

Information sharing in Domestic Violence Disclosure Schemes: An international comparison

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Executive Summary

This policy summary provides a comparative overview of how information is collected and shared within international versions of the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (DVDS). It examines the notable similarities and differences between these schemes.

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Key similarities include the significant role of the police, both in gathering relevant information from their systems and disclosing information (if available) primarily to those at-risk unless there are concerns regarding vulnerability.

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Key differences include what information is shared, with some areas/countries opting to share only information relating to a conviction and other areas sharing only the risk grading associated with the information. Furthermore, the involvement of other agencies other than the police differs, with some areas utilising multi-agency panels to either gather information or consider the necessity of disclosure and other areas working in a direct partnership with domestic abuse services.

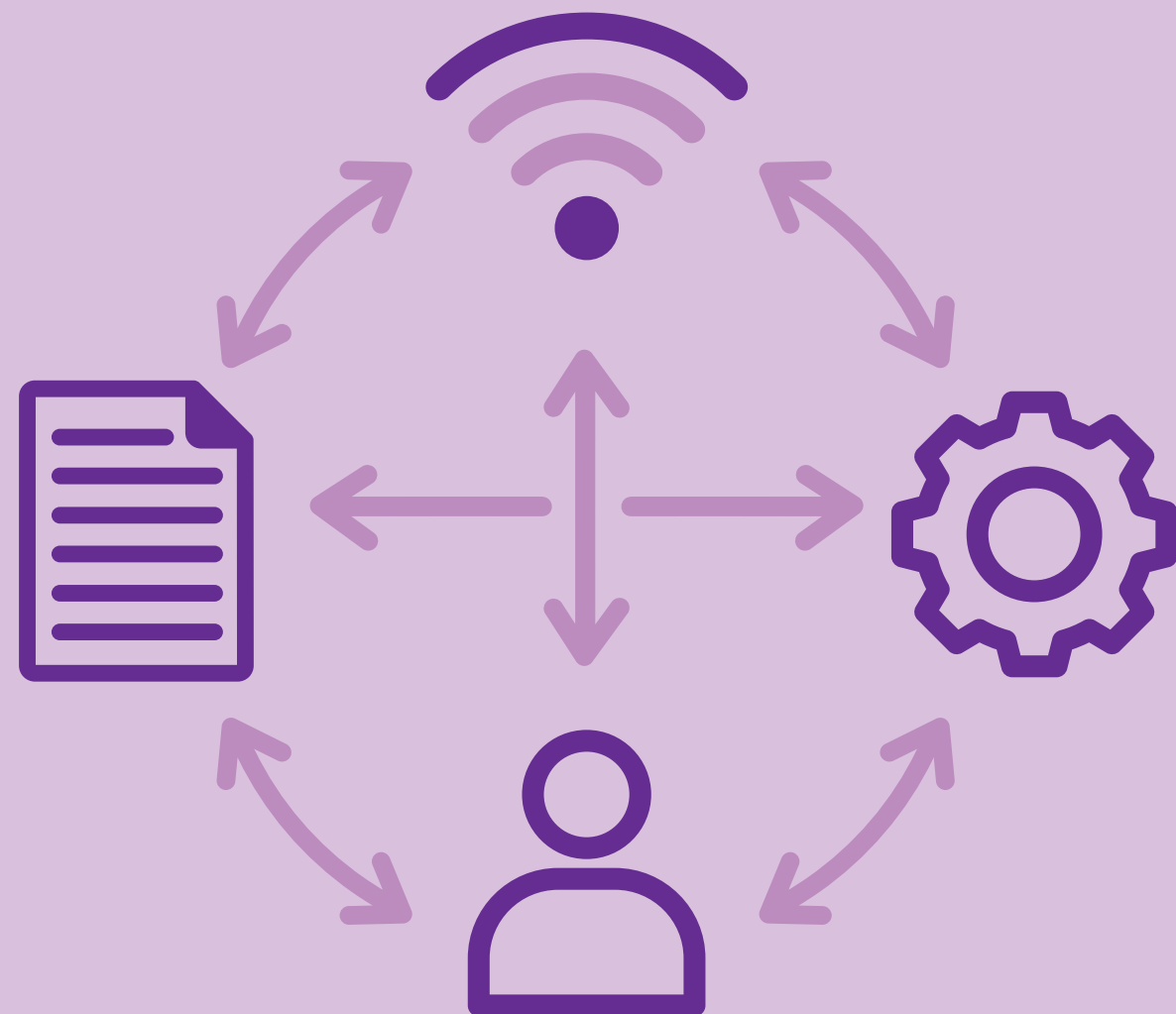
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Understanding the different ways in which the DVDS is operationalised across the globe allows a more nuanced understanding of what is working well and what challenges persist. It is hoped that this will lead to learning opportunities and sharing of practice across jurisdictions.

Introduction

This policy summary compares the information sharing arrangements under Clare's Law or the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (DVDS) across international contexts. Versions of the DVDS are currently implemented in England and Wales, Northern Ireland, Scotland, New

Zealand, Malta, South Australia and in the Canadian provinces of Alberta, Newfoundland and Labrador, Manitoba and Saskatchewan. This report only provides a summary of the publicly available policy documents related to the DVDS.



Context and background

Concerns about information sharing have long been discussed in the context of domestic abuse, with the value of timely and proactive information sharing routinely emphasised as valuable for the prevention of harm¹. However, the murder of Clare Wood in 2009 by her ex-partner George Appleton² placed a critical spotlight on how, to whom and the extent to which the police share information in the context of domestic abuse. George Appleton had a history of violence with previous convictions for the harassment of previous partners and for common assault. Furthermore, Clare had contacted the Police several times regarding domestic abuse from Appleton and a non-harassment order was in place a week before her murder. A case review undertaken in 2010 by the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC)³ highlighted failures and delays in the policing response to Clares case⁴.

Following Clare's murder, her father, Michael Brown, began a campaign⁵ to ensure that everyone has the right to ask and right to know about a

partner's history of domestic abuse and violent behaviour. This was based on the belief that should Clare and her parents have known of Appleton's history, this may have helped prevent her murder. The high-profile nature of the campaign prompted the subsequent consultation and roll-out of the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (DVDS) in 2014.

Clare's Law (2014) - England and Wales

Whilst people in England and Wales have a right to information privacy, the DVDS emphasises the importance of timely information sharing by the police to prevent victimisation and harm. The scheme is based around existing police common law powers which allow for the disclosure of personal offending history when necessary to prevent a crime. The DVDS guidance was placed on a statutory footing in 2021 to support a clearer process of information sharing for the police.

'Clare's Law' was adopted by all 43 police forces in England and Wales in 2014. The DVDS allows information about domestic

abuse or other violent and abusive offending or behaviour to be shared by the police in the context of domestic abuse both on a 'right to know' and 'right to ask' basis⁶.

In the year ending March 2020, 52% of 'right to know' and 37% of 'right to ask' applications resulted in disclosure⁷.

Other versions of the DVDS

In the United Kingdom, Scotland and Northern Ireland adopted versions of the DVDS following England and Wales. Across Europe, a version was also implemented in Malta in 2023.

Versions of the DVDS also exist in other regions across the globe. The scheme exists in the Canadian provinces of Alberta, Manitoba, Newfoundland and Labrador and Saskatchewan. New Zealand implemented the Family Violence Information Disclosure Scheme (FVIDS) in 2015. Introducing a DVDS has been discussed in various jurisdictions in Australia, however, the only territory to currently operationalise a version is South Australia.

¹ Home Office, (2022), "Domestic Abuse Act: Statutory Guidance", available from: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/62c6df068fa8f54e855dfe31/Domestic_Abuse_Act_2021_Statutory_Guidance.pdf, accessed on 28/05/2026

² Clare Wood was murdered in England by George Appleton in 2009, who was known to Greater Manchester Police for previous violent offending. George Appleton had also displayed concerning and violent behaviour towards Clare before her death. For more information: [Salford murder victim Clare Wood 'was not protected' - BBC News](https://www.bbc.com/news/health-17488958)

³ Strickland, P, 2013, "Clare's Law": The domestic violence disclosure scheme, available from: <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN06250/SN06250.pdf>

⁴ Fitz-Gibbon, K, & Walklate, S, (2017), 'The efficacy of Clare's Law in domestic violence law reform in England and Wales', British Society of Criminology, Vol. 17 (3), <https://doi.org/10.1177/1748895816671383>

⁵ Michael Brown believed that had Clare known about Appleton's previous offending history, Clare's life could have been saved. For more information about the campaign: [Clare's Law](https://www.clarelaw.org.uk/)

⁶ The guidance for the DVDS was placed on a statutory footing in 2023 following the Domestic Abuse Act (2021). For more information: [Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/domestic-violence-disclosure-scheme)

⁷ Home Office, (2024), 'Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme factsheet', available from: [Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme factsheet - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/domestic-violence-disclosure-scheme-factsheet), accessed on 28/05/2026

Comparisons

The information gathering and sharing arrangements in each version of the DVDS differs. Tables 1 and 2 provide an overview comparison.

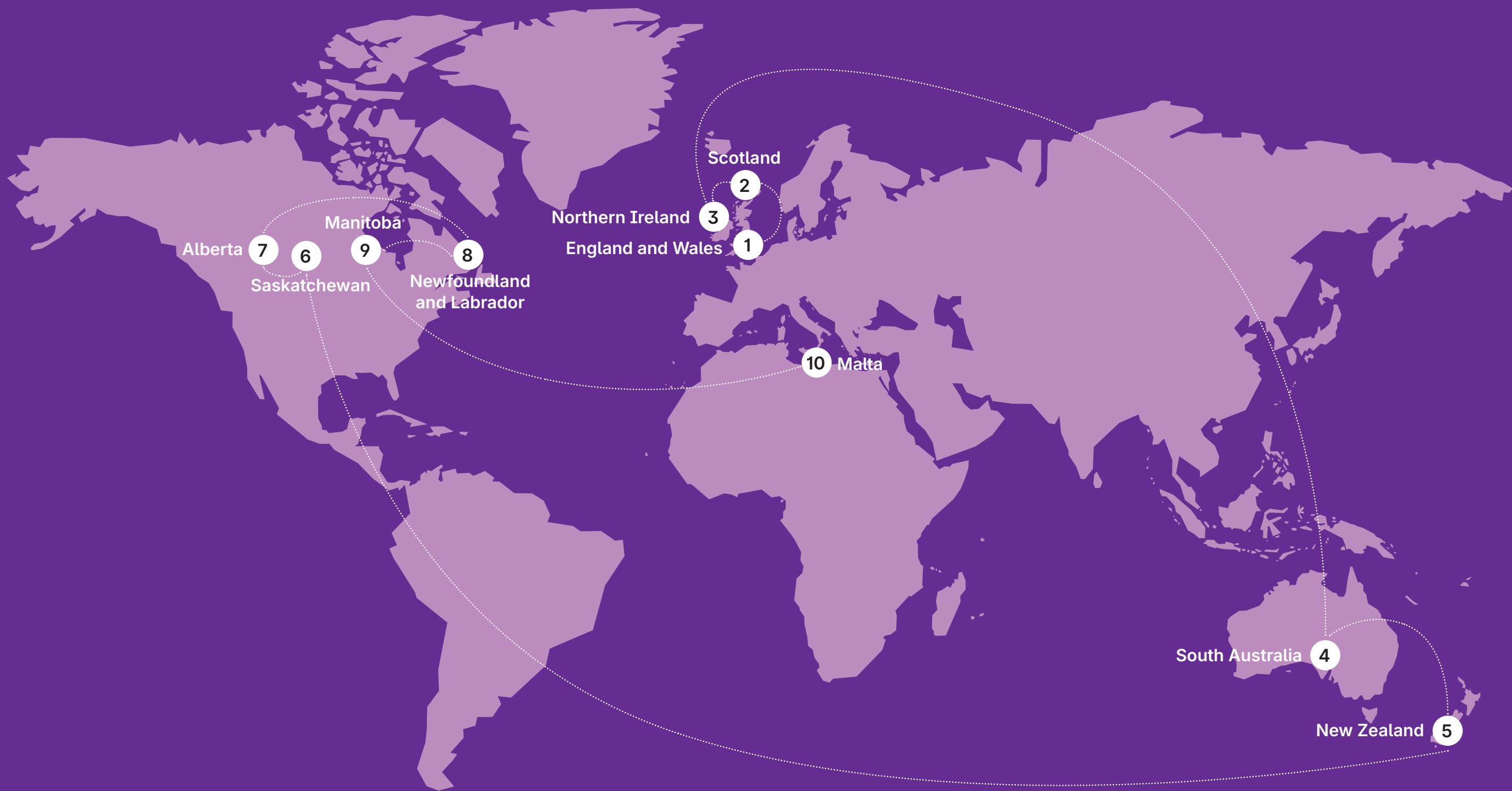


Table 1: Information gathering processes

England and Wales

Following receipt of an application, initial background checks are made on the subject and the person-at-risk (and if applicable, the third-party applicant). This is done using **local and national databases and intelligence systems**. The **police will typically meet face-to-face with the right-to-ask applicant** to discuss the application and gather further information. Should an application be progressed, the information gathered by the police should aim to build on information collected in the application, the face-to-face meeting and during initial checks. The information should demonstrate **if the subject has a history of violence and poses a risk to the person-at-risk**. When appropriate, the police may liaise with agencies such as local authorities, domestic abuse services, probation services, other forces and others to complete information gathering.

Scotland

Following receipt of an application, initial background checks are made to determine the level of risk and whether there are any ongoing crimes or concerns. **The police will meet face-to-face with a right-to-ask applicant to gather further information**. Should the application be progressed, the police will conduct research on the subject. The information checked should demonstrate **if the subject has a history of violence and poses a risk to the person-at-risk**. The police will **gather information from various sources** including MAPPA, previous police reports and other forces.

Northern Ireland

Following receipt of an application, initial background checks should be made on the subject and the person-at-risk (and if applicable, the third-party applicant). This is done using **local and national databases and intelligence systems**. The information checked should demonstrate if the subject has a **history of violence and poses a risk to the person-at-risk**. Should an application be progressed, **the details should be shared with partner agencies for further checks on the subject, the person-at risk and the applicant** (if applicable). This could include probation boards, MARAC, domestic abuse services, other police forces or other relevant agencies.

South Australia

Following receipt of an application, initial background checks are made by the police on the subject. **The domestic and family violence worker will liaise with the applicant to discuss the application**, determine the level of risk and offer support. **The police gather information using their systems** and may liaise with other police forces where necessary. The information checked should demonstrate if the subject has a **history of violence and poses a risk to the person-at-risk**.

New Zealand

Following receipt of an application, the **police will meet face-to-face with an applicant to gather further information**. After this, the police will then gather relevant information using their **intelligence systems**. The information checked should demonstrate if the subject has a **history of violence and poses a risk to the person-at-risk**.

Saskatchewan

Following receipt of an application, the **police review the application and may meet face-to-face with a right-to-ask applicant**. Subsequently, the police complete additional checks to gather relevant information on the subject, the person-at-risk and the third-party applicant (if applicable) and understand the level of risk. The checks should build on the information received in the application form and in the meeting and should consider information that may led the police to consider that they pose a risk of harm to the person-at-risk. **The police gather information using their systems and may liaise with other police forces or agencies where necessary. Only convictions that show an increased risk of interpersonal violence** will be considered in the decision to disclose.

Alberta

Following receipt of an application, **the government will review this and meet with a right-to-ask applicant. The government will then notify the police and request initial police checks** to be made on the subject, the person-at-risk and a third party (if applicable). The police gather information using their **national and local systems and databases**. Information researched will help to confirm identities of all parties, prevent malicious intent, establish context for the relationship and establish risk. **This information is forwarded back to the government for consideration.**

Newfoundland and Labrador

Following receipt of an application, the **police review the application and may meet face-to-face with a right-to-ask applicant**. Subsequently, the police complete additional checks to gather relevant information on the subject, the person-at-risk and the third-party applicant (if applicable) and understand the level of risk. **This information will be gathered from national and local police systems as well as other law enforcement agencies**. The information checked should demonstrate if the subject has a **history of violence and poses a risk to the person-at-risk**.

Manitoba

Following receipt of an application, the **government will review this and meet with a right-to-ask applicant**. If the applicant wishes to pursue a disclosure, **the government will then notify the police and request initial police checks** to be made on the subject, the person-at-risk and a third party (if applicable). The information checked should demonstrate if the subject has a **history of violence and poses a risk to the person-at-risk**. The government assess risk of interpersonal violence by **considering police information and using evidence-based risk assessment tools**.

Malta

Following receipt of an application, the **police review this and meet with a right-to-ask applicant**. Should an application be progressed, the **police request a conduct certificate of the person of concern**. **If a conviction is recorded with the certificate**, the police will determine if this is linked to domestic abuse offending by requesting further **information from the register of criminal convictions**, the Malta police force or the courts of Malta. If the conviction is related to domestic abuse offending, the police will proceed with a **domestic abuse risk warning**.

Table 2: Information sharing processes

England and Wales

Information is only **disclosed to the person-at-risk** unless there are circumstances which deem it more appropriate to share with a guardian or other agency. Information which may be disclosed includes: **offences related to domestic abuse; other violent offences; intelligence about violent or abusive offending**; information which indicates that the subject is a **serial perpetrator**; information that indicates the subject has displayed control, coercion, **stalking or harassment** over previous partners or the applicant. Spent convictions can be disclosed at the discretion of the police.

Scotland

Information is only **disclosed to the person-at-risk** unless there are circumstances which deem it more appropriate to share with a guardian or other agency. Information disclosed will show the subject has a record of **violent behaviour and offending** or a history which may show the applicant is at risk.

Northern Ireland

Information is only **disclosed to the person-at-risk** unless there are circumstances which deem it more appropriate to share with a guardian or other agency. Information which may be disclosed includes: **offences related to domestic abuse; other violent offences; intelligence about violent or abusive offending**; information which indicates that the subject is a **serial perpetrator**; information that indicates the subject has displayed **control, coercion, stalking or harassment** over previous partners or the applicant. Spent convictions can be disclosed at the discretion of the police.

South Australia

Information is only **disclosed to the person-at-risk** and the domestic and family violence worker who is supporting them during the meeting. Information that may be shared includes **convictions for domestic abuse related offences** (e.g. assault, threats, damage, stalking, sexual violence); **reports of relevant offences; current and previous intervention orders; breaches of orders**; convictions for **relevant offences committed outside of South Australia** and other relevant information. The police cannot disclose spent convictions, convictions when the subject was under the age of 18, offences which are unrelated to domestic abuse and offences which do not impact on the safety of the person-at-risk.

New Zealand

Information is only **disclosed to the person-at-risk** if they are at ‘serious risk’ of harm. The information disclosed must be **deemed relevant for the safety of the person-at-risk** and for the prevention of a crime. **Only information about convictions, behaviour that led to a conviction or information relating to violent behaviour can be communicated within a disclosure.** This means non-violent behaviour, such as **coercive control or verbal abuse is not included.** Furthermore, this information must not be available elsewhere (for example online).

Saskatchewan

Information is only **disclosed to the person-at-risk** unless there are circumstances which deem it more appropriate to share with a guardian or other agency. The **details of convictions will not be shared** with the person-at-risk but rather the person-at-risk will be **provided the risk grading** which will indicate the severity of risk.

Alberta

Information is **only disclosed to the person-at-risk; however, additional people can attend the disclosure meeting** at the discretion of the police. **A risk and context statement will be provided** in the disclosure meeting; however, the **details of convictions will not be shared** with the person-at-risk. The person-at-risk will be provided the **risk grading** which will indicate the severity of risk.

Newfoundland and Labrador

Information is shared with the **person-at-risk, and a support person can be present** in the disclosure meeting if requested. Information disclosed would include the **level of risk and some contextual information but not usually specific details about convictions**, criminal history or personal history unless that is already publicly available information. In cases of **medium and high risk, the police may disclose details about convictions if this is publicly available.**

Manitoba

Information is only **disclosed to the person-at-risk**; however, they can share this information with a lawyer, a health professional, a parent or guardian and a counselling service. **Information shared is limited to what is necessary to communicate the risk.** This may include: a clear listing or timeframe of convictions for offences that constitute intimate partner violence or relevant offences, a clear summary of the risk which may include information about convictions or other conduct of the subject.

Malta

Information is only **disclosed to the person-at-risk**, unless they are vulnerable in which circumstance this may also be done in the presence of the applicant or a third-party support service. When a disclosure is made, it should be communicated to the applicant that this is a **to a domestic violence conviction registered in the persons conduct**, and information should be provided about support services. The police will not divulge more information than this as deemed necessary.

Discussion



The process of information gathering

For all the schemes listed, the police take a lead role in gathering relevant information. Whilst in Manitoba and Alberta, checks are requested by members of the DVDS team employed by the provincial government, the police hold responsibility for gathering relevant information. To conduct sufficient background checks the police utilise both local and national systems to collect information on the subject. The information is therefore primarily related to convictions, offences or behaviour that is related to criminal offending. In some countries or jurisdictions, there is also the possibility of the police gathering information from other agencies. For

example, in Scotland and Northern Ireland, following the progression of an application, details are shared with existing multi-agency arrangements such as Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) or Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARAC).

The assessment of information

Once information has been gathered, in most jurisdictions it is then the responsibility of the police to decide whether the information warrants the necessity for a disclosure. In some places, a local decision-making forum or multi-agency panel may support the police to make this decision. For example, in Scotland, Northern Ireland

and Saskatchewan the case/application should be discussed with the panel. In England and Wales, this process is advised but not mandatory. In South Australia, the case is discussed with a domestic and family violence worker who supports the police to make the disclosure.

In the Canadian provinces there is an emphasis on risk and risk assessing any information available following the information gathering phase. This is either done by the police or by a risk assessor employed by the provincial government, as is the case in Manitoba and Alberta. The risk assessment of this information subsequently informs what information is shared with the person-at-risk.

What information is shared

What information is disclosed to a person-at-risk differs across the jurisdictions. In England and Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and South Australia information which shows that the persons-at-risk is potentially at risk from the subject will be disclosed. This includes convictions or other relevant information related to violent offending, controlling and coercive behaviours as well as domestic abuse more broadly. For these jurisdictions, it is not a requirement that the information or behaviour led to a conviction or arrest. In comparison, in New Zealand the information which is disclosed is highly restricted to certain prerequisites. For example, a disclosure is only facilitated if the person is at “serious risk” and this information must not be publicly available elsewhere. The information disclosed can only pertain to convictions, behaviour that led to a conviction and behaviour that is related to violent offending. Non-violent behaviour, such as coercive control, is excluded from this.

In Malta and some Canadian provinces, the disclosure of information is often precipitated on the risk grading attached to the applicant. In Saskatchewan, Alberta and Malta specific information about convictions, criminal histories, personal behaviour histories or other specific information is not disclosed. Instead, these areas communicate to the

person-at-risk the police risk grading of this information. The risk grading is seen to reflect the level of severity of violence that the person may face. However, Malta would disclose to the individual at risk if there was a domestic violence conviction in the persons history.

Newfoundland and Labrador provide a similar approach, with the police usually disclosing the risk grading rather than specific information. However, in this province the police hold the ability to discuss specific convictions or information in cases where the risk is medium or high. In Manitoba, whilst the information provided in the disclosure is kept to a minimum of what is necessary, the information would normally provide an overview of conviction or behavioural history.

Who shares and receives information

The decision to disclose and the level of information provided is usually decided by the police. However, in some jurisdictions the multi-agency team may support the police in some capacity to undertake disclosures. For example, in Scotland the multi-agency panel helps to create the disclosure script and in Alberta, a government risk assessor will formulate the disclosure package. In South Australia disclosure is facilitated in tandem with a domestic and family violence worker.

In most situations, information will be shared solely with the person-at-risk even if the application came from a third-party. However, all places may consider disclosing information to an appropriate adult or third-party service in situations when it is deemed appropriate (e.g. when the person-at-risk is a child or is a vulnerable adult). Furthermore, many countries or jurisdictions allow for a support person or professional to be present in the disclosure meeting. Both the person-at-risk and the support person receiving a disclosure are subject to stringent confidentiality arrangements.

Conclusion



In conclusion, the implementation of Clare's Law or the DVDS differs across the globe. What information is gathered, what information is shared and the processes under which that information is shared varies geographically. The reasons for this variation are not explicit in publicly available policy documentation. However, it appears that differences in legal parameters, in particular privacy and data protection laws, developments in the broader domestic abuse landscape and variation in information sharing practices across organisations more broadly have influenced the differences in the policy approaches adopted.

Across the different versions of the DVDS, an understanding of the experience of professionals

responsible for gathering and disclosing information is often limited in policy documentation. There is also a lack of information available in how victim-survivors/applicants experience receiving information (or not) via the DVDS. This indicates the need for closer collaboration between international jurisdictions to share best practice and learning.

It must be noted that publicly available information about the different versions of the DVDS varies. For example, in Scotland, New Zealand and South Australia, in-depth information about the operation and legal parameters of the scheme is not within the public domain. This may hinder the ability to fully understand the information gathering and sharing processes in these jurisdictions.

Whilst this policy summary focuses on the international variation of DVDS policy, there is also significant variation in how the scheme operates at a local level⁸. For example, in the context of England and Wales, there are differences in information sharing arrangements, working relationships between agencies, resourcing, budgets or priorities across different police force areas. The 'Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme: Information sharing and domestic abuse' project aims to explore this further.

The Project

The 'Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme: Information sharing and domestic abuse' project is a 2-year ESRC funded project. The project seeks to examine the effectiveness of Clares Law as a method of information sharing and the broader implications for policy and practice.

The project is co-ordinated by

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For more information about the project or to get in touch, please visit the project webpage:
dvds.leeds.ac.uk

⁸ Barlow, C., & Walklate, S. (2024), Domestic Violence Disclosure Schemes (Clare's Law): Ten Years On, Project Report, available from: <https://knowledge.lancashire.ac.uk/id/eprint/51827/>

