at overarching and specific responses to perpetrators.



Scott Mills, No To Violence, presenting at our third workshop

We also heard from survivor advocates Sapphire and Rebeca from the Speaking Out Program at Women's Health East. They shared their reflections from their participation in the final workshop on the financial impact of family violence and answered questions on their own experience of family violence. Sapphire talked about how important it felt to be believed when she first described her circumstances to call centre staff. Rebeca said there was huge value in customer-facing staff being supported to understand what family violence is like and that it can have long-term impacts. We discussed training for offshore call centre staff as a significant issue for the industry to navigate.



Survivor advocates Sapphire and Rebeca speaking at our fourth workshop with Speaking Out Program Coordinator Ari

## What's next?

We have now received feedback on our consultation paper and will publish a draft decision early next year. The draft decision will incorporate the written feedback and insights from the workshop series.

## For general enquiries

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### [Family violence resources review 2018](#)

We are developing resources for energy retailers outlining how they can support customers experiencing economic abuse associated with family violence.

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