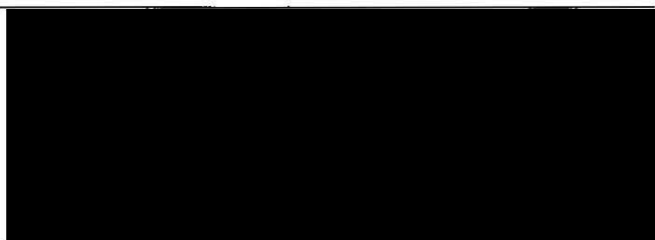


**IN THE MATTER OF THE ROYAL COMMISSION
INTO FAMILY VIOLENCE**

ATTACHMENT WS-3 TO STATEMENT OF WENDY MAREE STEENDAM

Date of document: 9 July 2015
Filed on behalf of: State of Victoria
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This is the attachment marked **'WS-3'** produced and shown to **WENDY MAREE STEENDAM** at the time of signing her Statement on 9 July 2015.

Before me:



**An Australian Legal Practitioner within
the meaning of the Legal Profession Uniform Law (Victoria)**

Executive Summary

The Government's Commitment

The Government has a vision for a safer future for all Victorians.

In *Growing Victoria Together* the Government has outlined its commitment to safer streets, homes and workplaces. A Crime and Violence Prevention Strategy has been developed. Local Safety Committees exist in each municipality. Police, local government, community organisations and others are all working to improve community safety.

Despite significant advances for women over the past 30 years, many women continue to live in fear of violence. More than one in three Australian women have experienced violence or a serious threat of violence in their adult lives. One quarter of young people have witnessed physical abuse against their mother or step-mother.

In Victoria, police attend over 20,000 incidents of family violence each year. Victoria Police recorded rapes or sexual assaults against nearly 4000 Victorian women or girls each year. National research shows that the true extent of violence against women is far greater. Over 80% of violence against women is not reported to the police or other services.

A Safety Strategy for Women

The Bracks Government recognises the need for a specific strategy to address violence against women.

Women are at far greater risk of family violence, sexual assault, sexual harassment and stalking than men. Women experience more fear of violence in public places. Women are at risk of violence and harassment in the workplace.

Women's experience of violence is often significantly different to men's experience. It also differs from the way 'violent crime' is portrayed in the media. Women are more likely to experience violence from a current or previous partner than a stranger. Violence against women usually occurs in the home rather than in public places. Violence against women often involves a repeated pattern of abuse. Violence against women may include psychological, emotional or financial abuse as well as physical and sexual abuse. Violence against women occurs in the context of a continuing power imbalance and inequality between men and women in society.

Violence against women seriously impacts on Victorians. It causes the death, injury and ill health of women, and often children and young people in the family. It causes psychological and emotional trauma for women, and often children and young people. It may result in low self-esteem and confidence, anxiety, depression and other mental health issues, substance abuse, homelessness, or alienation. It causes women and children to live in fear. The whole community is diminished when violent acts are committed against women and children. The development of a specific strategy to address violence against women will benefit all Victorians.

Working Together

The Government recognises that a reduction in violence against women can only be achieved if all agencies work co-operatively to tackle this issue.

At a statewide level this means that all Ministers and Government Departments must work together across the boundaries between portfolios and Departments. It also means that the Government is committed to working co-operatively with local government, non-government organisations and the broader community to achieve its goals.

At a local level it means that a wide range of people must all work together to improve women's safety, including police, magistrates, local government, family violence services, centres against sexual assault, health professionals, union representatives, employers, schools, women's services, multicultural groups and organisations, and Aboriginal communities and organisations.

A Shared Understanding of Violence Against Women

The Government's work to address violence against women must be informed by a shared understanding of violence against women and its causes.

Family violence, sexual assault, stalking, violence in public places, workplace violence, bullying and sexual harassment, racial and religious violence against women, trafficking in women and girls and female genital mutilation are all forms of violence that may affect Victorian women.

There is no simple explanation for violence against women. In the *Women's Safety Strategy* violence against women is understood as an abuse of power that occurs in a particular social and cultural context. The power imbalance between men and women in society contributes to violence against women, along with other factors such as racism, homophobia, other forms of prejudice and the dispossession of Aboriginal people from traditional lands.

Violence against women affects women and girls of all ages, cultures, backgrounds and life experiences, and women with disabilities. It is important that the diversity of women's needs, experiences and perceptions are taken into account in developing policies and programs.

However, it is also important to emphasise that women and their experiences cannot and should not be neatly categorised. Each woman has distinct and individual needs and issues which must be taken into account in responding to violence. Violence-related programs and services must cater for all women.

Addressing Violence Against Women

A set of principles has been developed to guide the Government's future activities to reduce the level, and fear, of violence against women.

The Government will focus its efforts in four key areas.

(1) Protection and Justice

Women who experience violence must be afforded protection and have access to effective legal remedies. Those who commit violent acts against women must be held accountable for their behaviour. The role of the justice system in responding to violence against women is pivotal to a broad community understanding that violence against women is unacceptable.

Key Directions:

- Reform criminal law and procedure
- Increase reporting and reduce attrition
- Improve support and advocacy for women
- Improve the police response to violence against women
- Improve pathways between police and other services
- Improve responses to psychological and emotional abuse.

(2) Options for Women

Improving the range of options available to women who have experienced violence, and the information and support available, will assist women to envisage a future without violence and move forward into that future. This must include a crisis response as well as options to assist women on the journey to healing and recovery.

Key Directions:

- Reduce the barriers to seeking assistance
- Provide information to women through universal services
- Increase awareness amongst family members and friends

- Enhance the capacity, quality and flexibility of services
- Support women to remain in the home where safe and appropriate
- Assist women in the healing process.

(3) Violence Prevention and Education

There is a need to strengthen prevention responses and develop a shared approach across agencies. Prevention is about individuals, communities and governments taking responsibility for creating a safer environment for women, and for all members of the community. Education and changing community attitudes is a particularly important component of violence prevention.

Key Directions:

- Support a mix of primary, secondary and tertiary prevention activities
- Provide consistent messages across sectors
- Ensure that violence prevention initiatives reflect the differences between men and women's experiences
- Support education and violence prevention programs in schools
- Conduct targeted communication activities
- Encourage community involvement and ownership
- Increase professional education about violence against women
- Respond in an appropriate and timely manner to men who use violence
- Create safer public places
- Ensure that we are doing what works.

(4) Community Action and Co-ordination

To effectively prevent and respond to violence against women, action must occur at a community level and there must be better co-ordination between agencies. The role of communities in addressing violence against women must be valued and strengthened.

Key Directions:

- Value the role of communities in addressing violence against women
- Strengthen the capacity of communities to address violence against women
- Support rural and regional communities
- Support 'communities of interest' in improving women's safety
- Move towards an integrated response to family violence
- Support best practice and evaluation.

Complementary Initiatives

A number of Bracks Government initiatives already existing, or in development, will also lead to significant improvements in women's safety:

- *Safer Streets and Home: A Crime and Violence Prevention Strategy 2002 – 2005*
- *Victoria Police Violence Against Women Strategy: A Way Forward*
- *Victorian Homelessness Strategy*
- *Women's Health and Well-being Strategy*
- *Local Priority Policing Program*
- *Indigenous Family Violence Strategy*
- *Community Building Initiative*
- *The BEST START Initiative*
- *Primary Care Partnerships*
- *State Disability Plan*
- *Gender Education Strategy for Victorian Schools*
- *Metropolitan Strategy*
- *Supporting Vulnerable Families – Innovation Projects*
- *Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy*
- *Respect: The Government's Vision for Young People.*

Acting on the Women's Safety Strategy

The initiatives Government is undertaking to reduce violence against women have been outlined in a separate document called *Acting on the Women's Safety Strategy*. Departments responsible for each initiative have specified the outcomes they will achieve and will report on their progress to the Annual Meeting of Ministers on Women's Safety.

The implementation of the *Women's Safety Strategy* will evolve over time as we gain further knowledge and experience in addressing violence against women. It will build on existing programs and services and recognise the important role and contribution of the non-government sector. *Acting on the Women's Safety Strategy* will be regularly updated as new initiatives are put in place.

The *Women's Safety Strategy* will be implemented in partnership with relevant Government and non-government agencies. Three steering committees are being established, including Government and non-government representatives, to address family violence, sexual assault and workplace violence. Two of these committees are being established by the Chief Commissioner of Police in partnership with the Office of Women's Policy.

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Monitoring and Evaluation

It is important that initiatives implemented under the *Women's Safety Strategy* and the impact of the strategy overall are monitored and evaluated to determine whether they are having a positive effect in reducing violence against women.

The success of the strategy will be measured by the degree to which the overall aim has been achieved and the degree to which the initiatives in all of the four areas outlined in this document have achieved their stated outcomes.

The process of continually improving the Government's responses to violence against women over the five-year life of the Strategy is a critical part of its evaluation.

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Introduction**1 Purpose of this Document**

The *Women's Safety Strategy* represents a commitment by all State Government Ministers and Departments to work together under a single policy framework to reduce the level, and fear, of violence against women in Victoria.

Violence against women includes sexual and physical violence as well as emotional and psychological violence. It includes all types of violence regardless of whether it occurs in the home, workplace or a public place and regardless of the relationship between the perpetrator and the woman who has experienced violence.

The Strategy was developed over two years and is the result of an extensive development and consultation process involving representatives from State Government, local government, non-government agencies and the broader community.

The *Women's Safety Strategy* has three related components:

- **Women's Safety Strategy: A Policy Framework** sets the principles and policy directions for addressing violence against women in Victoria over the next five years.
- **Acting on the Women's Safety Strategy** outlines specific initiatives the Government is undertaking to reduce violence against women.
- **Women's Safety, Women's Voices** presents personal experiences of violence against women in women's own words.

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2 The Government's Commitment**A Safer Future for all Victorians**

This Government has a vision for a better and safer future for all Victorians, including women and children.

- It is a future in which women's right to live free of violence and fear is accepted by everyone.
- It is a future in which women are no longer victims of violence and no longer afraid.
- It is a future in which women travel and participate freely and equally in community life without fear of violence.

- It is a future in which women do not have to endure violence from men in their own families or intimate relationships, and their children do not have to see, hear, fear or experience violence.

We will move closer to achieving this vision if each Government agency, each community organisation, and each and every citizen refuses to let violence against women continue.

Growing Victoria Together

The Bracks Government is committed to improving the lives of all Victorians, by pursuing economic, social and environmental goals.

In *Growing Victoria Together* the Government has outlined its commitment to safer streets, homes and workplaces. Building caring, safe communities is an essential part of the Government's vision for Victoria. Reducing family violence is a priority area for action.¹

A great deal has already been done to improve community safety and well-being.

The Government provides services and programs for people who have experienced violence and undertakes a range of prevention and support activities. A Crime and Violence Prevention Strategy, *Safer Streets and Homes*, has been developed. Additional police have been employed. Local Safety Committees have been established in each municipality to enhance community safety. The Government is working in partnership with local communities across Victoria on a range of community building initiatives, focussed on specific neighbourhoods, towns or population groups. These projects are based on broad local participation, with communities deciding priority issues.

These and other programs reflect the Government's commitment to building strong, safe, and vibrant communities.

A Commitment to Women's Safety

The Government also recognises the need for a specific strategy to address violence against women.

The five-year *Women's Safety Strategy* aims to:

Improve women's safety, well-being and capacity to fully participate in Victorian life by reducing the level, and fear, of violence against women.

A specific strategy to improve women's safety is needed because:

- **Women are at far greater risk of particular forms of violence than men, including family violence, sexual assault, sexual harassment and stalking.** Women also report higher levels of fear of violence than men. Women's fear of violence in public places may restrict their activities and constrain their ability to fully participate in the community.² Women are at risk of bullying, violence and sexual harassment in the workplace.
- **Women's experience of violence is often significantly different from men's experience.** Violence against women also differs from the way 'violent crime' is portrayed in the media and popular culture. Women are more likely to experience violence from a current or previous partner than a stranger or acquaintance.³ Violence against women usually occurs in the home rather than in public places.⁴ Violence against women is often part of a repeated pattern of abuse over many years, rather than a single incident. Violence against women may involve psychological, emotional and financial abuse, as well as physical and sexual abuse. Although it is important to acknowledge these overall differences, there may also be some similarities between the experiences of individual women and men in relation to violence.

■ Violence profoundly affects women's lives.

In Victoria there were 63 female victims of homicide in 2000/01. Physical and sexual violence against women causes injury, ill-health, fear, and psychological trauma. The fear and long-term effects of violence continue long after the violence has stopped. Women may experience anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, insomnia, confusion and feelings of helplessness.⁵ Women's job prospects, career advancement and livelihoods may suffer as a result of harassment or abuse in their workplace. Violence in public places, and the fear it causes, may restrict women's freedom to travel and participate in community activities.

■ Violence against women often affects children.

Women are often the primary carers of children. Children and young people of both sexes may witness violence against their mothers or other female relatives, and may experience violence themselves. Children may be injured and experience ill-health and trauma. Witnessing or hearing violence against their mother or siblings in itself has far reaching effects on children's well-being. One quarter of Australian children and young people have witnessed acts of violence against their mother or step-mother.⁶ The effects may include depression, withdrawal, low self-esteem, poor performance at school, aggression, tantrums, anxiety, and other developmental and health problems.⁷

■ There is evidence that violence against women is much higher than crime statistics indicate.

In Victoria almost 12,000 violent offences against women were reported to police in 2000/01.⁸ Police attended over 21,000 incidents of family violence. However, a survey of women conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics — *The Women's Safety Australia Survey* — showed that the extent of violence against women in the community is much greater than these figures indicate. The survey showed that more than one in three women has experienced violence or serious threats of violence in their adult lives. One in 14 women had experienced violence or serious threats of violence in the previous year. The survey showed that over 80% of violence against women was not reported to the police or revealed to other services.⁹

■ Violence against women is linked to inequality.

Violence against women occurs in the context of a continuing power imbalance between men and women in society. Almost nine in 10 incidents of violence against women are perpetrated by men.¹⁰ Violence against women is an abuse of power and is often used as a means of controlling women's lives. Women cannot equally participate in public or private life if they live in fear of violence. The link between violence against women and gender inequality has been recognised at an international level, for example, through the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women.¹¹

■ **Violence affects women and girls from all cultures, age groups, and backgrounds.**

It affects women living in rural and metropolitan areas. It affects Indigenous and non-Indigenous women. It affects women with disabilities and women with mental illness. It affects women who are cared for by others as well as women who are carers. It affects women in a wide range of occupations and workplaces and women who work at home. It affects women of all income levels. Violence affects women in prison and women living in other institutions or residential care. Heterosexual and lesbian women experience violence. Violence against women is sometimes linked to racism, homophobia and other forms of prejudice. It is important that the risk of violence for all women is recognised and that the diverse needs, experiences and perceptions of women are taken into account in addressing violence.

Over the five-year life of the *Women's Safety Strategy* various types of violence against women will be addressed. The strategy will begin with a strong focus on family violence, in recognition that more than half of sexual violence and three quarters of physical violence by men against women is perpetrated by the woman's boyfriend, partner, ex-partner or a family member.¹²

Benefiting Women, Benefiting the Whole Community

The *Women's Safety Strategy* is an essential part of the Government's policy agenda for women. The strategy is one of over 150 initiatives that will benefit Victorian women under the Government's Forward Plan for Women. Government is also working to address gender inequality in Victoria by increasing the number of women in leadership and decision-making positions, addressing work and family issues, and improving the representation of women in the media and advertising.

The Government's commitment to developing a *Women's Safety Strategy* acknowledges community views and expectations about women's safety. The safety of women and children is one of eight 'priority issues for women' presented in the *2001 Women's Petition* to the Victorian Parliament to mark the Centenary of Federation. Over 41,000 Victorians signed the petition.

The *Women's Safety Strategy* will benefit all Victorians. Violence against women seriously impacts on women, men, children and young people. The whole community is diminished when violence is committed against women and children. The whole community must also play a role in ending violence against women.

The Safety of Older Women

The *Women's Safety Australia Survey* found that 5% of women over 45 had experienced either sexual or physical assault in the previous year. Eighty-six per cent of women over the age of 50 did not report the assault to police.¹³

Research on family violence indicates that one in three women currently experiencing partner violence is over the age of 45 and one in five women currently experiencing partner violence is over the age of 50.¹⁴

Older women may have endured violence over many years and so the impacts can be severe.¹⁵ Health impacts include anxiety, depression, drug and alcohol abuse, fears and phobias, eating disorders, high blood pressure, heart trouble, poor health and frequent illness.¹⁶

Older women face the same barriers as all women in reporting violence and accessing support, along with additional barriers such as: fear of dependency at this stage of life, shame and embarrassment in talking about sexual violence, misconceptions about women being the cause of violence, economic concerns, fear of estrangement from other children and grandchildren, and fear of isolation. A lack of accurate information about rights and entitlements under current law, lack of

knowledge about support services and the response of some health professionals and police about the relevance of these support services to older women also act as barriers to older women disclosing and reporting violence.¹⁷

Older women who participated in a PADV study of domestic violence reported that they had told a variety of people of their experience of violence including family and friends (48%), counsellors (49%) and police (38%).¹⁸

Older women also relate that the reaction of the first person to whom they disclosed the violence was most important. The experience for many of the women however was that they were not believed or taken seriously and many believed they were blamed, or at least held responsible, for the violence.¹⁹

Elder abuse is also a concern for older women. It generally refers to situations where someone in a position of trust or authority harms an older person in an institutional or family setting. Women affected by frailty, dependence and impairment may be especially targeted. Often the violence is able to be concealed by the perpetrator because of their position of trust or authority.

1.3 Working Together

The Government recognises that a reduction in violence against women is only achievable when all agencies work co-operatively to address this issue.

At a statewide level this means all Ministers and Government Departments must work together across the traditional boundaries between portfolios and Departments. It also means that the Government is committed to working co-operatively with local government, community groups, and non-government organisations to achieve its goals.

At a local level it means that a wide range of people must all work together to improve women's safety, including police, magistrates, local government, family violence services, centres against sexual assault, health professionals, union representatives, employers, schools, women's services, multicultural groups and organisations, and Aboriginal communities and organisations.

This is what is meant by a whole-of-government, whole-of-community approach to violence against women. Only by working in partnership can genuine progress be made.

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Ministerial Leadership

Under the *Women's Safety Strategy*, 12 Government Ministers meet annually to review progress in improving women's safety and to jointly set priorities for the coming year.

- **The Hon. Mary Delahunty MP**, Minister for Women's Affairs; Minister for Planning;
- **The Hon. André Haermeyer MP**, Minister for Police and Emergency Services; Minister for Corrections;
- **The Hon. Rob Hulls MP**, Attorney-General;
- **The Hon. Bronwyn Pike MP**, Minister for Community Services; Minister for Housing; Minister Assisting the Premier for Community Building;
- **The Hon. John Thwaites MP**, Minister for Health;
- **The Hon. Lynne Kosky MP**, Minister for Education and Training;
- **The Hon. Keith Hamilton MP**, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs;
- **The Hon. John Pandazopoulos MP**, Minister Assisting the Premier on Multicultural Affairs;
- **The Hon. Christine Campbell MP**, Minister for Senior Victorians;
- **The Hon. Monica Gould MLC**, Minister for Youth Affairs;
- **The Hon. Bob Cameron MP**, Minister for WorkCover; Minister for Local Government;
- **The Hon. John Lenders MP**, Minister for Industrial Relations.

Departments Working Together

Many Government agencies play some part in responding to violence against women, however they work largely in isolation of each other. This is a significant barrier to improving women's safety. No single agency on its own is able to make a significant difference in improving women's safety.

Effective responses to violence against women require co-ordination across Government Departments. A wide range of Government agencies have an important role to play (See Appendix 1).

Working together across Departments involves:

- **Joint policy development**, so that each Department plans its activities within a single policy framework
- **Information sharing** about planned initiatives to both ensure that the implications for other Departments have been considered, and to combine efforts to improve women's safety
- **Joint initiatives** may be planned and implemented by cross-Departmental teams
- **Sharing of expertise**, so that Government initiatives not specifically directed at women's safety can make a contribution to improving women's safety
- **Joint monitoring of performance**, including identifying gaps and emerging issues and monitoring the Government's performance in relation to women's safety.

The *Women's Safety Strategy* was developed by the Office of Women's Policy, Department of Premier and Cabinet, under the guidance of the interdepartmental Women's Safety Co-ordinating Committee (WSCC). This ensured that all Government Departments worked collaboratively in developing the strategy. A list of members of the WSCC is outlined in Appendix 2.

Community Participation

Community activists and non-government agencies have historically played a critical role in addressing violence against women and continue to do so today.

Refuges for women and children who had experienced family violence were started in the 1970s by concerned women in the community who initially ran these services on a volunteer basis. Prevention and community awareness raising in relation to sexual assault and family violence also relied on the activism and involvement of women in the community. The non-government sector continues to play a significant role in addressing violence against women, over and above the funding they receive from Government.

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The Government values the role that community agencies, non-government organisations and local government play in preventing and responding to violence against women. The Government is committed to working in partnership with the community through the *Women's Safety Strategy*, ensuring a high level of community participation.

The involvement of community members and non-government organisations in the development of the *Women's Safety Strategy* occurred through:

- A Women's Safety Consultative Forum hosted by the Minister for Women's Affairs in September 2000
- A Women's Safety Think Tank held in June 2001
- Three working groups, including both Government and non-government representatives, which provided advice to the WSCC on:
 - increasing women's options following family violence
 - improving co-ordination at a local level; and
 - developing a more consistent and effective approach to prevention.
- A public consultation process occurring from February to April 2002. Sixty-seven written submissions were received and over 250 people attended consultation meetings throughout the state.

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During the five-year implementation of the *Women's Safety Strategy* Government will continue to work in partnership with community and non-government agencies through the establishment of three steering committees:

- A Statewide Steering Committee to Reduce Family Violence—to be jointly convened by Office of Women's Policy and Victoria Police
- A Statewide Steering Committee to Reduce Sexual Assault and Non-Relationship Violence Against Women—to be jointly convened by Office of Women's Policy and Victoria Police
- A Statewide Steering Committee to Reduce Violence Against Women in the Workplace.

The committees will play a critical role in relation to the implementation of the *Women's Safety Strategy* and will provide advice to the Chief Commissioner of Police, the Office of Women's Policy and relevant Government agencies. The committees will include both Government and non-government representatives, with expertise and/or specific responsibilities in relation to addressing these issues. The committees will also advise on how to ensure broader partnerships and collaborative working arrangements with other agencies to reduce violence against women.

In addition, there will be an annual forum on women's safety so a wide range of interested individuals and agencies can come together to discuss progress in addressing women's safety and identify areas for improvement.

Women's Safety in Rural Victoria

The experiences of women living in rural communities are diverse. There are however a number of fairly consistent findings regarding the barriers women in rural Victoria may face in reporting violence, and seeking assistance and support. These include isolation, lack of transport, increased availability of firearms, fear that violence will escalate, financial insecurity, concern about confidentiality and community attitudes, and a lack of specialist services in the vicinity. These barriers may be aggravated by the population decline in rural Australia, which may be accompanied by unemployment, poverty and reduced access to services.²²

Responses to violence against women must therefore accommodate the needs and experiences of women in rural and regional Victoria. They must have the flexibility to cater for the diversity among rural and regional communities and work to reduce isolation. The role of local government must be acknowledged in delivering such responses.

Indigenous Family Violence Strategy for Victoria

Addressing family violence has been recognised as a priority by Indigenous communities and this Government. The Victorian *Indigenous Family Violence Strategy* aims to resource and support an Indigenous-led approach to prevent, reduce and respond to the high levels of family violence in Indigenous communities throughout Victoria.

An Indigenous Family Violence Task Force has been appointed to lead the development of the strategy. This Indigenous community-led approach is supported by a parallel and complementary whole-of-government approach.

Four key components underpin the development of the strategy:

- Establishment and operation of the Indigenous Family Violence Task Force
- Resourcing and establishment of nine Indigenous Family Violence Action Groups
- Employment of the statewide co-ordinator and nine family violence support officers; and
- Establishment of an Indigenous Family Violence Community Initiative Fund.

The Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and the Minister for Community Services are the lead Ministers responsible for the development of the *Indigenous Family Violence Strategy*.

An Indigenous-led approach will improve women's safety and well-being in Indigenous communities.

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Understanding Violence Against Women

2

2.1 What is Violence Against Women?

Violence against women includes any act of violence that results in physical, sexual, emotional or psychological harm or suffering to women.

Family violence, sexual assault, stalking, violence in public places, workplace violence, bullying and sexual harassment, racial and religious violence, trafficking in women and girls and female genital mutilation are all forms of violence that may affect Victorian women.

Violence against women is a human rights issue. All women have a right to be valued and to be treated with respect and dignity. Women should be able to live their lives free from all forms of violence and the fear of violence.

Violence against women does not occur because of anything women say or do. It occurs because the perpetrator (usually a man) chooses to be violent, usually to exercise power and control over a girl or woman. An important principle underpinning responses to violence against women is that responsibility for any act of violence rests with the perpetrator of the violence.

Key Features of Violence Against Women

Some important features of violence against women are:

- Violence against women encompasses both criminal and non-criminal acts. Murder, rape, assault, psychological and emotional abuse, threats, financial deprivation, and forced isolation from friends and family are all forms of violence against women.

- Violence against women occurs in both public and private settings, including the home, workplace, institutional settings and the community. Evidence indicates that it is most likely to occur in the home.
- Violence is most often committed by someone known to the woman, rather than a stranger. *The Women's Safety Australia Survey* showed that more than half of sexual violence and three quarters of physical violence by men against women is perpetrated by the woman's boyfriend, partner, ex-partner or a family member.
- While both women and men may perpetrate violence, *The Women's Safety Australia Survey* indicated that 88% of violence against women was committed by men.²⁵
- Violence often occurs as part of a repeated pattern of abuse rather than an isolated incident. Some women endure violence in the home or workplace over many years.
- Violence against women often significantly affects children and young people, both directly and indirectly. Family violence, including sexual violence, may be directed towards children and young people as well as women. National research shows that one quarter of young people have witnessed physical violence against their mother or step-mother.²⁶

- Over 80% of violence against women is not reported to the police. It therefore remains hidden and is not adequately reflected in crime statistics²⁵
- Violence against women must be understood in the context of the diverse needs, circumstances and cultural backgrounds of women, including the experiences of women with disabilities
- Verbal abuse and sexual harassment can cause significant psychological and emotional harm to women and are themselves forms of violence against women
- Fear of violence significantly constrains the lives of many women and girls and causes harm and suffering.

Gender-based Violence

Violence against women is often described as 'gender-based violence' to reflect the fact that certain forms of violence are predominantly, but not exclusively, perpetrated by men against women.²⁶ These include family violence, sexual assault, stalking and sexual harassment.

The term 'gender-based violence' also acknowledges that power differences and inequality between men and women in society play a significant role in perpetuating violence against women and fear of violence. Violence and fear of violence also plays a role in preventing women from achieving equality.

The use of the term 'gender-based violence' indicates that gender issues must be taken into account in addressing violence against women. However, the term should not be taken to exclude forms of violence against women where a complex range of factors has contributed to the violence, such as racism, homophobia, other forms of prejudice, or the dispossession of Aboriginal people.

The use of the term 'gender-based violence' should not be taken to exclude the small proportion of violence against women that is perpetrated by women.²⁷

Victoria has adopted the United Nations definition of violence against women²⁸

"The term 'violence against women' means any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life."

2.2 Forms of Violence Against Women

Violence against women can take many different forms depending on:

- The nature of violence (e.g. physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, financial, social)
- The relationship between the perpetrator and the woman experiencing violence (e.g. a partner, ex-partner, acquaintance or stranger)
- The setting in which violence occurs (e.g. a home or residential setting, a workplace or educational setting, a public place, entertainment precinct or on public transport, a prison or institution)
- The presence of racism, discrimination or other circumstances associated with the violence.

While it is useful to focus on the particular categories outlined below, it is important to recognise that there is significant overlap between the categories. For example, sexual violence may be perpetrated by a woman's husband and so may also constitute family violence.

2.2.1 Family Violence

Violent, threatening, coercive or controlling behaviour that occurs in current or past family, domestic or intimate relationships is called family violence. This encompasses not only physical injury but direct or indirect threats, sexual assault, emotional and psychological torment, economic control, property damage, social isolation and behaviour which causes a person to live in fear.³³

The term 'family violence' is preferred to 'domestic violence' because it incorporates violence that

might occur between family members, such as violence between siblings or across generations, in addition to violence between partners. Use of the term family violence also reflects Indigenous communities' preference for the term because it more accurately reflects extended kinship ties and how the impact of violence affects all members of a family.

While child abuse and family violence are generally considered separately, it is important to acknowledge the inter-relationship between family violence and child abuse. These forms of violence often co-exist, with violence being directed towards both women and children. It is also a form of psychological child abuse, if a child hears or witnesses violence directed towards their mother or a sibling, even if that child is not a primary victim.

Family violence is predominantly, but not exclusively, perpetrated by men against women and children.³⁴ However, family violence can be perpetrated by any member of a family against any other member. Violence can occur in any kind of relationship, including lesbian, gay or transgendered relationships and against people who are elderly or disabled.

Family violence perpetrated against older people is often called elder abuse, although this term can also include abuse by professional carers.

It can be enormously difficult for women to take action to end a violent relationship. Some women remain in, or return to, relationships that are violent for a range of complex reasons, including fear that the violence will escalate, concerns for their children, lack of resources and support, feelings associated with the relationship, and hope that the violence will end. Some women feel that they will be blamed or disbelieved or they can't see any viable alternatives for themselves and their children. This has been misinterpreted as a sign that women do not want assistance. On the contrary, research shows that the quality consistency and reliability of responses to family violence make a significant difference to the woman's capacity to change her situation in the future.³⁵

Research and Data

Police attended 21,618 family violence incidents in 2000/2001, as measured by the number of Family Violence Incident Reports completed.³⁶

Approximately 80% of adult aggrieved family members at these incidents were female. There were also 19,933 children present at family violence incidents attended by police.³⁷

It is estimated that over 80% of family violence is not reported to the police, so the actual incidence of family violence is likely to be significantly higher.³⁸

In 2000/2001 there were 20,213 finalised original applications for intervention orders in Victorian courts. Approximately eighty per cent of applicants were female.³⁹

In 2000/2001 Victorian Supported Accommodation and Assistance Program (SAAP) agencies assisted 10,200 clients who gave family violence as a reason for seeking assistance. Over 95% of adult clients seeking assistance from SAAP agencies as a result of family violence were female.⁴⁰

National research shows that one quarter of young people have witnessed physical violence against their mother or step-mother.⁴¹

Based on *The Women's Safety Australia Survey* it is estimated that:

- 50% of sexual violence and 75% of physical violence by men against women is perpetrated by the woman's boyfriend, partner, ex-partner or a family member⁴²
- 8% of Australian women who are married or in a de facto relationship have experienced violence from their current partner (345,400), with 2.6% (111,000) experiencing violence from their partner in the previous 12 months⁴³
- 42% of women who had been in a previous relationship had experienced violence from a previous partner (1.1 million women), with 3.3% of women experiencing violence from a previous partner in the preceding 12 months.⁴⁴

The Law in Victoria

The *Crimes Act 1958* (Vic) applies to violence that occurs within families and relationships just as it does to violence in other situations. Homicide, intentionally or recklessly causing injury or serious injury, threats to kill, threats to inflict serious injury, assault, stalking, conduct endangering life, conduct endangering persons, are all offences under the *Crimes Act 1958* (Vic). Common assault and aggravated assault are also offences under the *Summary Offences Act 1966*.

The *Crimes (Family Violence) Act 1987* (Vic) empowers courts to make an intervention order, imposing certain restrictions that appear necessary or desirable in the circumstances, if a person has assaulted a family member (or threatened to do so), damaged their property, harassed, molested or behaved in an offensive manner to a family member, and is likely to do so again. Orders may, for example, restrict the defendant's access to where the victim lives and works or restrict his access to firearms.

Section 64 (1) of the *Children and Young Persons Act 1989* allows that any person who believes, on reasonable grounds, that a child is in need of protection may notify a protective intervener of that belief and of the reasonable grounds for it. Thus any person is voluntarily able to make a notification to Child Protection when they believe that a child is in need of protection and the child's parents are unable or unwilling to protect the child.

Section 64 (1A) of the *Children and Young Persons Act 1989* compels teachers, principals, doctors, nurses and police to report cases where they believe that a child is in need of protection because

the child has suffered, or is likely to suffer, significant harm as a result of physical injury or sexual abuse and the child's parents have not protected, or are unlikely to protect the child from such harm. This legislation is commonly referred to as 'mandatory reporting legislation'.

2.2.2 Sexual Assault

Sexual assault is 'a physical assault of a sexual nature, directed towards another person, where that person does not give consent, gives consent as a result of intimidation or fraud or is deemed legally incapable of giving consent'.⁴¹ It includes rape and unwanted sexual touching. It also includes incest and sexual offences against children, people with impaired mental functioning or people living in residential facilities.⁴²

Sexual violence is a broader term than sexual assault involving a continuum of behaviours from sexual harassment to coerced sexual activity to rape.⁴³

Most victims/survivors of sexual assault are women and children and the vast majority of perpetrators are men.⁴⁴

Sexual assault can occur in a variety of circumstances. Most sexual assaults are perpetrated by someone known to the woman rather than a stranger.⁴⁵ Sexual assault can occur within a family and may constitute a form of family violence. *The Women's Safety Australia Survey* indicates that around half of sexual assaults are perpetrated by a woman's partner, ex-partner, boyfriend or a male family member.⁴⁶ Some women are sexually assaulted by a man they know casually or with whom they have been on a date (sometimes called 'date rape' or 'acquaintance

rape'). There has also been growing concern about the sexual harassment and assault of young women in and around licensed premises. Drink spiking, which involves the adding of alcohol or drugs to a woman's drink without her knowledge or approval, may be a precursor to sexual assault.⁴⁷ Anecdotal evidence indicates that women with intellectual or other disabilities are significantly over-represented as victims of sexual assault.⁴⁸

Rape and other forms of sexual violence are serious crimes that can have serious and lasting effects on girls and women as well as their family and friends. The degree of physical harm is not predictive of the short or long-term impacts which may be influenced by a broad range of other factors.⁴⁹ Women who have been sexually assaulted may experience terror, anguish, disgust, personal vulnerability, shock, numbness, denial, depression, anxiety, guilt and self-blame.

Research and Data

Based on *The Women's Safety Australia Survey* it is estimated that almost one in five Australian women (18%) have been sexually assaulted or threatened since turning the age of 15. The survey showed that 1.4% of women had been sexually assaulted by a male perpetrator in the previous year. Nine out of 10 victims did not report the incident to police and four out of five did not seek the assistance of services.⁵⁰

Research indicates the vast majority of victims of reported sexual assault are women (approximately 83%)⁵¹ and that the overwhelming majority of women victims/survivors know the offender (approximately 72%).⁵² Sexual assaults perpetrated

by men against women most often occur in a residential location (approximately 60%).⁵³

Victoria Police recorded sexual offences against nearly 4000 women in 2000/2001.⁵⁴ This includes both rape and non-rape sexual offences, with some women experiencing more than one offence. The 1999 Crime Victimization Survey in Victoria showed that only 17.3% of women who were sexually assaulted reported the incident to police.⁵⁵

The Law in Victoria

Rape, indecent assault, sexual offences against children, incest, sexual offences against people with impaired mental functioning or people living in residential facilities are all offences under the *Crimes Act 1958* (Vic). Rape occurs when a person sexually penetrates another person without that person's consent, and is aware that the person is not consenting or might not be consenting. Consent means 'free agreement'. A woman is not freely agreeing if she submits because she is forced, afraid, held prisoner, asleep, unconscious, affected by drugs, incapable of understanding, mistaken about the identity of the person, or mistakenly thinks the act is for medical or hygienic purposes. Indecent assault covers sexual acts other than sexual penetration that occur without consent (e.g. unwanted touching).

The Victorian Law Review Commission is currently reviewing the law and procedure in relation to sexual offences.

2.2.3 Violence in Public Places

While the risk of violence is greater in the home than public places, women may experience violence and threats to their safety in a range of public places, including streets, shopping centres, public transport, parks and gardens, car parks, and in and around licensed premises and entertainment venues. Women's experience of violence is often significantly different to men's experience. In addition, fear of violence in public places may lead women to restrict their activities, especially after dark.

Research and Data

There are significant differences between women's and men's perceptions of safety in public places. The *Victorian Crime Victimisation Survey 1999* shows that only 54% of women compared to 82% of men feel safe or very safe walking alone in their neighbourhood after dark. Eighteen per cent of females reported that they never walked alone after dark compared with only 5% of males. Women also report feeling less safe on public transport and in a range of other public places than males.⁶⁰ Older women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds have reported feeling particularly unsafe in public places.⁶⁷

The Law in Victoria

The *Crimes Act 1958 (Vic)* applies to violence in public places just as it does to violence occurring in other places.

2.2.4 Stalking

Stalking is a pattern of repeated, often intrusive, behaviour that intimidates a person and causes fear.⁶⁸ Stalking is not a homogenous behaviour. It may include following the victim, repeatedly telephoning her or sending her mail or electronic mail, loitering near her home or workplace, giving her offensive material, keeping her under surveillance or other behaviours. Stalking offenders vary in their relationship with the victim, they may be a partner or previous partner, an acquaintance or a stranger. A growing amount of stalking occurs via email and the internet. This has been called cyberstalking.⁶⁹

The impact of stalking varies among victims, reflecting differences in the nature of harassment, availability of social support, and the effectiveness of interventions. Many victims experience distress and lifestyle disruptions which often endure long after the stalking itself has ceased. Almost one in four stalking victims seriously contemplates or attempts suicide as a result of their ordeal.⁶⁹

Research and Data

A recent study examined the prevalence, nature and impact of stalking in the Victorian community. One in 10 people had been subjected to a prolonged course of stalking lasting a month or more with 4% experiencing stalking in the year preceding the study.⁸¹ Some groups are at increased risk, including public figures, separated and divorced women and the legal, health and teaching professions.⁸²

There were 883 stalking offences recorded by police in 2001. A Department of Justice study has shown that most victims are female (82%)

and most offenders are male (88%) and both male and female offenders were more likely to stalk women. Two-thirds of male offenders were between 20 and 39 years and over four in five female victims were under 40.⁸³

The Law in Victoria

Stalking is prohibited under the *Crimes Act 1958 (Vic)* with anti-stalking legislation enacted in 1995. Under the legislation stalking is defined as engaging in a course of conduct with the intention to cause physical or mental harm, apprehension or fear, and that harm must eventuate.

2.2.5 Workplace Violence and Bullying

Violence against women in a work setting may include physical assault, threatening behaviour or verbal abuse, and sexual and racial harassment.⁶⁴ Violence may be perpetrated by a colleague or supervisor, a client or customer, or a member of the public.

Violence against women in the workplace can be very different to the violence experienced by men at work. It may include sexual harassment and other forms of sexual violence, which are far less likely to be directed towards men. There are also parallels between family violence and violence against women in the workplace, including the fact that in both cases violence usually represents an abuse of power, it is often repeated over a period of time, there is a high under-reporting rate, and often it is the victim/survivor rather than the offender who has to leave the home or workplace in order for the violence to stop. In both cases women may suffer

loss of confidence and self-blame as a result of the violence and may subsequently suffer from depression. It is important to recognise the gendered nature of violence that occurs in a workplace setting, and acknowledge that violence is likely to affect men and women differently.

Where women are employed on a casual, insecure basis or in small, isolated work environments it may be particularly difficult for women to report the violence. Women working in these situations often put up with the violence in order to keep their jobs and their livelihoods.

Research and Data

It is difficult to estimate the level of violence against women that occurs in a workplace setting. A Morgan poll conducted in 1998 revealed that 46% of Australians have experienced either verbal or physical abuse from a co-worker or manager some time in their working lives and 7% of Australians who have worked have experienced physical abuse from someone employed in the same workplace.⁶⁵ Estimates based on overseas studies suggest that around 25% of Australian employees will experience bullying at some time in their working lives.⁶⁶

In 2000/01, there were 616 standard claims reported to WorkCover where the cause of the injury/disease was classified as being assaulted by a person(s) or exposure to workplace or occupational violence. Women were the claimant in 38% of these claims. During that same period, a further 483 claims were reported to WorkCover with the mechanism of injury/disease classified as harassment. The claimant was a woman in 59% of these cases.

A Victorian study of internal workplace violence (perpetrated by co-workers or supervisors) found that workplace violence is often embedded in the power relationships in the workplace. Where violence was perpetrated by a single person, in around 65% of cases the perpetrator was in a position of power over the victim, for example, their supervisor, manager or business owner. In cases involving multiple perpetrators, the perpetrators were more likely to be co-workers. This study found that the majority of perpetrators were male (over 80%).⁶⁷

A significant amount of workplace violence is perpetrated by someone other than a co-worker or supervisor (for example, a customer, patient or client). In some industries or professions in which women are employed in greater numbers than men (e.g. nursing) high levels of workplace violence have been reported. For example, a study examining the nature and extent of violence towards nurses in NSW Emergency Departments found that all of the 266 respondents had experienced some form of violence at least weekly, with 58% experiencing verbal abuse and 14% experiencing physical intimidation or assault.⁶⁸

Women and girls who work in the sex industry in brothels, table top dancing venues or on the streets are at particular risk of violence, including rape, serious assault and violent robbery.⁶⁹

Further data that is disaggregated by gender is required on bullying and harassment to inform our understanding of the issues and to better target our responses.

The Law in Victoria

The *Crimes Act 1958 (Vic)* applies to violence occurring in the workplace as it does to violence occurring in other settings. The *Occupational Health and Safety Act 1985 (Vic)* imposes a general duty on employers to ensure, as far as practicable, the health and safety of employees at work. This includes, as far as practicable, that employees are safe and without risks to health from violence and bullying at work.

2.2.6 Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment is a sexual advance or other sexual conduct, which is 'unwelcome', and that a reasonable person could anticipate would result in the victim being offended, humiliated or intimidated. Sexual harassment is unlikely to occur without the harasser having some form of power over the person harassed.⁷⁰

Sexual harassment is both a form of sexual violence against women and a form of unlawful discrimination against women.

Research and Data

In 2000/2001 there were 550 complaints of sexual harassment lodged with the Equal Opportunity Commission Victoria (EOCV). Eighty three percent of these complaints were from women.⁷¹ This was greater than the number of complaints lodged for any other form of sexual discrimination. There were twice as many inquiries as complaints lodged suggesting many women choose not to proceed with making a complaint. Complaints of sexual harassment lodged at the Commission can include allegations of rape and sexual assault.

In the past 10 years complaints received by the EOCV of both sexual harassment and sex discrimination have increased. Whilst an increase in complaints could indicate an increase in awareness, it remains evident that a large number of women feel unsafe in areas of public life and are particularly vulnerable to harassment at work. Around 76% of all complaints lodged with the Equal Opportunity Commission are in the area of employment.

Research conducted on behalf of the EOCV in 2000 revealed that one quarter of the general public felt they had experienced illegal discrimination, and most had chosen not to report it. Research from overseas suggests that sexual harassment may be even more widespread. Surveys in the United Kingdom and the United States suggest that 'between 33% and 50% of women are victims of sexual harassment at least once in their lives'.⁷²

The Law in Victoria

Sexual harassment and other forms of discrimination are unlawful under the *Equal Opportunity Act 1995 (Vic)*; the *Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Cth)* and the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975 (Cth)*.

Violence in Lesbian and Bisexual Relationships

It is often assumed that family violence is unique to heterosexual relationships. This has led to a denial or minimisation of the violence within lesbian and bisexual relationships. Although research is limited, there is general consensus among researchers that the incidence of family violence in lesbian and bisexual relationships is comparable to that in heterosexual relationships.⁷³

Lesbian and bisexual communities have traditionally resisted acknowledging family violence as a problem within their communities. This is, at least partially, the result of a number of widely held myths about lesbian and bisexual relationships. These myths include:

- Women in relationships have equal power
- Violence in lesbian and bisexual relationships cannot occur because women are non-violent.⁷⁴

These myths, as well as more general heterosexism and homophobia, mean that lesbian and bisexual women face additional hurdles trying to overcome abuse. Many have a difficult time recognising their experiences as violence and gaining access to police and support services.

2.2.7 Racial and Religious Violence Against Women

Violence against women may be linked to racial or religious vilification, harassment and violence. This may escalate in times of conflict or war. It can be particularly directed at women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Research and Data

The Equal Opportunity Commission Victoria has documented an increase in vilification, harassment and violence connected to racial and religious hatred in Victoria.⁷³ The Commission recorded 50 incidents of racial and religious vilification in the two-week period from 11 September to 25 September, 2001. The majority of victims of these incidents were women and girls from Muslim and Arabic backgrounds.

The incidents included physical assaults, denial of goods and services, discrimination in employment on the grounds of race and religion and verbal attacks. They took place in a range of public areas including public transport, retail outlets, schools and public streets.

In addition to the reports of direct violence and vilification it is evident that Victorian Muslim and Arabic speaking women experienced heightened levels of fear and intimidation. Communities reported large numbers of women feeling too intimidated to leave home and unable to undertake daily tasks like attending work, going shopping, or attending school or university.

The Law in Victoria

Racial or religious vilification, harassment or violence may constitute a crime under the *Crimes Act 1958*. It may also be a form of racial discrimination which is unlawful under the *Equal Opportunity Act 1995 (Vic)* or the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975 (Cth)*.

The *Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001 (Vic)* came into effect on 1 January 2002. It prohibits vilification on the grounds of race or religion and offers victims a means of redress. It promotes conciliation to resolve civil complaints and also includes an offence for the incitement of racial hatred.

2.2.8 Trafficking in Women and Girls

The trafficking of women and girls to work in the sex industry is a significant concern, both internationally and in Australia. Trafficking in women and children is a violation of human rights. It involves acts of coercion, deception, intimidation and exploitation, which can occur both in legal and illegal sex industries and for the purposes of pornography. International research shows that women and girls who have been the victims of trafficking experience profound and ongoing violence and have often come from vulnerable situations such as poverty and violence.

Research and Data

Accurate statistics on the trafficking of women and girls in Victoria do not exist. However, international research indicates that human trafficking is the world's third most profitable illegal trade,⁷⁶ largely because women can be re-sold multiple times and the risks of detection and prosecution are fewer

than in other illegal trades. Commonwealth Government estimates put the gross cash flow to organisers of the Australian sex trafficking industry at \$1 million a week.⁷⁷ In 1998/1999, 243 women were located by the Commonwealth Government working illegally in the sex industry.⁷⁸ This number fell to 190 in 1999/2000.⁷⁹

The Law in Victoria

The *Slavery and Sexual Servitude Amendment Act 1999 (Cth)* legislates against the deceptive recruitment of a person to perform sexual services. Under the legislation it is also illegal to use threat or force to prevent a person from ceasing to provide sexual services or from leaving the site where these occur.⁸⁰ It can also provide protection against slavery outside the sex industry if ownership over the victim was exercised.⁸¹ However, the law does not protect those who have been deceived about the conditions of their work, rather than its nature, so that not all trafficking victims are protected. No prosecutions have as yet resulted from this legislation.⁸²

Victoria's Prostitution Control Act 1994 was used in 1999 to prosecute a man who trafficked at least 20 women to work in Melbourne brothels. He was charged on counts of living off the earnings of prostitution and of being an unlicensed prostitution provider.⁸³

The Safety of Women in the Sex Industry

Women working in the sex industries may experience violence from clients, brothel owners and violence in public places. This may take the form of workplace violence, physical and sexual assault, stalking and robbery. In a study of 500 sex workers in five countries, 62% of respondents reported being raped, 76% reported assault and 68% had been threatened with a weapon.⁸⁴

Although street prostitution carries the most risk, all sex workers may be subject to clients or brothel owners who engage in physical, sexual, emotional or psychological violence. In addition, women who work in brothels and table-top dancing venues may be required to enter and leave licensed venues through secluded locations. Women may also be forced to enter or stay in the sex industry by violent partners.

Perpetrators of violence against women working in the sex industry may target women working in secluded locations. The stigma associated with working in sex industry may provide a barrier to women seeking assistance or reporting violence.

2.2.9 Female Genital Mutilation

Female genital mutilation (FGM), also referred to as excision, female circumcision or female genital cutting (FGC), comprises all procedures involving partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs, whether for cultural or other non-therapeutic reasons. FGM is usually performed on girls between the ages four and 12.⁸⁵

Research and Data

While there are no figures on the occurrence of female genital mutilation in Victoria, between 80 and 130 million women and girls have been affected in 28 countries in Africa, as well as some countries in the Middle East and some parts of Asia. The numbers of women who have undergone FGM varies widely between countries, ranging from approximately 5% in countries like the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Uganda to more than 90% in countries like Djibouti, Egypt, Mali and Somalia. To date there have not been any reported incidents of FGM being performed in Victoria.

The Law in Victoria

The Victorian Government has adopted a rights based approach to prevention of female genital mutilation with the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) as its framework.

Female genital mutilation is against the law in Victoria under the *Crimes (Female Genital Mutilation) Act 1996* and is considered to be physical abuse under the *Children and Young Persons Act 1989*.

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Under the *Crimes (Female Genital Mutilation) Act 1996* it is also illegal for a woman or girl who normally resides in Victoria to be taken to another state or country to have female genital mutilation performed on her.

Although these broad categories of violence against women can be identified, it is important to recognise that women's actual experiences of violence may cross two or more categories. For example, a woman's husband may sexually assault her, which is both family violence and sexual assault.

Psychological and Emotional Violence

The impact of verbal abuse, bullying, threats and psychological or emotional violence against women is often underestimated whether it occurs in the context of family violence, the workplace, a public place or some other setting.

This type of abuse causes significant harm and suffering to women and so is itself a form of violence. The effects can be far reaching including depression and anxiety, continuous fear, low self-esteem, and a range of physical and mental health problems. Like other forms of violence, psychological and emotional violence is an abuse of power which undermines women's confidence and prevents their full participation in family, work and community life.

3 Women's Diverse Needs and Circumstances

Violence affects women and girls of all ages, cultures and religious backgrounds. It affects women living in rural and metropolitan areas. It affects women with disabilities and mental illness. It affects both heterosexual and lesbian women. It affects women who are cared for by others as well as women who are carers. It affects women in a wide range of occupations and workplaces and women who work at home. It affects women of all income levels. Violence may particularly affect women working in the sex industries. Violence affects women in prison and women living in other institutions or residential care.

The diversity of women who experience violence has important implications for policy and program development. Policies and programs must be sensitive to women's diverse needs and circumstances. They must draw on women's strengths and respect their values. Most importantly they must be underpinned by the principle that violence against women does not occur because of anything a woman says or does. Violent acts are an abuse of power and the perpetrator of violence is solely responsible.

Discussion of some of the particular issues that may face women has been included throughout this document in coloured boxes.

It is important to emphasise that women and their experiences cannot and should not be neatly categorised. Each woman has distinct and individual needs and issues which must be taken into account in responding to violence. Violence-related programs and services must cater for all women.

Responses to violence and prevention programs must be informed by women's experiences and perceptions. This involves acknowledging the meaning, language and context of women's experiences. The participation of women from diverse backgrounds is critical to the effective planning, implementation and evaluation of policies and programs.

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DEPT. OF JUSTICE
LIBRARY

The Safety of Women from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Backgrounds

Victoria is one of Australia's most diverse states and has been enriched by the presence of people from all over the world. Almost a quarter of Victoria's population was born overseas, while approximately 40% of Victorians were either born overseas, or have a parent who was born overseas. It is estimated that Victorians (some from over 200 countries), speak over 175 languages and dialects and follow more than 100 religious faiths.²⁸

Violence affects women from all cultural and religious backgrounds. Responses to violence against women must therefore be sensitive to the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) women and their communities. Some of the particular issues facing women from CALD communities include:

Racism and racial harassment and violence may be directed at women from CALD backgrounds, having a significant effect on women and their communities.

CALD women are at risk of violence and harassment in the workplace. A high proportion of CALD women work in industries with low wages, little job security and high levels of discrimination and occupational segregation. Ninety five per cent of women workers are from CALD backgrounds.²⁹

Responses to violence against women must recognise the barriers CALD women face in seeking assistance and the social and cultural

setting in which their safety is threatened. Services and information must be culturally and linguistically relevant so that CALD women can access them.

Women in emerging and smaller communities who experience family violence may lack strong support networks and fear community isolation if violence is reported. Separation from extended family, who may have provided valuable support in the country of origin, may also make it difficult for women to report violence.

Women who have recently arrived in Australia face many barriers to disclosing violence, particularly if they do not have permanent residency status. For example, women who have applied for a spouse visa (a visa granted because they married an Australian citizen or permanent resident) may be reluctant to report family violence for fear that they will not be able to remain in Australia. Women on some types of temporary visas may not be eligible for income support or have permission to work. A lack of information about available services and entitlements may also present barriers to women who have recently arrived in Australia.

Many refugee women have survived torture and trauma.³⁰ These difficulties are compounded for women in detention centres, who are particularly vulnerable to violence given their isolation from the community, their inability to escape the violence, and the frustrations of being detained indefinitely.

International trafficking in women and girls may result in women from various countries being brought to Australia to work in the sex industries.

Family Violence in Indigenous Communities

Family violence is being increasingly recognised within Indigenous communities and by state and national Governments as an issue which is adversely affecting the social and emotional well-being of Indigenous people, families and communities.

In an Indigenous community context, family violence is broader than spousal violence and encompasses a mix of harmful, violent and aggressive behaviours that can occur within families, extended families, kinship networks and communities. It extends to one on one fighting (same gender) and inter-group fighting as well as self-harm, injury and suicide. It includes forms of violence often referred to as 'elder abuse' and 'child abuse'.

A range of factors has been identified as contributing to the high rate of violence in Indigenous communities.³¹ These include:

- Marginalisation and dispossession
- Loss of land and traditional culture
- Breakdown of community kinship systems and Aboriginal law
- Entrenched poverty
- Racism
- Alcohol and drug abuse
- The effects of institutionalism and removal policies
- The loss of the traditional Aboriginal male role and status
- Inherited grief and trauma

Responses to family violence in Indigenous communities must recognise the central place and importance of family, kin and community in Aboriginal society and build on these inherent strengths. They must recognise Indigenous concepts of social, emotional and spiritual well-being. This involves recognition of how past practices, including dispossession, assimilation and separation of families continues to negatively impact on the present and the development of an approach that addresses this legacy and seeks to heal individuals, families and communities.

The development of the Indigenous Family Violence Strategy in Victoria recognises that solutions to family violence lie within Indigenous communities themselves. Government must support, empower and enable communities to examine family violence issues and develop solutions appropriate to local conditions and needs. Government also has a role to play in developing a co-ordinated policy and program framework to support the development and implementation of holistic, local community-driven responses.

2.4 Why Does Violence Against Women Occur?

Statistics show that almost nine in 10 incidents of violence against women are perpetrated by men.⁵⁰ Violence against women does not occur because of anything women say or do. Historically women have often been blamed for the violence perpetrated against them, and this continues today. Violence against women predominantly occurs because men choose to use violence to assert power and control over women.

The recognition that violence against women occurs as a result of a 'choice' by the perpetrator is important because it emphasises that that responsibility for violence against women rests solely with the man who uses violence. It also emphasises that men can choose to change their violent behaviour, although it is not always easy and they are not always willing to change. Men who use violence must be held accountable for their behaviour and challenged to change their behaviour.

There are many complex explanations and theories attempting to explain why violence against women occurs.⁵¹ No single theory provides a complete explanation. However, current literature and research show that:

- Theories that explain violence as a natural instinct or resulting from an illness or defect in an individual are not useful. They fail to take into account the way society influences violent behaviour. Men learn to use violence and they can learn not to use violence.

- Factors such as alcohol abuse, stress, unemployment, or poor conflict resolution skills may sometimes coincide with violence. Alcohol use, in particular, often precedes violence and sexual assault and some studies have found overwhelming evidence of a link between alcohol consumption and violent behaviour.⁵² However, alcohol use, stress, unemployment or lack of skills do not excuse violence and nor do they fully explain violence. Some men behave violently when none of these factors are present and many people have been intoxicated without ever using violence.

- Violence against women is sometimes explained as an expression of the power imbalance between men and women in society. Violence in homes, workplaces and communities is seen as an abuse of power and a means of controlling women's lives. It perpetuates the power imbalance and sexual inequality within society, families and workplaces. However, this does not explain the small proportion of women who use violence or violence that results from the interaction between a number of factors (such as race and gender).
- Indigenous communities emphasise that colonisation and past government policies such as the dispossession from traditional lands, the break-up of Aboriginal families, the suppression of language and culture, and continuing discrimination and racism all contribute to the level of violence in Indigenous communities.

- Recent efforts to understand violence against women draw from a range of theories and explanations to give a more complete picture.⁵³ Violence is viewed as the perpetrator's 'choice' but a choice that occurs in a particular social and cultural context. This approach acknowledges the role that the power imbalance between men and women plays in perpetuating violence against women. However, it is also able to take into account other factors that may play a role, such as racism, homophobia or the dispossession of Aboriginal people from traditional lands and the impact of past policies on Aboriginal people.

There is no simple explanation for violence against women. In the *Women's Safety Strategy* violence against women is understood as an abuse of power that occurs in a particular social and cultural context. The power imbalance between men and women in society contributes to violence against women, along with other factors such as racism, homophobia, other forms of prejudice and the dispossession of Aboriginal people from traditional lands.

5 How Does Violence Against Women Impact on Victorians?

Violence against women has enormous consequences in Victoria. This includes impacts on individuals, families, businesses and communities. For example:

- Death, physical injury and ill health of women, and often children and young people in the family
- Psychological and emotional trauma of women, and often children and young people in the family
- The trauma of violence may result in low self-esteem and confidence, anxiety, depression or other mental health issues, substance abuse, homelessness, social alienation, suicide or attempted suicide⁵⁴
- High levels of ongoing fear, which substantially reduce quality of life and lead to women restricting their activities
- Negative impacts on children and young people who witness or hear violent attacks against their mother or sibling⁵⁵

- Breakdown of family and personal relationships, including extended family relationships
- High levels of stress on individuals and families of negotiating the criminal justice system
- Low morale, staff turnover, absenteeism and reduced productivity as a result of violence, bullying and harassment in the workplace
- A devaluing of women's position in society
- The normalising of violence in the community
- The economic costs of violence, including the direct and indirect costs to Victorian businesses, the cost of health care and other services, and the cost of policing, courts and correctional services.

The direct and indirect cost of family violence to Australian businesses has been conservatively estimated at \$1.5 billion per year.⁹⁶

The fear and impact of violence against women often continue long after the violence has stopped.

Health Impacts of Violence Against Women

The health impacts of violence against women can be significant whether the violence is physical, sexual, or psychological in nature. Violence against women represents a major women's health issue⁹⁷ and was raised as a critical issue in the consultations conducted by the Department of Human Services to develop a *Women's Health and Well-being Strategy* for Victoria.

Women may be seriously injured, wounded or killed as a result of violence. Injuries may lead to long-term health problems or disabilities, including chronic pain and other pain syndromes, gastrointestinal problems, headaches, chronic fatigue and disturbed sleep patterns.⁹⁸ In addition, studies have shown that the abdomen is targeted more frequently and severely in pregnant women, harming both the mother and unborn child.⁹⁹

Psychological and mental health is also affected by violence. Women who have experienced physical, sexual, or psychological violence have increased rates of depression, anxiety,

Violence against women prevents women's full participation in the social, economic and democratic life of Victoria.

post-traumatic stress disorder, substance use and other psychological disorders.¹⁰⁰ Violence against women has been described as probably the most prevalent and certainly the most emblematic cause of depression in women.¹⁰¹ Self-esteem may be decreased, particularly if violence is part of a repeated pattern of abuse. Suicidal behaviour and other forms of self-harm reflect the extreme psychological distress experienced by some women following rape or other forms of violence.¹⁰²

Violence against women and children often co-exist, having a significant impact on children's health and well-being. Children may themselves be injured and experience ill-health and trauma. In addition, witnessing or hearing violence against their mother or siblings in itself has far-reaching effects on children's well-being. One quarter of Australian children and young people have witnessed acts of violence against their mother or step-mother.¹⁰³ The effects may include depression, withdrawal, low self-esteem, poor performance at school, aggression, tantrums, anxiety, and other developmental and health problems.¹⁰⁴

Addressing Violence Against Women

3

1 Building a Safer Future for Women and Girls

For a safer future Government must work in a co-ordinated way and be guided by clear principles and policy directions. Government must work in partnership with local government, non-government organisations and community groups to achieve lasting change that will make Victoria a better and safer place to live.

The Government makes a considerable investment in preventing and responding to violence against women. Responses under the *Women's Safety Strategy* will build on this existing investment.

Police resources are spent addressing and responding to violence against women, and improving community safety more generally. The Courts, the Office of Public Prosecution and Correctional Services all form part of the response to violence against women. Services are provided to victims of crime.

Crime Prevention Victoria has developed *Safer Streets and Homes: A Crime and Violence Prevention Strategy for Victoria 2002-2006* and undertakes a range of other activities to enhance community safety. The Government invests in initiatives to prevent bullying in schools and to improve security on public transport and in taxis. The Victorian Workcover Authority is developing a code of practice for the prevention of bullying and violence in the workplace.

In relation to violence against women specifically, Centres Against Sexual Assault (CASAs) provide crisis care and support, counselling, advocacy and referral to recent and past victims/survivors of sexual violence. Women's refuges, domestic violence outreach services, a telephone crisis and

referral service, and an immigrant women's service are provided for women who have experienced family violence. Family violence prevention and support programs are provided. The Government is improving responses to family violence in Indigenous communities through the development of the *Indigenous Family Violence Strategy*. These and other programs and initiatives contribute to the safety of women and girls in Victoria.

Local government, non-government organisations, community groups and community activists also make a substantial contribution to addressing violence against women. Local government works to promote community safety and provides a range of services to its residents. Non-government organisations provide a wide range of services, drawing on funding from Government and other sources. Women's organisations, community groups, community activists and other non-government organisations have worked hard over many years to change community attitudes to violence, to improve services and to improve the justice system response. Indigenous and multicultural organisations have also played a role in addressing violence against women within their communities.

Despite concerted efforts to improve women's safety there remains an unacceptably high level of violence against women in Victoria.

Through the principles and policy directions in this strategy, the Victorian Government will provide a way forward in reducing violence against women and fear experienced by women.

3.2 Principles to Guide our Practice

The following principles guide the Government's planning and action to prevent and respond to violence against women.¹⁰⁵

1. Preventing violence against women is the responsibility of the whole community. It requires a shared community understanding that violence against women in all its forms is unacceptable.
2. Government has a responsibility to show leadership in preventing violence against women and to ensure co-ordinated planning, monitoring and evaluation across all areas of Government.
3. Physical and sexual violence against women are crimes which warrant a strong and effective criminal justice response.
4. Men are responsible for their use of violence. They must take responsibility for learning non-violent ways of interacting with others and challenge other men to change their behaviour.
5. The effective prevention of violence against women requires education and a range of other activities, including:
 - Initiatives to change community attitudes and behaviour in relation to violence against women (often called **primary prevention**)
 - Initiatives to respond at the earliest possible stage to people at particular risk of experiencing or perpetrating violence (often called **secondary prevention** or **early intervention**)
 - Responding to victims and perpetrators of violence to prevent violence from reoccurring (often called **tertiary prevention**).
6. The prevention of violence against women will be most effective if consistent messages are delivered across primary, secondary and tertiary responses and across all sectors (e.g. police, courts, health and community services, education programs, workplaces, crisis and support services for women and programs for men who use violence).
7. An understanding of the different life experiences of men and women and the power imbalance between men and women (often called a 'gendered analysis') must inform education and prevention activities and be incorporated into the school curriculum framework.
8. Prevention efforts must build on existing good practice and focus on what has been shown to be effective through research, evaluation and data collection that incorporates a gendered understanding of violence and an awareness of the way gender intersects with culture and other factors.
9. Women's diverse cultural backgrounds and life experiences must be taken into account in preventing and responding to violence against women, including the experiences of women with a disability. Women must be actively empowered and involved in finding solutions. Solutions should draw on the strengths and values of each culture or community.
10. Initiatives to address family violence in Indigenous communities must be led by Indigenous people.
11. Community consultation, ownership and participation are essential in creating effective solutions to prevent and reduce violence. All women and men play an important role in working to reduce violence against women in all its forms.

3 Key Directions

The Government proposes to focus its efforts in four key areas to reduce the level, and fear, of violence against women in Victoria.

1. Protection and justice
2. Options for women
3. Violence prevention and education
4. Community action and co-ordination.

3.3.1 Protection and Justice

Physical and sexual violence against women and stalking are crimes. Women who experience violence must be afforded protection. It is also imperative that those who commit violent acts against women are held accountable for their behaviour and that women have access to effective legal remedies.

The role of the criminal justice system in responding to violence against women is pivotal to a broad community understanding that violence against women is unacceptable. Concerns have been expressed about the adequacy of the criminal justice response to family violence, sexual assault and stalking by a variety of stakeholders and service providers. The Victorian Government will review the way the justice system responds to violence against women to ensure that women and children are safer and that those who are responsible for violence are held accountable.

Proposed Key Directions

■ Reform criminal law and procedure

Legislation is in place recognising the criminal nature of violence against women. However, many

women are still not able to obtain adequate protection and many offenders are not held accountable for their behaviour.¹⁰⁷ Women who have been sexually assaulted often feel re-traumatised by the criminal justice system itself and concern has been expressed that women who experience family violence are not adequately protected through the legal response. Intervention orders are being used for minor neighbourhood disputes through the stalking provisions and this has possibly served to undermine the true purpose of obtaining an intervention order. The law and the way it is applied in practice by police, courts, the legal profession and other agencies can be significantly improved. These and other issues must be addressed through reform of law and procedure.

■ Increase reporting and reduce attrition

Currently most acts of violence against women are not dealt with under the criminal justice system. Significant under-reporting of violence against women means that many incidents do not come to police attention.¹⁰⁸ In cases of stalking, women have indicated that their reports are sometimes trivialised or dismissed and they consider it futile to report subsequent incidents. Even when women do report violence, fear of consequences or other factors means many women want to drop charges and take no further action, especially in sexual offences and family violence cases. Violence against women has a particularly high 'attrition rate'. This means that fewer and fewer cases proceed through each stage of the criminal justice process. The result is that only a small percentage of the reported cases result in the offender being put on trial and convicted.

There are complex reasons for the under-reporting of violence and the high attrition rate, however, they must be actively addressed so that perpetrators of violence are held accountable for their behaviour. The Victorian Law Reform Commission is undertaking a number of reviews which will inform future Government responses in this area.

■ Improve support and advocacy for women

Violence is inherently disempowering, particularly when it involves sexual violence or involves a repeated pattern of abuse in a family or workplace setting. It can therefore be enormously difficult for women to seek help to address violence, whether they wish to report the matter to police, are trying to navigate the courts or are seeking to have bullying or harassment addressed within their workplace. Some women fear that they will be disbelieved, not taken seriously, or partially blamed when they report or disclose violence to authorities. Women may fear that the violence will escalate or there will be some retribution for disclosing the violence. Women may also have concerns for their children, face financial barriers or lack support from family and friends. Many women choose not to report violence or pursue cases through the courts because of these difficulties. The provision of advocacy and support for women is critical in enabling women to access the justice system or to have violence addressed in a workplace or educational setting. While a number of services are already in place, it is important for these services to be strengthened, to be better able to respond to the diversity of women's needs and experiences and for more women to be aware that these services are available.

■ Improve police response to violence against women

Police provide the front-line 24-hour response to violence against women. The most effective models internationally appear to be those in which there is consistent police action demonstrating the serious nature of violence regardless of the relationship between the parties, and co-ordination and effective referral between the police and other agencies.

Where physical or sexual violence is repeated over time and forms a pattern of abuse, early intervention is critical. Early intervention is also critical in managing stalking to minimise the risk that stalking will escalate to physical violence, reduce the likelihood that stalking will become entrenched and avoid long-term psychological harm to the victim.¹⁰⁹ The way police investigate violence against women is critical. Work in the United Kingdom has shown that improving the way police investigate family violence incidents, including the use of photographs to provide evidence, increases the likelihood of a guilty plea by the perpetrator.¹¹⁰

Increasing the proportion of family violence incidents attended by police that result in a police-assisted application for intervention orders and/or charges being laid is an important way of demonstrating the seriousness with which police treat family violence incidents. Ensuring that breaches of intervention orders are prosecuted where sufficient evidence is available is also important.¹¹¹ However, there is also concern that victims of stalking and family violence may be encouraged to take out an intervention order instead of pursuing criminal charges. Civil

remedies, such as intervention orders, should not be seen as an alternative to the laying of criminal charges.

Victoria Police have conducted an internal review of responses to violence against women entitled *Victoria Police Violence Against Women Strategy: A Way Forward*. The review identified the need for enhanced training and education for police, improved data collection and increased police accountability when responding to incidents of violence against women. The operating procedures for investigating sexual assault will be reviewed. In relation to family violence, police will streamline access to intervention orders, review the role of family violence liaison officers, and develop a new police code of practice to respond to family violence.

■ Improve pathways between police and other services

Police have an important role in ensuring that women who experience violence are aware of the services available to support them and are effectively linked to those services. Partnerships between police and other agencies are critical to ensuring that these linkages are effective. Research shows that the quality, consistency and reliability of the messages police and other agencies provide to women significantly influence women's ability to achieve positive outcomes for themselves and their children. Early intervention by police and referral to relevant services may avert more serious harm, for example, in stalking cases.

The Safety of Homeless Women

A strong link exists between violence against women and homelessness.

Family violence is a major trigger of homelessness: in 2000/2001, family violence was the most common reason for people seeking assistance at Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) agencies in Victoria (28 per cent). Assistance was sought primarily because of family violence in 57 per cent of support periods provided for women with children and 62 per cent of support periods for unaccompanied women.¹¹²

The definition of homelessness extends beyond 'living on the streets' and includes lack of access to secure and safe accommodation. If women live in fear of violence from their partner or another family member, their accommodation

is neither safe nor secure. Women who experience violence in their homes are already 'homeless' in this sense. Women may also have to leave their homes in order to try and stop the violence.

Many women who are homeless have experienced family violence or breakdown. They may be subject to further forms of violence because they have no accommodation or are forced to live in unsafe housing. They often have limited access to services and reduced social support networks. They may experience prejudice, marginalisation and isolation.

Responses to violence against women must acknowledge the relationship between women's safety and homelessness by providing women and children the right to live in their homes, free of violence or fear.

■ Improve women's access to legal information and services

Access to legal information and services is critical for women who have experienced violence to exercise their rights under criminal and civil law. Some women may find it particularly difficult to access legal information and services, including women in rural and regional areas, women with disabilities or a mental illness, and young women. The Diversity Issues Unit in the Department of Justice is undertaking a Women's Policy and Cultural Diversity Inventory Project. The project aims to enhance the capacity of the Department of Justice to respond to the needs of women and multicultural communities. Access to and understanding of justice services, the needs of prisoners and offenders, women's safety (including family violence), consumer protection, the need for language services and managing diversity are key themes of the project. The Inventory Project will provide mechanisms to improve women's access to legal information and services.

The Safety of Women with Mental Illness

Many women with mental illness or psychiatric disabilities have experienced abuse or violence. A significant proportion of women with mental illness were sexually abused as children and adolescents. Women with mental illness may experience poverty and live in unsafe housing. During episodes of unwellness women with mental illness are often vulnerable to abuse and violence both in hospital and in the broader community. Women with mental illness do not

■ Improve responses to psychological and emotional violence

Violent behaviour which is not a criminal offence must also be dealt with appropriately to ensure the safety of women and that perpetrators are held accountable and do not repeat the violent behaviour. For example, teachers and employers must respond appropriately to non-criminal bullying and harassment in the school or workplace. If violence is ignored, the perpetrator's behaviour goes unchallenged, or the victim is partially blamed for the violence, this contributes to a culture in which violence continues. Inappropriate responses have the effect of discouraging women and girls from reporting violence to their teachers or supervisors, leaving them vulnerable to further violence.

always have access to education and support services which can assist them in exercising their legal rights to live free of physical and sexual violence, including ending abusive relationships. Women with mental illness have indicated that they are often disbelieved if they report physical, sexual or psychological violence to police, service providers or health professionals. Frequently their allegations are not taken seriously or properly investigated and offenders are not charged.¹¹³

3.3.2 Options for Women

Improving the range of options available to women who have experienced violence, and the information and support available, will assist women to envisage a future without violence and move forward into that future. This includes crisis support and protection as well as options to assist women on the journey to healing and recovery.

Proposed Key Directions

■ Reduce the barriers to seeking assistance

For women who experience physical and sexual violence there are many barriers to seeking assistance. Women may fear for their safety or their children's safety. They may fear that violence will escalate if they report it to police or other authorities. Poverty and concern about financial issues may be a barrier to women seeking assistance.¹¹⁴ Women who experience violence in the workplace may fear losing their jobs if they report violence to their supervisor. Some women do not recognise what has happened to them as 'violence'. Women may lack information about services and how to access them or they may have misgivings about services, fearing that they will force them to take particular action. Women may be reluctant to seek assistance because they have received inconsistent, unhelpful, racist or other discriminatory responses in the past.¹¹⁵ Barriers for women vary according to the diverse needs and circumstances of women. Services for women who have experienced violence must cater for all women, including Indigenous and non-Indigenous women, women from diverse cultural backgrounds, women with disabilities and women who may have other specific needs or experiences.

The Government will take a more proactive role in seeking to overcome these barriers through a range of activities including the provision of information and working to ensure positive messages are conveyed to women about the unacceptability of violence against women. The reactions of police, courts and service providers when women first report violence can be critical. Research has shown that where women in family violence situations consistently receive messages that 'they deserve better', it has a significant bearing on decision-making and the likelihood of positive outcomes for women and their children.¹¹⁶

■ Provide information to women through universal services

Universal services such as those provided by general practitioners, maternity services, maternal and child health services, child care agencies, pre-schools, schools, neighbourhood houses, community health centres and hospitals are an important way to provide information to women about a range of issues including violence against women. Universal services may be a particularly useful way of providing information to women, especially in rural areas where there are fewer specialist services. The provision of information to parents through universal services is particularly important given the impact of family violence on children and young people and evidence which shows that family violence may begin or escalate in pregnancy.¹¹⁷

Information on sexual assault and harassment, family violence and workplace violence should also be available in other places women may routinely visit, including workplaces, youth clubs, sporting clubs, senior citizens clubs, hairdressers,

banks, shopping centres and migrant resource centres. It is important for information to be readily available in a range of languages and formats.

■ **Increase awareness amongst family members and friends**

The Women's Safety Australia Survey showed that women are more likely to reveal physical or sexual violence to family members or friends than to police or services providers.¹¹⁸ The initial reaction when a woman talks to someone about violence can make a huge difference to her capacity to seek assistance in the future and her ability to heal and recover from violence. Some studies have found that women are twice as likely to follow through with legal action against the perpetrator if they have tangible material and social support from family and friends.¹¹⁹ It is therefore critical that a wide range of people in the community are well informed about the different forms of violence against women, the damaging impacts for women and children, and have access to information about how best to support a woman who has experienced violence. Changing community attitudes to violence against women will create an environment in which women can disclose violence without feeling they are being judged or that others may blame them for the violence. It is important that the community is supportive of women who have experienced violence and assists them to recover and heal.

■ **Enhance the capacity, quality and flexibility of services**

A wider and more flexible range of assistance options needs to be available to enable women who have experienced violence to choose the

types of assistance that best suit their needs. In particular, women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, Indigenous women and women with disabilities require service responses which are relevant to their particular needs.

In relation to family violence, for example, secure refuges must be one of a number of options available to women. Outreach services which support women in their own homes and other forms of accommodation must also be available. Women have also indicated that they want services to support them regardless of their decision about ending or remaining in a violent relationship. Service responses must be flexible enough to provide support to women with diverse needs and living circumstances, at the earliest possible stage, and in hours that suit women's lives. An appropriate justice system response and the provision of services and behaviour change programs for men who use violence can increase the options available to women.

Flexible services are also required for women who have experienced sexual assault, stalking and workplace violence. The needs and range of responses required to support women who have experienced sexual assault will be informed and developed in the context of implementing the recommendations of the Review of Services of Victims of Crime in Victoria.

Increased co-operation between child protection services, children's support services and family violence services is also necessary to protect women and their children and ensure they receive appropriate support. As the community becomes more aware of the impact on children who witness or experience family violence, service systems

must develop practice frameworks which take into account the particular needs of those children. Currently child protection and family violence services are working towards such a practice framework which ensures that women are not blamed for the violence and are supported to assist their children who may also be victims.

■ **Support women to remain in the home**

Many women who experience family violence escape to women's refuges in order to avoid the violence. In doing so, they often leave behind family and established support networks, community ties, and belongings. Their children may have to change school and experience significant upheaval. Some women want the perpetrator of violence to leave the family home so they are able to remain there safely with their children. Safety and other considerations mean this is not an option for all women. However, where it is safe and appropriate, women who want to exercise a right to remain in the home should be supported to do so.

The Crimes (Family Violence) Act 1987 provides a legal mechanism through which courts can prevent men from approaching or entering the home as a condition of an intervention order against them. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the courts do not consistently apply this provision and whilst some courts are prepared to make such orders others are less likely to do so.

Women cannot exercise a right to remain in their homes unless a range of well co-ordinated responses are in place to support their choices. Responses must include legal protection from further acts of violence, an appropriate police response, support of family violence services,

health and community-based services and the provision of practical assistance to improve security in the home. After hours responses are important as a significant proportion of family violence occurs after hours.

■ **Assist women in the healing process**

Women's recovery from physical, sexual and psychological violence can be a long and difficult process, particularly where women have experienced repeated violence. Recent Victorian research on recovery from family violence shows that the recovery process typically begins while the woman is still in the violent situation.¹²⁰ There is often some trigger event that creates a shift in her thinking and results in the woman beginning to seek help and information. Recovery occurs over time and involves a rebuilding of positive relationships. A woman's relationship with her children, friends and family, and links with a range of community activities, specialist services and support groups may all play an important role in her recovery. Education and learning can also play an important role.

Support for women who have experienced violence is important because the fear, mistrust and anxiety caused by violence can be difficult to overcome. Many women become detached from their normal support networks. Support and other therapeutic interventions can help women regain a sense of control and reconstitute their lives.¹²¹ In cases of workplace violence, assisting women in the healing process may include facilitating a smooth transition back to work to counter feelings of isolation or exclusion that the woman may experience.

Family Violence and Child Protection

Child protection and family violence workers have a shared interest and responsibility to work with families where family violence occurs. Family violence was a characteristic in at least 41% (13,156) of notifications received by Child Protection in 2001/2002.¹² An audit of case files conducted for the High Risk Infants Service Quality Initiatives Project found family violence in 75% of cases.¹³ Correspondingly, many women seeking support through family violence services have children. In many situations, the two service systems are working with the same family.

Differing philosophical, structural and legal frameworks that define Child Protection and Family Violence Services in Victoria has meant that historically, the two systems have had a very different approach to working with families where family violence occurs. Collaborative practice between agencies is beginning to occur as each agency develops a greater understanding and respect for the other's role.

Family Violence Services and Child Protection share a common aim to respond to family members affected by family violence in a way which:

- Supports and empowers women to make safe choices.
- Ensures children's safety and well-being.
- Clearly locates the responsibility for the violence with the person who perpetrates the violence.

When working with a family, a child protection worker must focus on the safety of the child. They will assess the situation to ensure that an adult is able to provide a safe environment for the child. Similarly, Family Violence Services assess the safety needs of the child in the context of providing safety for the woman.

Responding to men who use violence against women and children is particularly challenging. The men may be aggressive towards workers or may be compliant and engaging while denying the violence. They may be unable or unwilling to attend men's behaviour change programs. They may not have received a criminal justice response to the violence perpetrated. The Child Protection program is obliged to work with and assess all family members and a number Family Violence Services are also exploring ways they can work with men who use violence. Partnerships between Child Protection, Victoria Police and other agencies to improve responses and options to women, and to men who use violence, will lead to a more integrated and effective service response in the future.

The forthcoming publication of *The Protocols Resource Guide* by the Department of Human Services aims to provide support and information for child protection and family violence professionals who come into contact with children and young people who have experienced family violence. The guide will enhance cross-sector collaboration and lead to improved outcomes for children and their families who have experienced family violence.

3.3.3 Violence Prevention and Education

Prevention of violence against women includes any law, policy, program or activity aimed at reducing the level, fear, and impact of violence against women or changing community perceptions of violence against women. Prevention is about individuals, communities and governments taking responsibility for creating a safer environment for women, and for all members of the community.

Education is an important means of informing the community and changing attitudes in relation to violence against women. This includes education of children from pre-school age and throughout their schooling about positive life values such as respect for others, communication skills, gender awareness and programs about violence in relationships. While all children and young people should receive education on these issues, more targeted programs for children and families at risk are also beneficial. The provision of information and education to the general community, a range of professionals and service providers and targeted programs for those who have experienced violence and those who use violence are an important element of violence prevention.

A range of government, non-government and community agencies currently play a role in preventing violence against women and informing and changing community attitudes. However, there has not been a consistent approach across agencies or clear principles underpinning prevention programs. This has limited the effectiveness of efforts to prevent violence against women in Victoria.

Proposed Key Directions

■ Support a mix of primary, secondary and tertiary prevention activities

Violence against women is a complex criminal and social issue. No single prevention approach will be effective in isolation. The prevention of violence against women requires a mix of activities, including:

- Initiatives to inform and change community attitudes and behaviour in relation to violence against women (often called **primary prevention**)
- Initiatives to respond at the earliest possible stage to people at particular risk of experiencing or perpetrating violence (often called **secondary prevention** or **early intervention**)
- Responding to perpetrators and supporting victims of violence to prevent the violence from recurring (often called **tertiary prevention**).

■ Provide consistent messages across sectors

The prevention of violence against women will be most effective if consistent messages are delivered across primary, secondary and tertiary responses and across all sectors. Police, courts, health and community services, education programs, workplaces, crisis and support services for women and programs for men who use violence must all give consistent messages that:

- All forms of violence against women are unacceptable
- Physical and sexual violence and stalking are crimes and will be treated as such
- Responsibility for violence rests with the offender and not the victim
- Women are no more likely to make false allegations about physical or sexual violence than men
- Violence is not an acceptable part of any personal or professional relationship
- Violence, bullying or sexual harassment is not acceptable in homes, schools, workplaces or the broader community
- Women should not have to be afraid for their safety on the streets, on public transport, in licensed premises, entertainment venues or other public places.
- Ensure that violence prevention initiatives reflect the differences between men and women's experiences

Women and men's lives are different, and therefore their experiences, needs, issues and priorities are also different. Inequality and power differences

continue to exist between women and men in society. Gender analysis involves taking these differences into account in identifying the issues of concern to the Government and in planning, developing and evaluating programs to address those issues. Different issues may need to be addressed and/or different approaches taken so that women's specific needs can be met. Gender analysis requires data that reveals the differences between men and women. Gender analysis must also take into account the differences between women, including age differences, cultural differences and issues for women with disabilities.¹²⁴

Women's and men's experiences and needs in relation to violence are often quite different. A gender analysis of violence prevention highlights the need for:

- A focus on family violence and sexual assault
- A focus on both criminal and non-criminal forms of violence, including harassment or psychological abuse
- The development of programs which recognise and respond to the fact that most perpetrators of violence against women are men
- Programs which acknowledge that only a small proportion of violence against women is reported to police or other authorities
- Programs which address the inherently disempowering nature of violence against women, especially violence which is sexual in nature or part of a repeated pattern of abuse
- Sexual harassment is a form of violence and discrimination which particularly affects women

■ Support education and violence prevention programs in schools

Schools have a substantial role in supporting and promoting women's safety and addressing issues related to violence against women and children. This can be achieved by the development of a statewide curriculum framework that is informed by gender analysis and which fosters positive life values and relationships. Implementing anti-bullying and violence programs and promoting a respectful school culture recognises women's right to safety.

For effective education a whole of school community approach is required, with teachers, students and parents committed to providing a safe school environment. Linking with the local community to support initiatives and provide expertise will further enhance the education process. The role of young people themselves in the promotion of community safety must be recognised. This can be achieved through such programs as Student Action Teams which are helping to teach young people to make a difference to their school and the community in areas which include personal safety and reduction of risk factors with regard to safety.

Along with the more general education programs, it is also important that schools recognise that additional programs for female and male students who have experienced or used violence may be required. Schools are a primary source for identifying violent and abusive behaviours in young people and are well-positioned to put early intervention strategies into place, e.g. young men who are exhibiting violent behaviours could be provided with or referred to prevention programs within the school or local community.

■ Conduct targeted community education activities

In order for prevention programs to be relevant to people from diverse age groups, cultural backgrounds and life experiences they must be tailored to the needs of particular groups and acknowledge the context in which violence occurs. Targeted information and education activities are likely to be more effective than generic campaigns. Sexual violence, violence occurring in relationships and families, and violence and sexual harassment in the workplace should be a particular focus of education campaigns. Culturally specific and age-appropriate information resources may be an important part of raising community awareness. Campaigns should utilise the rural and ethnic media as well as metropolitan media and will require specific approaches to ensure that people from particular population groups receive information in the format that is accessible. This includes the provision of information in relevant community languages.

Prevention programs may target men, women, children, various professional groups or the broader community. However, all prevention initiatives should be conducted in a way that promotes women's safety and incorporates women's viewpoints and experiences. It is important that women are not portrayed in a way which serves to further disempower women as a group. The participation of women is critical to the effective planning, implementation and evaluation of prevention programs. This involves acknowledging the meaning, language and context of women's experiences and perceptions. It is also important for men who are in leadership positions to publicly voice their opposition to violence against women and serve as positive role models for young men.

■ Enhance community involvement and ownership

Approaches that actively engage people at a local level and foster community development and ownership of solutions are important in preventing violence. Activities can be focussed around schools, workplaces, and/or communities. 'Community' may be defined as a 'community of interest' as well as a community within a certain geographic area. A variety of consultation and engagement processes may be required for men and women, for people of different ages, for people from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds and life experiences, for people with disabilities and other groups. Women's voices have often not been heard and their perspectives not taken into account, so particular strategies may be required to ensure their broad participation.

■ Increase professional education about violence against women

Research shows that only a small proportion of women who have experienced sexual assault or other forms of violence contact specialist services such as centres against sexual assault and family violence services. It is therefore critical that a wide range of professionals from both the legal system and health and community services have increased understanding about violence against women and are able to provide information to women about their rights and support services available, providing sensitive and appropriate professional services for women. Doctors, nurses, psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers, police, court registrars, lawyers, magistrates and judges, bilingual workers, Indigenous workers, disability support workers and a range of other community

workers should all receive appropriate professional education on violence against women. Increased education for professionals about violence against women will help reduce the barriers to women disclosing violence and seeking assistance. Professional education should foster appropriate responses to women with diverse needs, including women from different age groups and cultural backgrounds and women with disabilities.

■ Respond in an appropriate and timely manner to people who use violence

The criminal justice system provides the primary response to violent offenders. However, there is growing interest in programs aimed at changing the behaviour of people who perpetrate violence as an important part of the continuum of prevention strategies.

There are a number of agencies conducting programs or groups for men who use violence toward their family members. The Victorian Government has recently produced *Taking Responsibility: A framework for developing best practice in programs for men who use violence toward family members*.

The framework outlines the important elements for best practice, including: the need for programs to have the safety of women and children as their primary objective; clear pathways to enter programs; an assessment framework; a high level of accountability and adherence to clear standards and principles; good linkages and protocols with other family violence services; a capacity to respond to men from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds; and the need to evaluate the effectiveness of programs.¹²⁸ This report confirms that programs for men who use violence are an

important part of the continuum of prevention and intervention strategies to reduce family violence.

Early intervention programs targeting young men are identified as being particularly important in preventing future violence. Through the Government's crime and violence prevention strategy, *'Safer Streets and Homes'*, initiatives which seek to intervene early with young boys and men who use violence towards their family members are being identified, including peer relationship models.

A critical component of any comprehensive strategy to reduce sexual assault in our community is early intervention with treatment programs for sex offenders. The Male Adolescent Program for Positive Sexuality (MAPPSS) at Juvenile Justice facilities and the Adolescent Sex Offender Treatment Program run through the Child Protection Society are important programs.

It is essential that a range of programs, underpinned by a strong, consistent and systematic criminal justice response, are available to ensure appropriate consequences and opportunities for change for people who use violence against women.

■ Create safer public places

The impact that the construction of buildings and public spaces can have on safety is increasingly recognised and urban design is being harnessed to create public spaces that feel, and are, safer. Simple measures such as providing adequate signage or good lighting for pedestrian routes, along with more complex responses involving site layout, building design and landscaping to minimise

opportunities for anti-social or criminal activity are examples of the importance of good urban design in providing attractive public spaces that are accessible to women as equal members of the wider community. Extensive consultation with the community is essential to identifying the needs and aspirations for public places and addressing safety concerns that may discourage some members of the community from using the place. Such consultation must include input from women and reflect their diverse needs, aspirations and concerns.

A range of other activities can also assist in creating safer public places in Victoria. Confident living programs, responsible serving of alcohol programs and targeted crime prevention programs all improve community safety and generate greater community confidence in public places. These issues are being addressed through the Government's crime and violence prevention strategy *'Safer Streets and Homes'* developed by Crime Prevention Victoria. Guidelines to improve safety at Automatic Teller Machines (ATMs) and reduce assaults in and around licensed premises are two specific areas of focus for Crime Prevention Victoria.

■ Ensure that we are doing what works

Government must focus its prevention efforts on what has been shown to be effective through research, evaluation and data collection that is based on a gendered understanding of violence and an awareness of cultural and other differences.

It is important to increase our understanding of the factors that contribute to violence against women and to assess the effectiveness of various

prevention approaches. Such research should not be limited to a narrow medical or risk factor approach. There is not one simple cause of violence that suggests a simple solution. Rather the broader social and structural factors that contribute to violence against women should be the subject of further practical research which generates options for action.

Improved data collection capturing the extent of previously unreported violence against women,

data in relation to sexual violence and data on violence occurring in homes and workplaces where the perpetrator is known to the victim, is important to inform future action and to monitor progress. Greater collaboration across agencies in sharing, analysing and using data and evaluation of existing programs are also critical in ensuring that responses to violence against women are effective and underpinned by sound data.

Principles for the Development of Urban Design Guidelines to Address Safety and Inclusiveness

Design for community safety

- Clearly define the difference and boundary between public and private space
- Foster natural surveillance by providing buildings with "active" ground floors and orient these to streets, squares and parks
- Bring together the main lines of movement to concentrate activity and mix uses to increase the intensity and duration of activity
- Provide clear open lines of sight, clearly identify entry and exit points, and provide alternative means of exit
- Provide good lighting and visibility to create an environment that helps people to easily find their way

Design for accessibility and inclusiveness

- Address the needs of all users, including those with disabilities
- Direct public transport, walking and cycling into the heart of an area, and as close as possible to meeting areas and public spaces
- Ensure that new development is of suitable scale to encourage interaction and participation, and also to allow for retreat and individual activity
- Establish a high-quality pedestrian-oriented street environment that is visually interesting, comprehensive, varied and well-connected

Design for diversity and choice

- Reinforce differences between places by highlighting and celebrating unique qualities
- Respond to context, in particular underlying landscape character, cultural heritage, value, existing built form, ecology and habitat

The Safety of Women with Disabilities

Approximately 18% of women in Australia have a disability.³⁷ Overseas research shows that women with disabilities are assaulted, raped and abused twice as often as women without disabilities.³⁸ Violence may be perpetrated by a family member, partner, paid or unpaid carer, work colleague or supervisor or an acquaintance or stranger. Women with disabilities may experience physical, sexual, psychological and emotional violence.

Violence experienced by women with disabilities that is perpetrated by a carer or partner can include the withholding of medication, threats of being placed in an institution, threats of punitive responses, control of finances, and being exploited or taken advantage of because of their disability. Violence perpetrated by a carer is particularly harmful to women as they may rely on the carers for day-to-day support needs.

Violence is a form of power and control being exercised by the carer against women with disabilities. The increased likelihood of women with disabilities living in institutions or unsafe housing because of poverty may also increase their vulnerability to violence.

Women with disabilities may face the same barriers to reporting violence and seeking assistance as other women. However, they may face additional barriers such as: reliance on carers for day to day support needs; lack of awareness and inexperience of service providers in addressing the needs of women with disabilities; the inaccessibility of services to people with disabilities; lack of alternative care options; community stigma and prejudice associated with disabilities; and women's fear that their reports of violence are likely to be disbelieved or not taken seriously. Many women with disabilities who have been sexually assaulted say that they think they will be disbelieved if they report violence to police or other services.

3.3.4 Community Action and Co-ordination

Community action and co-operation between local agencies is often the best way to achieve long-term benefits for the community. To effectively prevent and respond to violence against women, action must occur at a community level and there must be co-ordination between local agencies. Police, courts, health services, family violence services, centres against sexual assault, local government, schools, workplaces and a wide

range of other agencies all play a role in preventing and responding to violence against women. They must work effectively together at a local level to reduce violence against women.

It must also be acknowledged that Victoria is made up of a wide range of diverse communities, based on geographic area, cultural, ethnic or religious groupings, common interest or some other shared experience. It is important to engage all of these diverse communities if we are to create a safer society for women, children and men.

Proposed Key Directions

■ Value the role of communities in addressing violence against women

Government recognises and values the benefits that occur when local agencies work together to tackle violence against women and is committed to supporting this work. Some of the key benefits include:

- The development of a shared commitment, goals, and principles for addressing violence against women and increased momentum for action
- Pooling of resources and better targeting of resources to achieve results
- Increased capacity to identify gaps and problems and collectively find solutions
- More effective prevention and education activities, leading to increased community awareness and more visible services
- Increased co-ordination and referrals between agencies so that women and children are safer and receive the support they need
- The promotion of good practice and increased professional development opportunities
- A greater capacity to translate policy into action and for action to subsequently inform policy development.

Areas aligned with municipal boundaries are a useful starting point when thinking about community action and co-ordination. Local government plays a particularly important role. Larger regional or sub-regional or smaller neighbourhood areas may provide a more useful focus for action in some contexts.

■ Strengthen the capacity of communities to address violence against women

A range of community agencies, committees and networks currently or potentially play an important role in improving women's safety. In particular, Local Safety Committees in each municipality, Family Violence Networks, Primary Care Partnerships (PCPs), community partnerships under the BEST START program, Indigenous Family Violence Action Groups, centres against sexual assault, women's health services, community health services, non-government organisations, women's groups and others. Schools also provide an important focus for community action.

Local government plays a significant role in promoting women's safety through developing municipal health plans, crime prevention and community safety activities, urban planning and other programs. Local government may create a range of opportunities for community consultation and participation in relation to these activities.

The Government considers it an important priority to strengthen the capacity of community agencies and networks to address violence against women. Information to encourage local agencies to have an interest in, and commitment to, women's safety is important, as is the development of shared principles and goals for addressing violence against women across agencies. The development of a Women's Safety Charter based on the principles in the *Women's Safety Strategy* will be a tool to assist in this work. Agency commitment, staff time and funding for local projects may assist in addressing violence against women at a local level. Community agencies report that statewide policy directions that are consistent across sectors make it easier for them to work collaboratively at the local level.

■ Support for rural and regional communities

Large travel distances, fewer services and more limited after hours responses are factors affecting service provision in rural areas. Women who experience violence in rural areas can feel very isolated. They may be concerned about confidentiality or community attitudes. A strong supportive response from rural communities that reinforces the unacceptable nature of violence against women is critical in reducing violence against women and fear of violence in rural Victoria and ensuring there are options available for women.

Safety of Women in Pregnancy

Women who are pregnant may experience particular risks in relation to family violence, causing serious harm to both the mother and unborn child.¹⁵² Research shows that women often experience their first assault during pregnancy or experience an increase in assaults, targeting the abdomen, genitals and breast areas placing the woman and her child at serious risk. Pregnant women who experience physical assault are also more likely to have multiple trauma sites than non-pregnant women experiencing violence.¹⁵³

While the extent of violence against pregnant women in Australia has yet to be ascertained, evidence suggests it is significant. International research indicates that between 4-8% and up to 21% of pregnant women experience violence that causes injury.¹⁵⁴ Babies born to women who have experienced violence are more likely to be at a lower birth rate, to be more vulnerable to illness, be at risk of premature delivery and at greater risk of death in the months following birth.¹⁵⁵

■ Support 'communities of interest' in improving women's safety

Community action to address violence against women is not limited to people who live in the same locality. The essence of community is a shared identity and reciprocity over time.¹⁵² 'Community action' may be focussed around a particular cultural group, ethnic community or any group of people with a common interest (e.g. women with disabilities, lesbian women, women working in the sex industries). People in the same workplace, union, school or university may also form a 'community of interest' for the purposes of taking action to address violence against women.

'Communities of interest' can facilitate the participation and involvement of women and men who may not be well represented in other local activities and programs. Action to address violence against women that is driven or supported by a 'community of interest' is likely to be more relevant to members of that community and more effective in reaching them.

■ Move towards an integrated response to family violence

Multi-agency co-ordination and action must progress towards an integrated response to family violence, incorporating both the criminal justice and human services response.¹⁵³ Integrated models place the safety of women and children, and the responsibility of perpetrators for their violence, at the centre of the model. Under this framework, all agencies work co-operatively to ensure timely and appropriate services are provided and that there are smooth pathways between different parts of the system. There has been growing support for such a model within Victoria amongst service providers, police and other agencies.

In Australia a co-ordinated inter-agency approach has been trialled in the ACT with support from Commonwealth Partnerships Against Domestic Violence Program. The 'Duluth Model' developed in Minnesota USA is a model which seeks to address the system as a whole and has received international recognition and acclaim. Many communities have attempted to adapt the Duluth Model to their own circumstances.

Progressing towards a truly co-ordinated response requires co-operation across agencies over a number of years. High-level support from relevant agencies and a commitment to the monitoring and evaluation of the system is critical to the development of an effective integrated response. Victoria will develop its own approach, learning from Australian and overseas models. The *Women's Safety Strategy* provides a strong foundation on which this co-operative work across agencies will evolve.

■ Support best practice and evaluation

Research and evaluation can enhance the capacity of communities to achieve their aims by identifying what has been achieved, what is working well, and areas for improvement. Stronger and more effective community action and co-ordination will also result if there is an increased opportunity to learn from good practice occurring in other communities throughout Australia and internationally. Forums for communities to share best practice information and ideas in addressing violence against women are important to maximise learnings and increase our combined capacity to improve women's safety in Victoria.

Safety of Women Carers

Carers provide vital unpaid support and care to family members or friends affected by a chronic illness, disability, mental illness, dementia or other conditions. Sixty-two per cent of unpaid carers in Victoria are women.¹⁴

Women carers may be vulnerable to violence from a person they care for, both as a consequence of behaviour changes due to illness or as a continuing element of an abusive relationship. This can include physical, sexual, emotional or psychological harm.

Violence against women carers may be exacerbated by complex barriers to reporting the violence, including the carers' commitment to the person requiring care, a lack of support networks and lack of alternative care options.

Anecdotally, there are many parallels to domestic violence in the way women carers who have experienced violence tend to think about their experiences, for example, their powerlessness, the taboos and the lack of support from workers/family if they do raise the issue.¹⁵

3.4 Monitoring and Evaluation

The Government will provide an interim report outlining the progress of the *Women's Safety Strategy* after two years and a final report after five years.

Many complex factors influence the level of violence and fear of violence experienced by women in Victoria. Changes in either direction cannot solely be attributed to Government policy. In evaluating the effectiveness of the *Women's Safety Strategy*, it will therefore be important to use a combination of approaches. Government will:

- Measure the degree to which the overall aim of the strategy is being achieved
- Monitor the degree to which the initiatives in each of the four areas have achieved their stated outcomes
- Ensure a process of continuous learning and improvement over the five-year life of the strategy.

Measuring Progress Towards the Aim

The overall aim of the *Women's Safety Strategy* is to:

Improve women's safety, well-being and capacity to fully participate in Victorian life by reducing the level, and fear, of violence against women.

The measures outlined below provide an indication of the level of violence against women, the degree to which violence against women is reported to authorities, women's fear of violence and how this impacts on women's capacity to participate in community life.

■ A reduction in the level of physical and sexual assault against women

Measuring the level of physical and sexual assault against women is complex and there are a number of limitations with existing data. It is necessary to ask women about their experiences of violence rather than relying on crime statistics due to the high level of violence against women which is not reported to police.

According to the *Victorian Crime Victimization Survey (CVS) 1999*, 4.2% of Victorian women indicated that they had been the victim of robbery, assault or sexual assault in the preceding year. However, the survey does not fully capture the level of physical and sexual assaults within families because many do not think of it as a 'crime'.¹⁶

Crime Prevention Victoria is undertaking a scoping review regarding the feasibility of surveying women to determine the incidence of violence against women in Victoria, including the level of physical and sexual assault that occurs within Victorian families. The scoping review will include an examination of the literature to determine the most appropriate way to survey women who may have been subject to family violence and sexual assault, having regard to the issues of privacy.

■ An increase in the proportion of assaults and sexual offences against women reported to police

Police statistics provide an important indicator of the number of violent offences against women which are reported to police each year. The Australian Bureau of Statistics *Recorded Crime in Australia* allows comparison across the states and territories of Australia.

However, because a high proportion of violence against women is not reported to police or other agencies changes in official crime statistics must be interpreted with care.¹³⁸ Increases in reported crime statistics may reflect an increase in violence in the community and/or it may reflect a growing preparedness amongst women to report these crimes to police.

Paradoxically, if the *Women's Safety Strategy* is successful one would expect a short-term increase in assaults and sexual offences recorded by police as a greater proportion of women who experience violence report it to police. This does not mean that more violent incidents are occurring, rather that more women are reporting violent incidents which had previously remained hidden and the fact that police are more likely to use formal processes to deal with them. This paradox has been recognised by policy-makers in the United Kingdom and elsewhere.

The Victorian Family Violence Database, established by the Victorian Community Council Against Violence, brings together family violence data from Victoria Police, the Victorian Magistrates' and Children's Courts and Victorian Supported Accommodation Assistance Program agencies. The first report of the Database, released in August 2002, has a specific focus on adult female victims and children. The consolidation of existing data and the expansion to include further data from other source agencies will allow, over time, increasingly comprehensive analysis of family violence in Victoria that will inform policy and program development.

■ **A reduction in fear of violence by women and an increase in women's participation**

A reduction in fear of violence and an accompanying increase in women's participation in a range of

community activities is an important way to measure the degree to which the *Women's Safety Strategy* has achieved its aim.

The following can be measured over time through the Department of Justice's Crime Victimisation Survey, Local Safety Surveys and the Department of Infrastructure's Customer Satisfaction Index for Public Transport:

- A reduction in the number of women who consider crime to be a problem in their local area
- An increase in the number of women who consider their local area to be safer than it was five years ago
- A decrease in the proportion of women who never walk alone after dark
- An increase in women's 'safety rating' of public places such as streets, shops, and public transport
- An increase in customer satisfaction index scores for public transport safety for women.

Much important data on women's experiences and perceptions of crime and violence is compiled in the forthcoming Crime Prevention Victoria publication *Women's Experience of Crime and Safety in Victoria: A Statistical Perspective*.

■ **Monitoring the Outcomes of Individual Initiatives**

The initiatives Government is undertaking to reduce violence against women are outlined in a separate document entitled *Acting on the Women's Safety Strategy*. Initiatives fall into four key areas:

- Protection and justice

- Options for women
- Violence prevention and education
- Community action and co-ordination.

Departments responsible for each initiative have specified the outcomes they are aiming to achieve and will report on their progress to the Annual Meeting of Ministers on Women's Safety.

■ **Continuous Learning and Improvement**

The *Women's Safety Strategy* is a living document and gains will be made progressively throughout the five-year life of the strategy.

The three steering committees established to provide advice in reducing and responding to (1) family violence, (2) sexual assault and (3) workplace violence, will play a critical role in improving responses to violence against women.

An annual forum on women's safety will also be held to provide an opportunity for dialogue between Government, non-government agencies and the community about how the *Women's Safety Strategy* is progressing and to identify specific areas and strategies for improvement.

■ **Growing Victoria Together**

The evaluation and monitoring processes for the *Women's Safety Strategy* will assist in demonstrating progress towards the key commitments in the Government's framework for the future—*Growing Victoria Together*.

Growing Victoria Together outlines the Government's commitment to safe streets, homes and workplaces for Victorians. Through *Growing Victoria Together* Government will report to the community on progress measures such as

■ **Safety of Women in Prisons**

While women represent only 7% of Victoria's current prison population, the number of women in Victoria's prisons has experienced a greater rate of growth than the number of male prisoners. Women prisoners also display a greater degree of exclusion and disadvantage than their male counterparts. Many women may have experienced violence prior to entering prison. They may also experience violence during their stay in prison and after their release.

Women are more likely to be imprisoned for property related offences with the majority serving relatively short sentences. Many women prisoners have a history of unmet needs, including drug and alcohol abuse, unemployment, poverty and mental illness. Many women in prison also report histories of physical, sexual and emotional abuse. Evidence indicates that women prisoners have experienced a higher level of abuse than the general population and are more likely to have experienced some type of disruption or abuse during their formative years. The majority of women in prison are also mothers and primary caregivers of children.¹³⁹

Managing violence in women's prisons is also a significant issue. Violence usually occurs in the form of bullying, stand over behaviour and assaults.

Release from prison and the months immediately following have been identified as traumatic, highly stressful and a time when women are at risk of significant harm including post release mortality. Women facing accommodation difficulties may be particularly susceptible to exploitative or violent relationships.

3.5 Complementary Approaches Across Government

The *Women's Safety Strategy* compliments and strengthens other major initiatives occurring across State Government agencies. Similarly, other Government initiatives complement and strengthen the capacity of the *Women's Safety Strategy* to reduce violence against women in Victoria. Complementary approaches across Departments maximise the capacity of the Government to achieve its objectives.

In particular, the WSS is complementary and well-linked to the following Government initiatives.

Safer Streets and Homes: A Crime and Violence Prevention Strategy 2002 – 2005

Crime Prevention Victoria has developed *Safer Streets and Homes: A Crime and Violence Prevention Strategy for Victoria 2002 – 2005*, and undertakes a range of activities to enhance community safety and to prevent and reduce crime. This strategy takes a whole-of-government whole-of-community approach to preventing crime and assists in finding innovative community-based solutions to a range of crime and violence issues. The three priority areas of the strategy are (1) improving safety in streets and neighbourhoods (2) preventing family violence (3) reducing offending and violence by young people. The activities occurring under the strategy are informed by data and evaluation about 'what works' and include community education and awareness programs.

Victoria Police Violence Against Women Strategy: A Way Forward

Victoria Police has conducted an internal review of responses to violence against women. A series of recommendations is now being implemented through which police responses to violence against women will be improved, including:

- Enhanced training and education for police
- A new police code of practice to respond to domestic violence
- Improved data collection to identify patterns of domestic violence
- Streamlining access to intervention orders
- A review of the role of family violence liaison officers
- A review of operating procedures for investigating sexual assault
- Increased police accountability when responding to incidents of violence against women.

Strengthened partnerships between Victoria Police and other Government and non-government agencies are critical to the success of this project. The Statewide Steering Committees on family violence and sexual assault established by the Chief Commissioner of Police in partnership with the Office of Women's Policy will facilitate this partnership approach.

Victorian Homelessness Strategy

The Office of Housing, Department of Human Services, has developed the *Victorian Homelessness Strategy* to prevent and respond to homelessness in Victoria. This includes responding to family violence as a major factor contributing to homelessness and the provision of crisis and protection services for women and children experiencing family violence. Joint work to reduce the number of women who become homeless as a result of family violence (for example, by enabling women to exercise their right to remain in their family home) is an important example of the complementary work occurring in this area.

Women's Health and Well-being Strategy

The Policy and Strategic Projects Division, Department of Human Services, has developed a *Women's Health and Well-being Strategy* for Victoria. Five areas for action have been identified through the work of the strategy that will address key barriers facing women with regard to their health and well-being. Enhancing women's safety and security, through initiatives that aim to create environments where women are able to maximise their participation in their communities, is one of these action areas.

Local Priority Policing Program

Local Priority Policing (LPP) is an initiative of Victoria Police which aims to ensure that the local community is an active participant in shaping police service priorities. A major aspect of Local Priority Policing is a commitment by Victoria Police to establishing more effective and strategic

partnerships with other Government and non-government agencies as well as the broader community. The establishment of Local Safety Committees in each local government area is a major way in which Victoria Police works in partnership with local agencies to improve community safety.

Indigenous Family Violence Strategy

The Victorian *Indigenous Family Violence Strategy* aims to resource and support an Indigenous-led approach to prevent, reduce and respond to the high levels of family violence in Indigenous communities throughout Victoria. An Indigenous Family Violence Task Force has been appointed to lead the development of the strategy. This Indigenous community-led approach is supported by a parallel and complementary whole-of-government approach.

Four key components underpin the development of the strategy:

- Establishment and operation of the Indigenous Family Violence Task Force
- Resourcing and establishment of nine Indigenous Family Violence Action Groups
- Employment of the statewide co-ordinator and nine family violence support officers
- Establishment of an Indigenous Family Violence Community Initiative Fund.

The Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and the Minister for Community Services are the lead Ministers responsible for the development of the *Indigenous Family Violence Strategy*.

Community Building Initiative

The Office of Community Building, Department of Premier and Cabinet, is co-ordinating the Government's efforts to improve social and economic well-being across Victoria through building stronger communities. The Community Building Initiative is a whole-of-government strategy that involves all Departments and involves a range of specific targeted programs led by different Departments to influence practices across the public sector and support community-based efforts more broadly. As part of the initiative, the Government has funded 10 community building Demonstration Projects in particular locations throughout Victoria and one project which aims to enhance Indigenous community capacity. These projects focus on clusters of issues of importance to each particular community, including issues of health and well-being, together with broader capacity issues such as local leadership and partnership between different sectors. A key objective is to provide more 'joined up' Government responses and to change the relationship between Government and communities. The Community Support Fund (CSF) is also actively promoting and supporting opportunities for local government and community organisations to develop community building projects.

The BEST START prevention and early intervention early years project

The BEST START project is a cross-Government initiative focusing on improving the health, development and well-being of all young children (0 – 8 years) through community-driven improvements to local universal early years services

(for example maternity services, maternal and child health services, child care, pre-school, early parenting, general practitioners, parenting support services, schools and local police). These improvements will result in better access to child and family support, health services and early education, and improve the capacity and confidence of parents-to-be, parents and families to care for children and enjoy parenting. Through BEST START there is an opportunity to provide information about violence to parents and to assist communities to become safer for both women and children.

Primary Care Partnerships

Across Victoria, more than 800 services have come together in 32 Primary Care Partnerships (PCPs) to develop an integrated primary care system. The range of services include community health services, ethno-specific health services, Indigenous health services, women's health services, sexual assault services, local government, district nursing services, dental health services, general practitioners, hospitals, and drug and alcohol treatment services. Each PCP has developed a Community Health Plan, describing how service providers will plan, co-ordinate and deliver services. Analysis of key factors affecting the health and well-being of their particular communities, including gender, ethnicity, Indigenous status, disability and sexuality, will assist in the design and implementation of specifically targeted health promotion and community-building strategies.

State Disability Plan

The State Disability Plan outlines a new approach to disability for the Victorian Government and the Victorian community as a whole. For the first time in the history of Victoria, the plan takes a whole-of-government approach to disability, in recognition of the fact that support for people with a disability is not confined to health, community and disability services but extends across all aspects of living, including housing, education, transport, recreation, justice and employment.

The State Disability Plan is based on principles of human rights and social justice—that people with a disability, as citizens of Victoria, should enjoy the same rights, opportunities and responsibilities as all other citizens, and should be able to participate in the life of the Victorian community. The plan includes strategies to enhance support for people with a disability who have experienced, or who are at risk of experiencing physical, emotional or sexual assault, or sexual harassment.

Gender Education Strategy for Victorian Schools

The Department of Education and Training is developing a *Gender Education Strategy for Victorian Schools* which will highlight innovative learning and practices targeting particular groups of girls and boys in schools. The strategy will be developed through extensive research and consultation with school communities and other stakeholders. Professional development activities will be designed and conducted to support schools in implementing the strategy.

Metropolitan Strategy

The Department of Infrastructure's *Metropolitan Strategy* provides a long-term strategic framework for the growth and development of Metropolitan Melbourne and the surrounding region. The views and aspirations of all sectors of our community, sought through extensive consultation, were incorporated in the development of the strategy. Public safety was one of the key messages to emerge from the consultation.

The *Metropolitan Strategy* acknowledges concerns about safety may restrict some people's mobility, activity and independence. Perceptions of safety may have as great an impact on people's lives as do actual levels of safety and crime. Different groups within the wider community, such as women, may feel more vulnerable than others, making safety an important equity issue.

The need to ensure that all people are, and feel, safe is an important element of the strategy. The *Metropolitan Strategy* ensures public safety considerations are integrated into the development of urban design guidelines. Travel safety, both on and accessing public transport, is another important aspect of the strategy.

DEPT. OF JUSTICE
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Supporting Vulnerable Families — Innovation Projects

The Department of Human Services is establishing eight Innovation Projects that will provide new service capacity for vulnerable families aimed at more appropriately responding to their needs. The basis of the new approach recognises that there is a broad range of reasons why families and children may be in need, which requires an equally broad range of services and service capacity. A more discerning approach is required, with greater emphasis on matching of families and children's needs to appropriate services. The Innovation Projects will have the flexibility to provide services tailored to the specific needs of families in each community. Services will be provided by local agencies working in conjunction with Child Protection services to provide a 'joined up' response.

Eight Innovation Projects (including two Indigenous projects) will be established in Ballarat, Central Goldfields, East Gippsland, Frankston, Greater Shepparton and Greater Geelong from October 2002. This new service capacity will complement the *Women Safety Strategy* and strengthen the interface between Child Protection and Family Violence Services in local communities.

Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy

Neighbourhood Renewal is a new approach that offers a better deal for disadvantaged neighbourhoods in Victoria. The strategy is an initiative of the Department of Human Services as part of the State Government's *Growing Victoria Together* agenda to build more cohesive communities and reduce inequalities.

The Victorian Government, local communities, businesses and service providers will work together to bridge the gap between the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods in Victoria and their surrounding communities. Many of these areas have high concentrations of public housing.

To bridge the gap, the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy will: increase people's pride and participation in the community; lift employment, training and education and expand local economies; improve personal safety and reduce crime; enhance housing and the physical environment; promote health and well-being; increase access to transport and other key services; and improve government responsiveness. The strategy will empower local people to build their own futures. A shared vision for neighbourhoods will be developed through local Neighbourhood Renewal Action Plans. To achieve this vision, the efforts of the whole-of-government will be co-ordinated around people and the places they live, work and play. Safer places will be created where people want to live.

Respect: The Government's Vision for Young People

This framework outlines a clear, strategic direction for the Government's future program and policy development in relation to young people. It is the result of extensive consultation both across Government and with the wider community, particularly organisations and individuals working with young people and of course young people themselves.

The Government's vision is that young people benefit from supportive and inclusive communities in which they are:

- valued and respected
- supported through social, educational, cultural and employment opportunities
- able to live healthy, satisfying lives
- able to realise their full potential.

This vision is based on respect: respect for young people themselves, for their diverse needs, aspirations and interests and for the many and varied contributions they make to the community.

The framework will be used by the Office for Youth to promote consistency across Government in program and policy development for young people and as the basis for promoting alignment between the Government's priorities for young people and the activities of other key youth sector stakeholders.

Young Women's Safety

The Women's Safety Australia Survey identifies younger women at greater risk of violence than older women with 19% of women aged 18–24 experiencing an incident of violence in the previous 12 months compared to 6.8% of women aged 35–44 and 1.2% of women aged 55% and over.¹³

Younger women are also more likely than older women to be stalked and experience other types of harassment including obscene phone calls, indecent exposure, inappropriate comments about body/sex life and unwanted sexual touching.¹⁴

A Commonwealth Government survey found that 14% of young women had experienced rape or sexual assault, in comparison to 3% of young men.¹⁵ In a survey conducted by Mission Australia young women identified abuse/sexual assault as one of their most important issues of concern, second only to depression/suicide.

Young women may feel particularly unsafe in licensed premises such as nightclubs and bars, where 21.3% of sexual assaults against women occur.¹⁶ Drink spiking, often a premeditated step

to sexual assaults, increases young women's concerns about safety in licensed premises, even where the offender is known to the victim.

Young women are also more at risk of violence in relationships than older women.¹⁷ Their capacity to end the relationship may be limited by insufficient life experience or support networks.

Young women may be the targets of workplace violence, harassment and bullying. Insecure work environments, limited employment opportunities for young people and lack of information about worker rights may make it difficult for young women to assert their right to work in an environment that is free of violence or to report any violence or harassment that does occur. Young women often put up with violence in order to keep their jobs because their livelihood depends on it.

To ensure the experiences of younger women are taken into account, their involvement in the planning, implementation and evaluation of policies and programs which respond to violence against women is critical.

3.6 Links with National and International Initiatives

The Victorian Government addresses violence against women in the context of activities occurring at both a national and international level.

National Programs

Partnerships Against Domestic Violence (PADV)

At a national level the Commonwealth Government has been working to reduce family violence through the Partnerships Against Domestic Violence (*Partnerships*) initiative. *Partnerships* has the active involvement of the states and territories and is co-ordinated by a taskforce of Commonwealth, state and territory representatives. *Partnerships* has sponsored around 100 projects to explore best practice at a local, regional and national level. Four national forums and a series of showcasing events have been held to disseminate information on good practice in addressing family violence. *Partnerships* has also provided community grants to address violence in Indigenous communities, established the Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse and initiated community education campaigns. Other key priorities for work are children living with domestic violence, services for women experiencing domestic violence, perpetrators of domestic violence and further work in the area of community awareness. An extensive evaluation of the first phase of PADV will soon be released. Victoria will build on the work undertaken by *Partnerships*.

National Initiative to Combat Sexual Assault

The Commonwealth Government is committed to developing a national approach to combat sexual assault against women. The *National Initiative to Combat Sexual Assault* has established four key objectives with the initial focus being on research and policy development to inform community awareness. These are:

1. To promote cultural change in attitudes and behaviours to reduce the incidence of sexual assault
2. To identify and address the immediate and long-term impacts of sexual assault on women (and children) and the social and financial costs to the community
3. Establish a consistent and co-ordinated framework for sexual assault reduction, prevention and interventions across all levels of government and the wider community
4. To develop an information strategy to:
 - facilitate access to national, policy-relevant data to inform strategies to more effectively prevent and respond to sexual assault, and
 - establish a comprehensive evidence base incorporating both research and practice.

National Crime Prevention Strategy

The *National Crime Prevention Program* aims to identify and promote innovative ways of reducing and preventing crime and fear of crime. The *National Crime Prevention Program* includes both research and practical initiatives, including national research projects, national pilot projects, local prevention activities, communication and training activities. The program has funded a number of projects on the prevention of family violence, including research reports on violence in Indigenous communities and young people's attitudes towards domestic violence.

International Obligations

Australia is a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). CEDAW is a key international human rights instrument which aims to end discrimination against women.

The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (DEVAW) passed by the General Assembly of the United Nations in December 1993 recognises that the effective implementation of CEDAW would contribute to the elimination of violence against women.

Violence against Lesbian and Bisexual Women

Research shows that lesbian and bisexual women are disproportionately subject to verbal and physical abuse. This may occur in the workplace, public places and a range of other settings. Recent Victorian research reveals that almost 80% of lesbian/bisexual women have experienced some form of public abuse. In the five years preceding the survey 68% of lesbian/bisexual women report having been physically assaulted.¹⁵ Physical or verbal homophobic violence can have a lasting impact on the victim. It also has effects beyond the individual who is the direct target. Homophobic violence is designed to make the entire lesbian and bisexual community feel afraid and has the effect of forcing lesbian/bisexual women into self-censoring their behaviour in order to avoid a potentially violent situation.

Violence and harassment against lesbian and bisexual women is a form of hate crime. It is directed towards lesbian women because they are members of a particular group and is motivated by prejudice and bias. The elimination of violence against lesbians requires eradication of anti-homosexual bias.¹⁶

Appendix 1: Victorian Government roles and responsibilities in relation to women's safety

Department of Human Services

Community Care

- Fund and monitor prevention and support programs in relation to family violence, including:
 - support programs for women
 - behaviour change programs for men who use violence towards their family members
 - family violence network positions
 - fund and monitor services to prevent and respond to sexual assault.
- Prevent and respond to child abuse, through the Child Protection Service
- Respond to family violence in Indigenous communities, through an Indigenous-led strategy (with AAV)
- Represent the State Government on the Commonwealth's Partnerships Against Domestic Violence Taskforce.

Office of Housing

- Fund and monitor family violence services, through the Supported Accommodation and Assistance Program (SAAP) including:
 - women's refuges
 - domestic violence outreach services
 - prevent and respond to homelessness, through the development of the *Victorian Homelessness Strategy*

- Fund and monitor accommodation and support for women and men at risk of homelessness, through the SAAP Program
- Provide accelerated access to public housing for women who are homeless and escaping family violence.

Policy and Strategic Projects Division

- Improve women's health and well-being through the development of a whole-of-department Women's Health and Well-being Strategy.

Rural and Regional Health and Aged Care Services

- Fund and monitor primary health services, including women's health services.

Disability Services

- Focus on improving the quality of life of Victorians with disabilities by enhancing their independence, choice and community inclusion
- Responsible for the funding and provision of a range of supports and services for people with intellectual, physical, sensory and dual disabilities, neurological impairments and acquired brain injury in Victoria
- Work with a range of Government Departments and statutory authorities to ensure that their facilities, programs and services are accessible to, and inclusive of, people with a disability
- Work in partnership with a range of Government Departments and statutory authorities to progress initiatives designed to improve outcomes for people with a disability.

Department of Justice

Crime Prevention Victoria

- Contribute to reducing crime and violence in Victoria through:
 - co-ordinating whole-of-government, community-based approaches to crime prevention
 - developing programs, research and communication strategies aimed at reducing the number of people offending and at risk of offending
 - finding innovative, practical local solutions to priority crime issues, facilitating access to knowledge, information and data, gathering best practice local solutions here and overseas
 - influencing social, economic and physical environments to make crime less likely
 - supporting initiatives aimed at reducing crime and the impact of crime in local environments.

Victorian Community Council Against Violence

- Work with the Victorian community to reduce violence in society through:
 - consulting with the Victorian community and across Government on issues of violence
 - advancing community awareness of violence related issues through communication, research and advice
 - contributing to appropriate, innovative responses to violence
 - promoting Government and community collaboration on strategies to prevent violence and reduce the fear of violence.

Legal Policy

- Administer the legislation program and associated legal policy and law reform activities of the Attorney-General
- Provide policy advice and legal support to the Attorney-General and the Secretary, Department of Justice, on a range of matters within the Attorney-General's portfolio.

Court Services

- Provide an efficient and accessible system of courts, boards and tribunals to members of the public, the legal profession, prosecutions authorities and other bodies as necessary
- Provide administrative support services to the Supreme, County, Magistrates' and Children's Courts, the State Coroner's Office and the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal.

Other Roles in the Department of Justice

- Collect statistics on crime and violence
- Fund and provide counselling and support services to victims of crime
- Provide compensation to victims of crime
- Implement the Victorian Aboriginal Justice Agreement to address the ongoing issue of Aboriginal over-representation in the criminal justice system; improve Aboriginal access to justice-related services; and promote greater awareness in the Aboriginal community of civil, legal and political rights.

Victoria Police

- Investigate and prosecute criminal offences
- Protect members of the public and enforce the law
- Prevent crime
- Apply for intervention orders, under the *Crimes (Family Violence) Act 1987* in appropriate circumstances.
- Assist women in need regarding family violence processes and procedures
- Work collaboratively and in partnership with other agencies in response to issues in women's safety
- Develop and facilitate safety strategies specifically in accordance with victims' needs
- Develop proactive strategies to address the safety and well-being of women in the community
- Work in partnership with communities through Local Safety Committees, as part of the Local Priority Policing Program.

Office of the Correctional Services Commissioner

- Provide leadership to the Victorian Corrections System
- Provide policy advice to Government on correctional service issues
- Undertake strategic planning and policy development for the adult corrections system in Victoria
- Set service delivery standards
- Monitor the performance of prison operators in Victoria, both public and private
- Assess and classify each prisoner as part of sentence management.

Department of Education and Training

- Ensure a safe and supportive school environment for staff and students that is free from violence and bullying
- Ensure that student welfare needs are met, including students who may have experienced violence in the school, home or community
- Develop appropriate curriculum guidelines, including curriculum which promotes the safety of young women
- Provide advice in relation to preventing and responding to violence as it affects young people.

Department of Infrastructure

- Ensure that women's safety is considered in planning and urban design
- Provide safer public transport by train, tram, bus or taxi
- Liaise with the 78 local governments on State Government activities.

Department of Premier and Cabinet**Office of Women's Policy**

- Co-ordinate the whole-of-government response to violence against women, through the development of the *Women's Safety Strategy*
- Provide policy advice and executive support to the Annual Meeting of Ministers on Women's Safety and steering committees
- Provide advice on violence against women as a women's policy issue
- Represent the State Government on the Commonwealth's Partnerships Against Domestic Violence Taskforce.

Victorian Office of Multicultural Affairs

- Provide advice in relation to issues for people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Natural Resources And Environment**Aboriginal Affairs Victoria**

- Facilitate the development of an *Indigenous Family Violence Strategy* for Victoria (with DHS).

Rural Women's Network

- Provide advice in relation to rural women's issues.

Victorian Workcover Authority

- Promote occupational health and safety in the workplace
- Administer the *Occupational Health and Safety Act 1985* and associated regulations
- Provide compensation to people who have suffered injury or illness as a result of health and safety issues in the workplace.

Office of Public Prosecutions

- Prepare and conduct criminal prosecutions on behalf of the Director of Public Prosecutions.

Victorian Law Reform Commission

- Examine, report and make recommendations to the Attorney-General on matters relating to law reform as referred by the Attorney-General

- Examine, report and make recommendations to the Attorney-General on any matter that the Commission considers raises relatively minor legal issues that are of general community concern
- Suggest to the Attorney-General that a proposal or matter relating to law reform in Victoria be referred to the Commission by the Attorney-General
- Monitor and co-ordinate law reform activity in Victoria
- Undertake educational programs on any area of the law relevant to a reference whether past or current.

Equal Opportunity Commission

- Provide information, training, and education, conduct research and provide legal and policy advice to eliminate discrimination in Victoria, including sexual harassment
- Provide a free and impartial complaints resolution service for people who have been discriminated against under the *Equal Opportunity Act 1995 (Vic)*, the *Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001 (Vic)* and federal anti-discrimination legislation
- Work with the community to further the principles of equal opportunity and human rights for all Victorians.

Appendix 2: Members of the Women's Safety Co-ordinating Committee (WSCC)

Current Members

Ms Sue Hamilton (Chair)	Office of Women's Policy, Department of Premier and Cabinet
Ms Rena De Francesco (Executive Officer)	Office of Women's Policy, Department of Premier and Cabinet
Ms Penny Drysdale	Office of Women's Policy, Department of Premier and Cabinet
Ms Susan Geraghty	Office of Women's Policy, Department of Premier and Cabinet
Ms Jill Wood	Equal Opportunity and Diversity Unit, Victoria Police
Dr Sevgi Kilic	Diversity Issues Unit, Department of Justice
Mr Michael Bourne	Crime Prevention Victoria, Department of Justice
Ms Mary Amiridis	Victorian Community Council Against Violence, Department of Justice
Ms Jelena Popovic	Melbourne Magistrates' Court
Judge Jennifer Coate	Children's Court
Ms Carolyn Gale	Office of Housing, Department of Human Services
Ms Kym Arthur	Office of Housing, Department of Human Services
Ms Kathryn Lamb	Family and Community Support Branch, Department of Human Services
Ms Di Calleja	Aged Care, Department of Human Services
Ms Bernice Murphy	Primary Health Programs, Department of Human Services
Mr Ron James	Koori Health Unit, Department of Human Services
Ms Faye Spiteri	Victorian Office of Multicultural Affairs, Department of Premier and Cabinet
Ms Mandy Charman	Community Relations Team, Department of Natural Resources and the Environment
Ms Melissa Stevens	Aboriginal Affairs Victoria, Department of Natural Resources and the Environment
Ms Kellie Smith	Office for Youth, Department of Education and Training

Ms Kay McVey	Occupational Health and Safety, Department of Education and Training
Ms Mary Hughes	Local Government Division, Department of Infrastructure
Ms Andrea Argirides	Research and Development Branch, Strategy and Programs Division, Victorian Workcover Authority

Past Members

Ms Debbie King (Former Chair)	Office of Women's Policy, Department of Premier and Cabinet
Ms Janice Watt (Former Chair)	Office of Women's Policy, Department of Premier and Cabinet
Ms Katherine Koesasi (Former Executive Officer)	Office of Women's Policy, Department of Premier and Cabinet
Ms Sandra Langlands	Corporate Management Review, Victoria Police
Ms Marisa De Cicco	Justice Policy, Department of Justice
Ms Angela Cannon	Legal Policy, Department of Justice
Ms Nadja Diessel	Victorian Community Council Against Violence, Department of Justice
Ms Judith Miralles	Victorian Office of Multicultural Affairs, Department of Premier and Cabinet
Ms Helen Rees	Justice Policy, Department of Justice
Ms Kate Stoney	Agriculture Victoria, Department of Natural Resources and Environment
Ms Catherine Thompson	Aged Care, Department of Human Services
Ms Cathy Meynell-James	Office for Youth, Department of Education and Training
Ms Biljana Krsmanovic	Victorian Office of Multicultural Affairs, Department of Premier and Cabinet
Ms Lisa Moore	Aboriginal Affairs Victoria, Department of Natural Resources and the Environment

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