



WESNET Inc

Women's Services Network

Australia's peak women's organisation working to eliminate domestic and family violence

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Federal Government supports WESNET safer phones for women program, Telstra donates 20,000 smartphones

Thursday, 17 March 2016 (Canberra). Today The Hon. Malcolm Turnbull, MP, Prime Minister, Senator the Hon Michaelia Cash, Minister for Women, and The Hon. Christian Porter, MP, Minister for Social Services announced funding for WESNET to strengthen its successful partnership with the Telstra *Safe Connections* program. Telstra also announced that it will donate 20,000 smart phones to the program to help WESNET provide safe phones to women who are experiencing technology abuse and need a safer phone.

WESNET is Australia's national women's peak body for domestic and family violence services. Its SafetyNet Australia project works with communities, police, technologists, and agencies to address how technology affects the safety, privacy and accessibility rights of victims of domestic violence, sexual violence and stalking.

"We are absolutely delighted to receive this funding from the Australian Government as part of its \$100 million Women's Safety Package." said Julie Oberin, WESNET's National Chair, "The funding will allow WESNET to significantly expand the program by signing up more services as distribution points for the smart phones and by training front line services staff."

WESNET has been working in partnership with Telstra since 2014 to give safe phones to women experiencing domestic violence. "We are very grateful to Telstra for donating new smart phones. This means we will be able to help up to 20,000 women experiencing domestic violence to access a safer phone", said Karen Bentley, WESNET's Senior Technology Safety Specialist, "and with the funding from Government, we will be able to provide support and training to specialist services, so they know and can recognise how technology abuse might be impacting women experiencing domestic violence."

As part of the initiative WESNET will also provide its highly regarded Technology Safety Training to frontline agencies and agencies like 1800-Respect and DV Alert, so that crisis line and training services know more about how technology abuse occurs and how to help women access a safer phone through the program.

Recent Australianⁱ and USⁱⁱ studies show that there is now an almost total overlap between domestic violence and technology abuse. Women in Australia experiencing domestic violence are now likely to also experience technology facilitated abuse such as stalking and tracking through their smart phones.

WESNET strongly believes that women shouldn't have to avoid technology to avoid abuse. "It's critical for women and girls to become tech savvy and not shy away from technology," says Julie Oberin. Women need to embrace technology and know how to use it safely to access services and resources, and importantly how to collect evidence against perpetrators".

WESNET runs the *Safety Net Australia* project: helping women experiencing domestic violence (and other forms of violence against women) to safely use technology to search for help and decrease isolation, while using technology evidence to assist police and courts to hold abusers and stalkers accountable for misusing technology. The project was founded in the USA by WESNET's sister agency, the United States National Network to End Domestic Violence (NNEDV).

WESNET thanks both the Australian Government and Telstra for this significant support for this important work.
[ENDS]

See next page for interview contact details

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Note for editors: Could you please include safety and contact information to assist Australian women under threat of technology abuse and violence. Thank you very much

“If you or someone you know is experiencing domestic violence contact 1800 RESPECT (1800 737 732) to speak with a trained counsellor from the National Sexual Assault, Domestic Violence Counselling Service”

For additional information about *Safety Net Australia*: <http://wesnet.org.au/safetynet/>

For interviews or more information contact:

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Established in 1992, the Women’s Services Network (WESNET) is the Australian national women’s peak advocacy body which works on behalf of women and children who are experiencing or have experienced domestic or family violence. With almost 350 member organisations across Australia, WESNET represents a range of organisations and individuals including women’s refuges, shelters, safe houses and information/ referral services. Since 2010, WESNET has been the contract manager and lead agency for the Australian Women Against Violence Alliance (www.awava.org.au).

*The objectives of the **Safety Net Australia** project are to:*

- *Work with communities, police, technologists, and agencies to address how technology impacts the safety, privacy and accessibility rights of victims of domestic violence, sexual violence and stalking.*
- *Educate a wide range of community agencies who work with women experiencing all forms of violence on ways to use technology strategically to help find safety and escape domestic violence, dating violence, sexual violence, stalking and abuse.*
- *Advocate for strong local, state, national and international policies that ensure the safety, privacy and rights of all victims and survivors of gender-based violence.*

*To learn more about **WESNET’s Safety Net Australia Project**, please visit: wesnet.org.au/safetynet*



The SafetyNet Australia project is based on pioneering work of the US National Network to End Domestic Violence (NNEDV). NNEDV, a nonprofit charitable organisation, is the leading voice for domestic violence victims and their advocates. NNEDV members include all 56 of the state and territorial coalitions against domestic violence, which have over 2,000 local programs. NNEDV has been a premiere national organization advancing the movement against domestic violence for over 20 years, having led efforts to pass the landmark Violence Against Women Act of 1994 and to reauthorize and strengthen countless laws and regulations to increase safety and end violence. To learn more about NNEDV, please visit www.nnedv.org.

ⁱ <http://smartsafe.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/SmartSafe-Findings-Summary.pdf>

ⁱⁱ <http://techsafety.org/blog/2014/4/29/new-survey-technology-abuse-experiences-of-survivors-and-victim-services>