

22 December 2024

The Rt Hon Keir Starmer MP  
Prime Minister  
10 Downing Street  
City of Westminster  
SW1A 2AA

### **Increase Funding for Victims' Services**

Dear Prime Minister,

As third sector leaders, we welcomed your commitments as a mission-led government, to halving violence against women & girls (VAWG) in a decade, and to fundamentally resetting the government's relationship with civil society.

We're writing to you as the leaders of the leading VAWG and victim-survivors charities, to ask you to meet with us and hear our concerns about how recently announced PCC funding cuts and National Insurance increases will undermine those ambitions.

Your government has committed to halving VAWG and serious violence. In stark contrast to those aims, these cuts will have dire consequences for victims of domestic and sexual violence, as well as other forms of crime, particularly because significant funding for victims and VAWG sits outside of the ring-fenced allocation within PCC allocations.

The criminal justice system is in chaos. Faith in the police is at rock bottom and court delays have reached record levels. VAWG-related offences now account for twenty per cent of all police recorded crime. Our vital support services are needed now more than ever, so by cutting funding and raising National Insurance, this government is putting their future in danger and potentially denying a lifeline to hundreds of thousands of women and girls who have experienced gender-based violence. If these moves go ahead, we believe your mission to halve VAWG is in jeopardy.

We recognise that the Government is committed to investing in public services such as the NHS and policing, but Women's Aid Federation of England and ResPublica [research](#) has demonstrated that it is significantly more cost effective to invest in specialist services as a response to VAWG, with a £9 saving to the public purse for every £1 invested.

The reality is that between us, National Insurance increases alone are likely to cost many millions of pounds. The cost to victims of crime will be significantly greater. We, and others across the sector, will have no choice but to meet these costs through running down reserves, making redundancies, closing waiting lists, and cutting services. Victim Support estimates it faces a 7% real-terms funding cut, once unexpected costs like the upcoming rise in employers' National Insurance contributions are taken into account - effectively £3.5m, or 84 employees. Demand for support is higher than ever before with 88% of Welsh Women's Aid members reporting an increased demand for support alongside challenges in short-term and inadequate funding ([WWA State of the Sector](#)). This year, almost half (49%) of organisations surveyed for Women's Aid Federation of England's [Annual Audit](#) had been forced to run an area of their service without dedicated funding, an issue which is common across our sector and which will be exacerbated by further funding cuts. A third of Rape Crisis centre

managers and directors are expecting to issue redundancy notices before the end of the financial year, with 30% of Rape Crisis directors concerned that they will have to close down their Rape Crisis centre altogether (Rape Crisis England & Wales survey report, [The Rape Crisis Funding Crisis 2024](#)). Put simply, we are already delivering more than we are contracted to. There is no fat to trim. We will be forced to cut services and victims will suffer.

The government has repeatedly said it is protecting services for victims of domestic abuse and sexual violence, but as providers of these services, this is not the reality. National Insurance increases mean that services face cuts in real terms. We're also concerned about the impact of the public sector - but not charities - being exempt from National Insurance increases. The independence of our services is consistently cited as an important factor when it comes to survivors feeling able to trust and work with services – this is even more true for Black and minoritised survivors, and those without recourse to public funds, who face significant barriers to accessing services and simply wouldn't come forward at all, if there were no independent, specialist by-and-for services.

Current funding structures and practices leave by-and-for services disproportionately marginalised as 'one-size fits all' commissioning models do not take account of specialisms or the social value of these services. Research by the Domestic Abuse Commissioner's office (2021) found that 'by and for' organisations were five times less likely to obtain statutory funding compared to mainstream services. As a result of such structural inequality, half of all 'by and for' refuges in the UK have closed in the past decade and continue to struggle to stay afloat when Black and minoritised women need them more than ever (Imkaan, 2018). Imkaan's [Reclaiming Voice](#) report (2020) also highlighted that victim-survivors being supported by Black and minoritised 'by and for' organisations often require more intensive support for longer to holistically address their range of needs across the continuum of VAWG. The proposed PCC cuts and national insurance increases therefore are likely to exacerbate the already precarious position of specialist 'by and for' services, placing the life-saving support they provide to minoritised and marginalised women in jeopardy.

In order to mitigate for the National Insurance increases, we are asking for an uplift in our funding. Without this, survivors will not have access to the right support, to which they're entitled under the [Victims Code](#), and commissioning is also likely to be unfairly skewed towards the public sector, disadvantaging independent and specialist services (undermining competitive neutrality). This is neither ethical nor the right thing for victims. If we wait for the comprehensive spending review, it will cost twice as much to rebuild and repair the damage done to our services and the harm caused to victims and survivors.

Redundancies and the loss of staff is a further threat to the longevity of our [sector](#). Scarce and stagnant funding and grants and contracts that do not increase with inflationary rises means that we cannot afford to pay our crucial, skilled staff well. VAWG sector services are already struggling with recruitment and retention. Short-term funding cycles lead to job insecurity and mean that services struggle to retain highly specialist and dedicated staff members. At a time when so much has been invested into developing those staff and ensuring that survivors have access to the expert support they need, losing staff is disastrous.

We all want to work with Government to support you to achieve your mission, which is why we would like to meet with you so that you can hear our concerns and help us to find a way forward to ensure that all survivors who need our help are not left with nowhere to turn.

Yours sincerely

Ciara Bergman, CEO Rape Crisis England & Wales

Katie Kempen, CEO Victim Support

Sara Kirkpatrick, CEO Welsh Women's Aid

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