

Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) Toolkit

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The Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance’s (DAHA) mission is to improve the housing sector’s response to domestic abuse through the introduction and adoption of an established set of standards and an accreditation process. DAHA is a partnership between three agencies who are leaders in innovation to address domestic abuse within housing: Standing Together, Peabody and Gentoo.

Launched in September of 2014, DAHA embeds the best practice learned and implemented by its three founding partners and has established the first accreditation for housing providers for domestic abuse.

Purpose of this toolkit

This toolkit is for housing providers and services, domestic abuse services and local commissioners. It provides an overview of the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance’s (DAHA) accreditation process and offers guidance and resources for housing professionals to plan and implement DAHA accreditation across the organisation as part of the Whole Housing Approach (WHA). Obtaining accreditation not only enhances how housing providers interact with victim/survivors, it also strengthens the local area’s coordinated community response to domestic abuse.

Background

DAHA's mission is to improve the housing sector's response to domestic abuse and one of the ways it does this is through an accreditation scheme, which offers housing providers a framework and benchmark for how they can respond effectively to domestic abuse.

DAHA is a partnership between three agencies, housing providers *Gentoo*, *Peabody* and second tier domestic abuse charity, *Standing Together*, who are leading change for cohesive policies and strategies for tackling domestic abuse and housing globally. DAHA was founded in 2014 in recognition of the important role that housing providers play in the coordinated community response to domestic abuse. A home in which someone feels safe is vital and the housing sector is ideally placed to identify, recognise and prevent domestic abuse in their properties.

Some of DAHA's key strands of work include:

- DAHA accreditation for social housing providers,
- Lobbying the government on legislation related to domestic abuse and housing,
- Conducting research alongside other national services working in housing and domestic abuse,
- Pioneering project work in the private rented sector, including national and local initiatives.

This toolkit focuses on DAHA accreditation for housing providers. See the private rented sector chapter for further information about DAHA's work in this sector.

Why should social housing be part of the response to domestic abuse?

"They listened to me and believed me. I felt validated. For me it was a once in a lifetime opportunity, if help hadn't been there, I couldn't have gone through with it. They changed my life"

A victim/survivor speaking about her housing officer

Social housing providers have been providing homes for people since the 1860s. They aim to provide affordable and secure homes as well as functioning as housing managers who are responsible for safeguarding their tenants and tackling antisocial behaviour (ASB). They also offer other services that bring them into contact with their tenants on a regular basis through estate and

tenancy management, repairs and maintenance services, and rent collection and management of arrears.

As domestic abuse is a safeguarding issue and the perpetrator's abusive behaviours are a form of ASB, housing providers have a key role in responding to this by offering support to victim/survivors and holding perpetrators to account.

On average two women are killed by their partner or ex-partner every week in England and Wales and 75% of homicides take place inside the person's home.ⁱ Housing providers can help in the prevention of further homicides by spotting the signs of domestic abuse and creating earlier intervention.

Victim/survivors living in social housing are losing their security of tenure. Research by Solace Women's Aid Solace found a 41% drop in the number of women in secure tenancies on departure from their refuge services.ⁱⁱ A more recent survey by Solace shows that 53% of the women starting their journey with a secure tenancy lost their tenancy and either: ended up in temporary accommodation; had to stay with family and friends; or became homeless.ⁱⁱⁱ This research highlights the vital role housing providers play in supporting victim/survivors to maintain their secure tenancies, and looks at other options available such as management transfers or reciprocal schemes. These alternatives are available to victim/survivors with a social housing tenancy in London who are at high risk of harm, offering them a secure tenancy via a property exchange with another local housing provider.

Barriers to safety can also stem from the legal implications of a joint tenancy: where a victim/survivor and perpetrator are on a joint tenancy agreement, both parties are classed as a single legal entity. This means that where there are rent arrears or repair payments and the perpetrator refuses to take responsibility, the victim/survivor becomes solely responsible for these payments. This in turn can result in escalating rent arrears, making it difficult for victim/survivors to leave the property and claim full housing benefit in their own name as they have outstanding payments to make.

A court order is required in order to transfer tenancy rights either from the perpetrator's sole tenancy to the victim/survivor's sole tenancy, or from a joint tenancy to the victim/survivor's sole tenancy. However, the mechanisms to acquire this court order are very limited, and they are only granted in particular circumstances. On top of this the process is uncertain, expensive and complex.

There is a need to consider what happens to the perpetrator when a victim/survivor leaves a property as many will remain in the home consequence free. Housing providers that intervene earlier with victim/survivors can help them to remain in their home when it is their choice to do so and yield costs savings related to repairs, arrears and evictions. Safe engagement with the perpetrator is also vital and requires that housing providers work in partnership with victim/survivors to offer effective interventions. The perpetrator management toolkit offers further information and guidance on how social housing providers can take action against perpetrators.

Spotting the signs

Gentoo conducted research into the cost of domestic abuse to housing providers. In 2018, they published the report 'Safe at Home: the case for a response to domestic abuse by a housing provider' in collaboration with SafeLives.^{iv} A brief summary of key findings of the key signs of domestic abuse that housing providers should look out for is given below.

Antisocial behaviour

Residents report that they feel less safe when living on the roads where there is DA

Domestic abuse is commonly labelled by housing providers as antisocial behaviour. This can include noise complaints, reports from the police and social services and victim/survivors reporting the perpetrator's behaviour. A survey of housing providers shows that 40% of tenants experiencing domestic abuse had an ASB complaint made against them.^v While domestic abuse is a form of ASB, the issue is that this label tends to position victim/survivors as part of the problem and doesn't distinguish between their support and safety needs, and the actions that need to be taken against the abuser.

Housing providers can mitigate against this risk by ensuring they have standalone domestic abuse policies and procedures, and also making sure that domestic abuse is a distinct category within their case management systems. They can also take an active role in promoting positive messages to all tenants that domestic abuse will be taken seriously, whilst simultaneously encouraging them to report concerns about themselves and their neighbours.

Rent arrears

Residents experiencing DA are 7 times more likely to be in rent arrears of more than £1000

Rent arrears and evictions are commonly associated with domestic abuse, often as a result of the perpetrator's use of economic abuse which includes restricting how victim/survivors acquire, use and maintain money and economic resources such as housing, food and transport. This in turn reduces the victim/survivor's physical safety and ability to make choices for themselves. Perpetrator tactics often include controlling all finances, stopping victim/survivors from having enough money to pay bills, withholding important financial information (like the accumulation of rent arrears) and building up debt in the victim/survivor's name. The same survey that identified high levels of ASB complaints against people experiencing domestic abuse also found that 63% of tenants experiencing domestic abuse had rent arrears and were at the Notice of Seeking Possession stage.^{vi}

Housing providers can mitigate this risk by working with their collections and income teams to ensure they are trained; by developing procedures for better detection of domestic abuse when rent arrears are first identified; including how and when notice letters are sent to tenants; and by enhancing their case management systems to include a flag for domestic abuse.

Repairs

There are high levels of property damage in homes where there is domestic abuse

Another form of economic abuse includes when perpetrators cause damage to the property, such as destroying items in the house. This then comes to the attention of the housing provider's maintenance team which leads to the household having to pay for the repairs or the replacement costs. Often the onus of this will fall on the survivor. Gentoo found that repairs flagged as being potentially due to domestic abuse accounted for 13% of all jobs or 21% of all repair costs, accounting for £8.4 million per year.

Repairs related to domestic that Gentoo identified include:

Category	Job description
Damage to property	Secure door after police concern for customer
	Board up bedroom window on first floor as the result of criminal damage
	Board up sitting room window after brick through window
	Kitchen repair after criminal damage
	Secure side window smashed
	Broken window, criminal damage
Access to property	There were 13 evictions at households with domestic abuse
	Force entry, domestic abuse concern
	Gain access for police concern of tenant
Security	Lock change requested, keys stolen (police log number)
	Joiner to attend change of lock on front door. Police and Wearside Women In Need at the property
	Secure front door after attempted break in

Evictions

Void properties where domestic abuse occurred are 6 times more expensive to prepare for re-letting.

ASB, rent arrears and damage to a property are all reasons why a housing provider may seek to evict tenants. Gentoo’s research found that the costs associated with evicting tenants (who may be hidden victim/survivors of domestic abuse) and re-letting the property were up to £5,700 per eviction. Intervening at the earliest stage possible can help prevent situations like this escalating to eviction proceedings, ultimately creating long term money savings for the housing provider and preserving life in the most serious of cases.

Outline of the model

DAHA's principles

DAHA's key principles are at the core of the accreditation standards. Below are the principles that housing providers are expected to adhere to as part of the accreditation process:

- Non-judgement: Creating an enabling environment where victim/survivors know they will be listened to. Housing providers can achieve this by allowing victim/survivors to disclose abuse without judgment, and by reassuring them that they will be believed, listened to and heard.
- Being person-centred: How the work is done is as important as what is done. Housing providers will work with empathy, integrity and transparency. Housing providers are committed to empowering their staff to build knowledge, skills and confidence to identify and respond to domestic abuse in the most appropriate way that puts the victim/survivor at the heart of the intervention and support.
- Amplifying victim/survivor voices: Valuing feedback from people with lived experience of domestic abuse. Housing providers seek to learn from victim/survivors, both staff and tenants, and work to amplify their voices to inform our development and improvement of practice.
- Intersectionality: Domestic abuse is different for everyone and will never be all of one person's experience. Housing providers recognise that they may face barriers related to their identity such as race, gender, age, sexuality, faith, disability and marital status. Housing providers will take an intersectional approach that recognises a person's unique experience.
- Safety: Creating safe homes and communities where perpetrators are held to account for their behaviour. Housing providers recognise that the safety of those who are experiencing domestic abuse is paramount and that safe intervention starts by talking to them and asking them what they need and want to happen.
- Working towards a Coordinated Community Response (CCR): Committing to working together to end domestic abuse. Housing providers will be part of a coordinated community response to domestic abuse by working collaboratively with local agencies to share information and to meet the needs of the individuals and families experiencing domestic abuse. Housing providers will communicate and build meaningful relationships with tenants, with colleagues and with those who have specialist knowledge, experience and powers to act to support housing providers to keep victim/survivors and their families safe and well.

DAHA accreditation standards

The following eight priority areas make up the DAHA accreditation standards and when embedded, reflect that housing services and providers are on their way to delivering an effective and safe response to domestic abuse. Each priority area contains a set of criteria that providers are assessed against:

Policies & Procedures	Policies underpin responses that prioritise the safety of victim/survivors and perpetrators being held accountable for their actions. There are stand-alone domestic abuse policies and procedures which set out clearly what residents can expect from their housing provider. This includes having a domestic abuse policy for staff as part of raising awareness among all employees, offering support to those affected, and taking action against perpetrators where appropriate.
Case Management	Domestic abuse cases are managed in a safe and sensitive manner where belief and a non-judgmental attitude form the basis and philosophy of the response.
Risk Management	Individuals and families experiencing domestic abuse have a right to be safe. Identifying and addressing risk as part of a multi-agency response will enable better interventions sooner to reduce risks, meet needs and improve outcomes for individuals and families.
Inclusivity & Accessibility	The response to those living with domestic abuse is consistent and services are accessible for all regardless of their identity or protected characteristics.
Perpetrator Management	Housing providers can identify abusive behaviour and work collaboratively with partner agencies to reduce the risk the perpetrator poses to the individual and family, including taking action where it is safe to do so.
Partnership Working	No single agency or professional has a complete picture of the life of an individual or family experiencing domestic abuse but many will have insights that are crucial to their safety, as well as expertise that can help ensure good service provision and outcomes. All agencies that are involved with a case have a responsibility to consider their own organisation's response and how they work in partnership with others in that community. To effectively meet needs, including reducing the risks of further harm, a coordinated community response is necessary.
Staff Training	Staff must be supported and empowered with the knowledge, skills, resources and confidence to identify domestic abuse and respond in the most effective and appropriate way. Training is tailored and relevant to staff roles within the organisation and includes raising awareness, how to identify domestic abuse,

understanding the dynamics of domestic abuse and how to respond effectively which includes risk assessment and information sharing.

Publicity & Awareness

Domestic abuse is everyone's business. Through publicity and awareness raising, more victim/survivors will be in a position to identify and name abuse and feel empowered to disclose and seek help. Awareness raising and publicly declaring that domestic abuse is unacceptable will encourage neighbours, friends and family members to report concerns that domestic abuse is happening.

The DAHA accreditation process

The process of acquiring DAHA accreditation for the first time takes between 12 and 18 months on average. The accreditation mark is valid for three years and the housing provider can then undergo reaccreditation, which involves the same assessment process. A smooth re-accreditation process occurs when domestic abuse becomes part of housing provider's core business with continuous developments and improvements made throughout the years.

The following diagram shows the process of accreditation:

1. Sign-up

- Contact Daha to register your commitment
- Identity a DAHA lead within your organisation to support the accreditation process
- DAHA sends you guidance on getting started



2. Getting started

- A senior member notifies staff that the organisation is acquiring DAHA accreditation
- Your DAHA lead begins setting up a steering group
- Your DAHA lead reviews how well you are already performing against DAHA standards



3. In progress

- Steering group is in action
- You are making use of free DAHA workshops and online toolkit
- At approximately the third steering group meeting, you set a date for assessment



4. Assessment

- DAHA assessment includes a desktop review of resources and a site visit to meet the steering group, interview staff and perform case audits
- DAHA assessor writes the report and informs of outcome within a month of the site visit. Extensions may be issues if further evidence is required



5. Renewal

- DAHA will contact you six months prior to your 3-year accreditation expiry and set a date for renewal assessment
- You may want to convene a steering group to review performance and update your assessment evidence to capture continuous improvement

DAHA's Accreditation Assessment

The DAHA accreditation assessment is usually conducted over three days. This may be more depending on the size and structure of the organisation. The assessment includes the following:

- A desktop review of documents developed and created throughout the process related to domestic abuse,
- A two day site visit including meeting with the domestic abuse steering group, interviews with a range of staff from across the organisation, and case audits for all case management systems in use.

A final assessment report is returned within 4 weeks of the assessment date with feedback and outcome of the assessment.

Planning and delivery

Implementing the standards most effectively takes time and requires the collective effort of a range of staff from across the organisation. To help housing providers implement the standards, DAHA provides a framework and resources for getting started and for embedding and delivering the work.

The resources for getting started are designed to help housing providers map and review their existing response and identify gaps and areas for improvement.

Guidance and templates are offered on each priority area that reflect best practice and keep the safety of victim/survivors at the forefront.

DAHA has also created a change tracker to help providers monitor whether the implementation of the standards is producing the intended positive changes for victim/survivors, staff and the organisation. This includes monitoring the number of victim/survivors that the organisation supports each year, with the recognition that an increase in this number is a good sign that the organisation is helping to reach victim/survivors earlier.

Planning and preparing for accreditation

Identify DAHA leads

Housing providers will need to identify a senior DAHA lead to coordinate and oversee the accreditation process. A sample job description is provided in the resources section of this toolkit.

The lead will need to be senior enough to sign off processes, authorise funding and communicate this with rest of the organisation

The lead's responsibilities may include but are not limited to:

- Acting as a key point of contact between DAHA and their organisation;
- Mapping current responses and evaluating how their organisation is performing against each priority area;
- Carrying out interviews with staff, case audits and seeking customer satisfaction feedback;
- Speaking and working with the local DA services and partnerships to get an idea of how victim/survivors are experiencing the service;
- Planning and preparing for a DAHA steering group and ensuring the actions that come out of this are completed satisfactorily and to deadline;
- Completing the DAHA assessment spreadsheet in preparation for the site visit;
- Organising the DAHA assessment.

DAHA Steering Group

DAHA recommends setting up a steering group to generate cross-organisational support for the accreditation process. This can include extending memberships to external partner agencies in order to improve collaborative working. At least one representative should be assigned to each of the priority areas to help spread the workload and cascade new practice across the service. Some priority areas may benefit from having multiple representatives working together.

It is estimated that contribution from the representatives will take on average 2 days per month, and that the meeting frequency should be every 4 to 6 weeks.

DAHA suggests the following membership for the steering group:

- Neighbourhoods/ Resident Services,
- Specialist Community Safety or ASB teams,
- Domestic abuse lead (if in place already),
- Safeguarding,
- Homeless teams,
- Lettings and Rehousing,
- Estates services,
- Asset Management / Maintenance or Repairs,
- Collections/ Rent/ Income team,
- Legal services,
- Tenancy fraud,
- Welfare benefits or financial inclusion,
- Supported Housing,
- Communications,
- Policy,
- Learning and Development,
- Warden schemes,
- Health and Safety.

Implementation

DAHA Online Toolkit

When an organisation registers for DAHA accreditation, they will be able to access a free online toolkit on the DAHA website. This offers practical materials, templates and guidance to support them during the process, and also allows providers to upload documents as evidence towards their accreditation assessment.

The toolkit can be found [here](#).

Support from a Development Manager

When a housing provider signs up for DAHA accreditation they will be allocated a dedicated Development Manager specific to their area. The Development Manager will send all resources and provide support and guidance when required.

The Development Manager should be notified about the Steering Group meetings and should be sent minutes to track progress. Capacity does not allow them to attend all meetings in person. However, they may be able to call into meetings if given notice.

When the housing provider is ready for assessment they should give two months' notice to their Development Manager who will then schedule in the assessment.

DAHA workshops

DAHA deliver free workshops across England and Wales that focus on one priority area and enable housing staff to reflect on what a safe and effective response to domestic abuse looks like within a housing context. The workshops are designed for housing providers who are acquiring accreditation however organisations who are not undertaking DAHA accreditation are welcome to attend. Organisations that are interested in or are working through DAHA accreditation can host DAHA workshops at their offices, subject to the location and organisation being covered by DAHA's funding.

Sustainability and continuous improvements

Based on DAHA's work with accredited providers to date, here are the changes that housing providers can expect to see as they begin to implement the accreditation standards:

- ✓ Helping to identify victim/survivors earlier as indicated by an increase in cases supported every year;
- ✓ Improving information sharing practices and joined up working with other local services involved in the coordinated community response to domestic abuse. This includes local specialist domestic abuse services as well as those signed up to the Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARAC);
- ✓ Improving customer satisfaction;
- ✓ Increasing staff confidence to ask about and respond to domestic abuse, resulting in higher staff job satisfaction;
- ✓ Staff experiencing domestic abuse reporting they feel better supported;
- ✓ Money savings relating to a reduction in domestic abuse related repairs, arrears and evictions.

Following accreditation, it is important that the work does not stop. Ideally the DAHA lead becomes a Domestic Abuse Lead for the organisation and is able to support ongoing work and continuous improvement.

Housing providers are encouraged to track and monitor the following changes on an annual basis to gauge improvements in their response to domestic abuse:

- Number of staff with domestic abuse training
- Number of tenant/service user domestic abuse disclosures over a given period
- Number of staff domestic abuse disclosures over a given period
- Number of tenant/service user referrals to other support services and to the MARAC over a given period
- Number of tenant/service user referrals to specialist domestic abuse services over a given period
- Number of perpetrators against whom action has been taken over a given period
- Number of domestic homicides and domestic homicide reviews participated in over a given period
- Number of management transfers or reciprocals over a given period
- Number of cases of Sanctuary Scheme work implemented over a given period
- Number of victim/survivors provided with financial support over a given period

DAHA accredited providers have said the following about the process and its impacts:

“Front line staff are extremely proud of our accreditation and we believe that external endorsement of our approach has set a new, higher standard that staff strive to achieve in their day to day work”

“Obtaining the DAHA accreditation helped to change the provision of services for people fleeing Domestic Abuse 100% and the culture of the service”

“Customer satisfaction is now 90% from the 30,000 households who visit the Housing Solutions service each year and this is as a result of the change in service provision following the DAHA accreditation”

“We provided tailored training to all trade supervisors and surveyors to raise awareness of domestic abuse. As a result, an operative became concerned, reported it immediately and we supported a tenant who was at high risk of homicide”

Raising awareness and mobilising housing providers through the Make a Stand pledge

CIH launched the Make A Stand campaign in June 2018 in partnership with DAHA and Women’s Aid. The pledge gives housing organisations the opportunity to sign up to make four commitments to improve their response to domestic abuse. The commitments are:

1. To put in place and embed a policy to support residents who are experiencing domestic abuse;
2. Make information about national and local domestic abuse support services available on your website and in other appropriate places so that they are easily accessible for staff, your members, customers or clients;
3. Put in place an HR policy, or amend an existing policy, to support members of staff who may be experiencing domestic abuse;
4. Appoint a champion at a senior level in your organisation to own the activity you are doing to support people experiencing domestic abuse and promote the campaign with your members, customers or clients.

Housing providers that have signed up to the pledge can carry on this work by acquiring DAHA accreditation.

Case Studies

Hull City Council contractor

As part of preparing for DAHA accreditation, the housing service provided tailored training to all trade supervisors and surveyors to raise awareness of domestic abuse. This complemented earlier safeguarding children's training that had been delivered.

As a result, an operative who attended an address to undertake a lock change became concerned about the behaviour of two men who were in the property, neither of whom were the tenant. The operative felt that the female tenant was being intimidated and reported their concerns to a supervisor when they returned to their depot. The supervisor discussed the matter immediately with the tenancy officer at the local housing office, and as a result, a MARAC referral was undertaken.

The woman was offered support to ensure her safety and the housing provider are in the process of re-housing her away from the perpetrator.

A victim/survivor's experience with believe housing, a DAHA accredited provider

Carol was only 18-years old and desperate to break away from a difficult upbringing when she met the man who was to become her husband. It was when their baby arrived that things "went pear shaped." Her husband had a difficult relationship with their child and began to be abusive towards Carol.

In August 2017 Carol and her husband moved to the North East. "Within four months things changed for the worse. He became quite extreme in some of his views. I knew I had to get away now. I began to panic. The first advice I got wasn't good. I had to go home because it was taking too long. But my neighbour persuaded me to seek help.

I went to believe housing's office the next day. I had a meltdown and said I couldn't go home, I couldn't stand it any longer...They listened to me and believed me...They changed my life.

Amanda explained the process and helped me to apply for a home, I was worried that if my husband found out it wouldn't end well. She also gave me advice with benefits, as everything was new to me. She's been in regular contact ever since, just to check in on me.

Within 12 hours I had a new home. I was crying, hugging my neighbour.

The support that was there was unbelievable. It's been an invaluable safety net. I've got a (domestic abuse) support worker from Harbour and I've discovered new groups that have been so welcoming to meet new people or just talk a little. I'm beginning to smile again. There are moments, but every day is a new day.

I'd like to give back too. If my story can help someone else to say 'I can do this' then that would be great... They need to know that there is hope. I'd like to scream from the rooftops that you don't have to live like this anymore."

Resources

SOI

Business case

DAHA toolkit

Job description for DAHA lead

References

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ⁱⁱ Solace Women's Aid (2016) *The Price of Safety: how the housing system is failing women and children fleeing domestic abuse*. Retrieved from https://www.solacewomensaid.org/sites/default/files/2018-05/Solace%20Women%27s%20Aid%20housing%20report_The%20price%20of%20safety_Mar16.pdf

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