

Rt Hon Sajid Javid MP
Chancellor of the Exchequer
HM Treasury
1 Horse Guards Road
London
SW1A 2HQ



29 August 2019

Dear Chancellor,

Re: Public Spending Decisions and Protecting Survivors of Abuse

We write in advance of your Spending Review on Wednesday 4 September to ask you to consider the enormous difference public spending decisions can make to the lives of women and girls threatened by and living with abuse.

The harms and costs of violence against women and girls

You will be familiar with the enormous harm done to women as a consequence of domestic violence, sexual violence, and other forms of violence against women and girls, not least from your time as Home Secretary. The Home Office' Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy sets out the need for cross-government working in order to detect, prevent and support victims of abuse, making it everyone's business from police and courts to GPs, nurses, teachers, social workers and community leaders.

This year the Home Office published research on the economic and social costs of domestic abuse which estimates that £66 billion worth of harm is done every year, with very significant costs to victims and their families, as well as a staggering £14 billion in lost working time, and costs across criminal justice, health and other public services.

Public spending on police, health and schools

It is reported your priorities are to be police, health and schools. When setting out how these critical public services are to be funded going forward, we urge you to consider the enormous difference that public spending can make to ending and preventing domestic and sexual violence. We hope that when making much anticipated spending announcements you will tell leaders and commissioners in our public services that you expect spending to relate to aims set out for them in the Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy, and in particular:

Policing - It is therefore critical that every police officer has in depth and continuous training on understanding and responding to domestic and sexual violence, and that there is high level and visible leadership in relation to them. IOPC investigations continue to demonstrate significant police failures in these areas and we need a guarantee of competence and performance from police, in addition to any increase in police numbers, if women and girls are to be safe.

In the NHS - Victims of domestic and sexual violence, FGM, trafficking and sexual exploitation are much more likely to present in a healthcare setting than to the police, but currently many opportunities to help are missed. As with police, it is critical that we ensure that frontline workers in primary care and in our hospitals are trained in asking about and responding to these forms of abuse. There are excellent examples of training for GPs, and placing specialist triage workers in hospitals, but these remain voluntary and provision is patchy. New NHS funding should be accompanied by an expectation that commissioners will make a priority of staff training on responding to women who need specialist support.

In schools – We welcome the introduction of Relationships Education and Relationships and Sex Education, which is already being developed by many schools this year before its compulsory roll-out in 2020. There must be an appropriate commitment to resourcing initial teacher training and continuing professional development for these new subjects, as well as adequate provision made to enable schools to access quality support and materials.

Welfare - It is also critical that your public spending announcements in relation to the welfare system have no further unintended consequence for women, as has previously happened with tax credits and Universal Credit.

Public spending on crisis and long-term support for abuse survivors

When making your announcements next week, we urge you to consider the life-saving value of the specialist support services which women use in emergencies and for medium and long term therapeutic and practical support. These are currently falling through all the cracks when it comes to whose responsibility it is to fund them.

More survivors than ever are taking the decision to seek help, as our society's attitudes to these crimes changes, but the sustainability of our national network of refuges, outreach support, advice lines, and Rape Crisis centres is fragile. Your Government's National Statement of Expectations sets out that PCCs, local authorities and health commissioners should work together to assess need and co-commission victims' services. However, the reality on the ground is that this aspirational vision for commissioning, with no actual statutory requirement to ensure support is there, is not working. Our recent [review](#) of Police and Crime Commissioners' Plans found many do not prioritise tackling abuse, while many of our member organisations have lost their local authority funding. Health commissioners have failed to become significant commissioners of sexual violence or other community based women's support.

If women are to find these support services when they need them, we urge you to:

- specifically recognise the £66 billion costs of domestic violence when you set out your spending plans;
- say to all those who commission victims' services that you expect domestic and sexual violence to feature as specific priorities, and ensure there is a mechanism for real accountability for the spending of public money in this area;
- consider ring-fencing public spending on specialist support services at national Government level, which is an urgent need for specialist BME women's support groups

and their work supporting women with complex needs and high barriers to accessing support and justice.

We need spending plans which sustain and recognise the specialism and expertise in our women's support sector. These essential life-saving community services run by and for women, have the highest levels of self-referral, and a track record of providing quality services which women want and trust.

The Government's VAWG Strategy is approaching its 10th year and much has been achieved. If we ensure that public spending matches the aims of this strategy, we will make enormous progress in reducing, preventing and ending VAWG, so that women in all our communities can live the lives they choose not limited by the threat and reality of abuse.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sarah Green', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Sarah Green
Director, End Violence Against Women Coalition