

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

ATTACHMENT WS-8 TO STATEMENT OF WENDY MAREE STEENDAM

Date of document: 9 July 2015
Filed on behalf of: State of Victoria
Prepared by:
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This is the attachment marked **'WS- 8'** 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)**

Attachment WS-8



Changing lives:
a new approach to family violence in Victoria



Family violence affects one in five Victorian women and is the leading contributor to death, disability and illness in women under 45. While family violence affects people throughout the Victorian community, it overwhelmingly harms women and children.

Across Victoria, highly dedicated people and services work tirelessly to protect and support the victims of family violence. But our system is fragmented, making it difficult for services to respond to increasing reports of family violence, reduce the high number of women experiencing repeated violence and provide effective protection to women and children.

The Bracks Government believes every Victorian should be able to live safely in their homes and the community. A new approach is needed to break the cycle of family violence. Working together with the police, courts and community services, we are developing an integrated system to respond to family violence – a first for Victoria. This is a core part of *A Favor Victoria*, our plan to address disadvantage and create opportunity.

Five Ministers – myself as the Minister for Housing and Minister for Local Government, the Minister for Women's Affairs, Mary Delahanty, the Attorney General, Rob Hulls, the Minister for Police and Emergency Services, Tim Holding, and the Minister for Community Services and Children, Sheryl Garbutt – are working together on this whole of government approach. I have been appointed Minister coordinating the new approach to family violence in Victoria. We want to make a real difference in the lives of women and children affected by family violence – and we want to make a real difference in the behaviour of men who act violently towards women and children.

Family violence will not be solved in the short term. Victoria's new approach involves a very different way of doing things and it will take time and consistent work to achieve. But the Government is strongly committed to putting in place a stronger system that will significantly reduce the incidence and impact of family violence over the longer term.

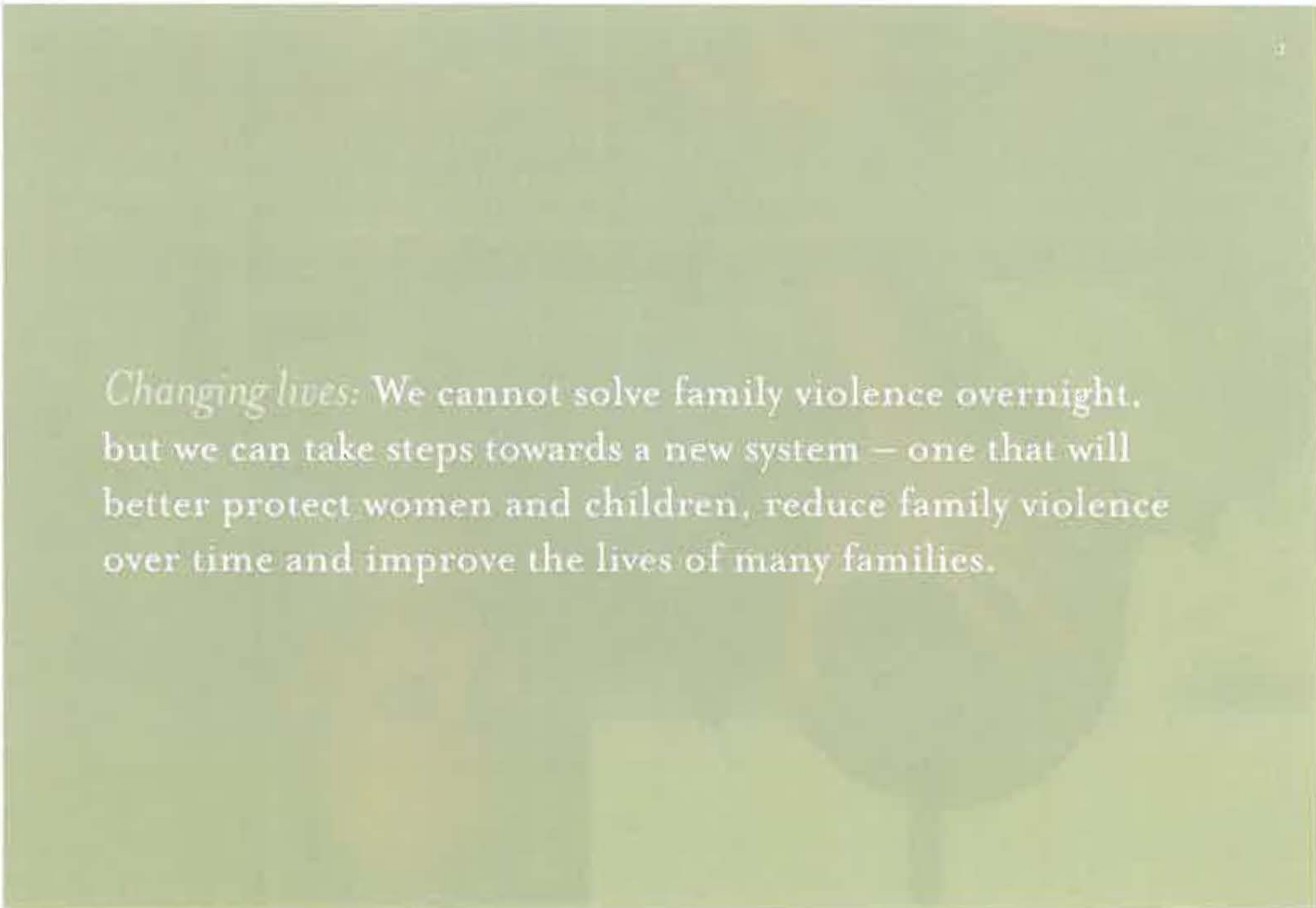
Change is always challenging – but it also brings rewards. As we take these steps, we can be confident we are making major improvements in our family violence services and a great difference in the lives, health and wellbeing of many Victorian families.

Candy Broad MLC

Minister coordinating the New Approach to Family Violence in Victoria

Candy Broad (centre front), Minister for Emergency and Minister for Local Government, Mary Delahanty (right front), Minister for Women's Affairs, Sheryl Garbutt (center back), the Minister for Community Services and Children, Tim Holding (center back), the Minister for Police and Emergency Services, and Rob Hulls (left), the Attorney General.





Changing lives: We cannot solve family violence overnight, but we can take steps towards a new system – one that will better protect women and children, reduce family violence over time and improve the lives of many families.



Victoria's new response to family violence will make Victoria a leader in taking action against family violence, and is vital to our community's health and well being.

FACTS ABOUT FAMILY VIOLENCE IN VICTORIA

Family violence directly affects one in five Victorian women over the course of their lifetime.

Family violence is the leading contributor to preventable death, disability and illness in Victorian women aged 15 to 44 years.

Women are more likely to be killed by a male partner or an ex-partner than by any other person.

Family violence is a factor in more than half of substantiated child protection cases and children are present at more than half of police attendances for family violence.

Less than 20 per cent of affected women report family violence to the Victorian police.

Indigenous Victorians, mainly women, are eight times more likely to be victims of family violence.

In 2003/4, the Victoria Police recorded more than 28,000 family violence incidents, and demand for a police response to family violence has increased by 45 per cent in the past three years.

In 2003/4, 36 per cent of family violence incidents attended by police were repeat visits to the same household.

In 2003/4, the Magistrate's Court finalised 15,189 Family Violence Intervention Orders.

The number of intervention orders sought by police from family incidents in 2004/5 was 4,528 – up 72.2 per cent from the previous year.

Family violence affects all communities, with the total cost of family violence to Victoria estimated at around \$2 billion each year.

HOW THE NEW APPROACH CAME ABOUT

In 2002, as part of the Women's Safety Strategy, the Victorian Government was determined to address the issue of family violence, and recognised it as an issue that particularly impacts on women. Consequently the Government formed a Statewide Steering Committee to Reduce Family Violence. Its members included representatives from police, government departments, the courts, family violence services, men's violence prevention services, peak bodies and legal services.

The Steering Committee investigated better ways of responding to family violence and found that an integrated model – where community services, police and justice agencies work together – is the best way to get results. These include more comprehensive action by police and courts, reductions in repeat incidents and better support to address the immediate and far-reaching impact on people affected by family violence.

Informed by this work and building on many years of experience and good practice in family violence services, the Government is now taking the first steps towards developing a new, integrated approach to family violence in Victoria.



Community services, police and justice agencies working together is the best way to get results.



The new family violence reforms will lead to more effective and consistent action by Government and community services, the police and the courts.

WHY A NEW APPROACH IS NEEDED

Until now, much of Victoria's approach to family violence has been fragmented and inconsistent, with different services across the State operating independently and with different policies and practices. Some parts of the system, such as the operation of the legal system and the courts, are also complex and may be hard to understand.

These shortcomings have made it difficult for many victims of family violence to find the right information and the help they need. The gaps in services have also affected our capacity to assist Victorian families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, Indigenous communities and families affected by disabilities, alcohol and mental health problems.

The increasing demand for family violence services is also placing extra strain on the system.

The Victorian Government's strong view is that family violence cannot be addressed by services acting alone. While much work has been undertaken by Victoria's family violence services in moving towards a more integrated system, leadership and coordination from Government working closely with sector agencies is needed to bring about real and lasting change.

Taking the first steps

The Government is providing \$55.1 million over four years to take the first steps towards developing a new approach to family violence, with the overall aims of:

- improving the safety of women and children who experience violence, and
- improving the accountability of men who use violence.

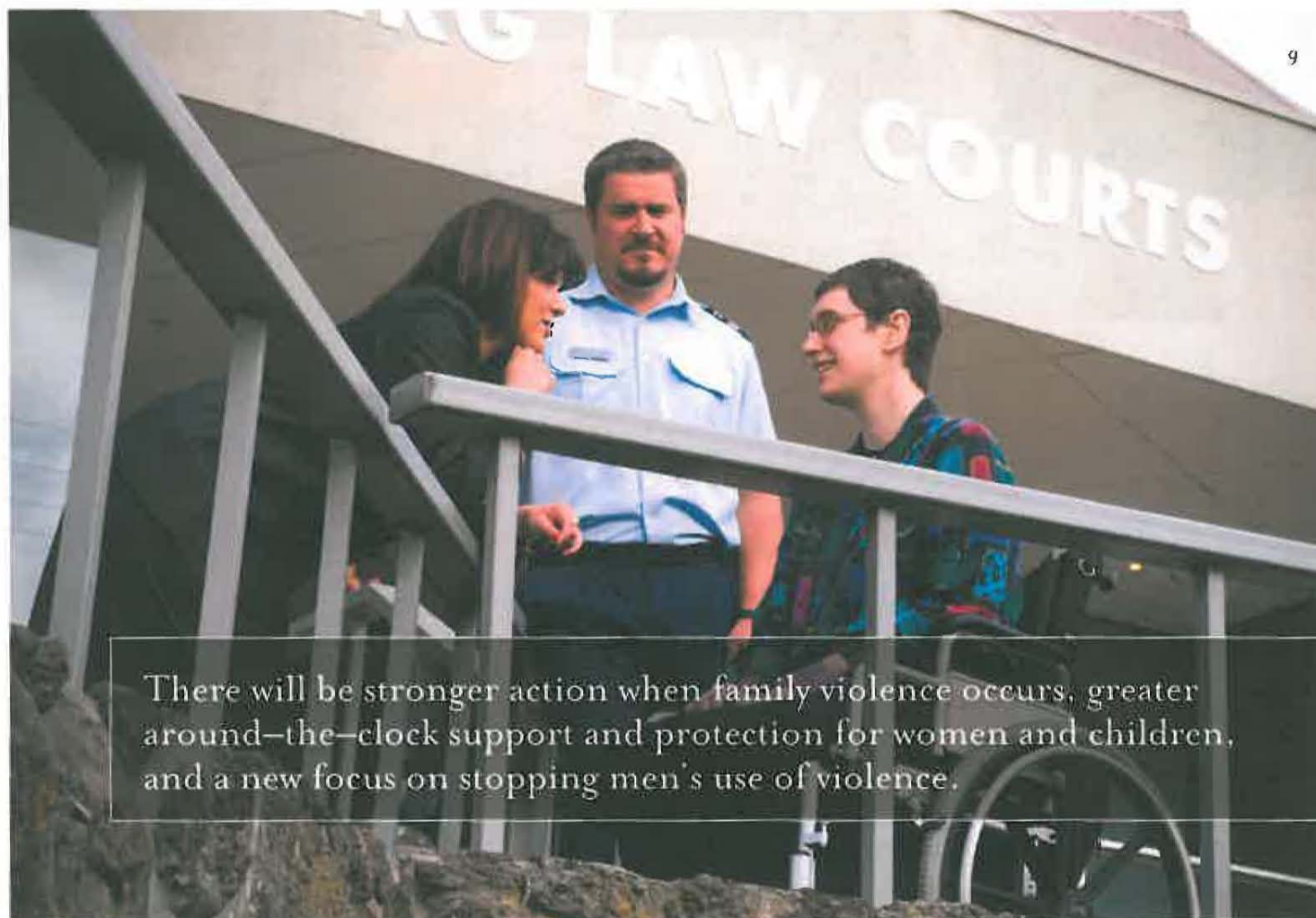
Introduced over four years, our new approach will aim to:

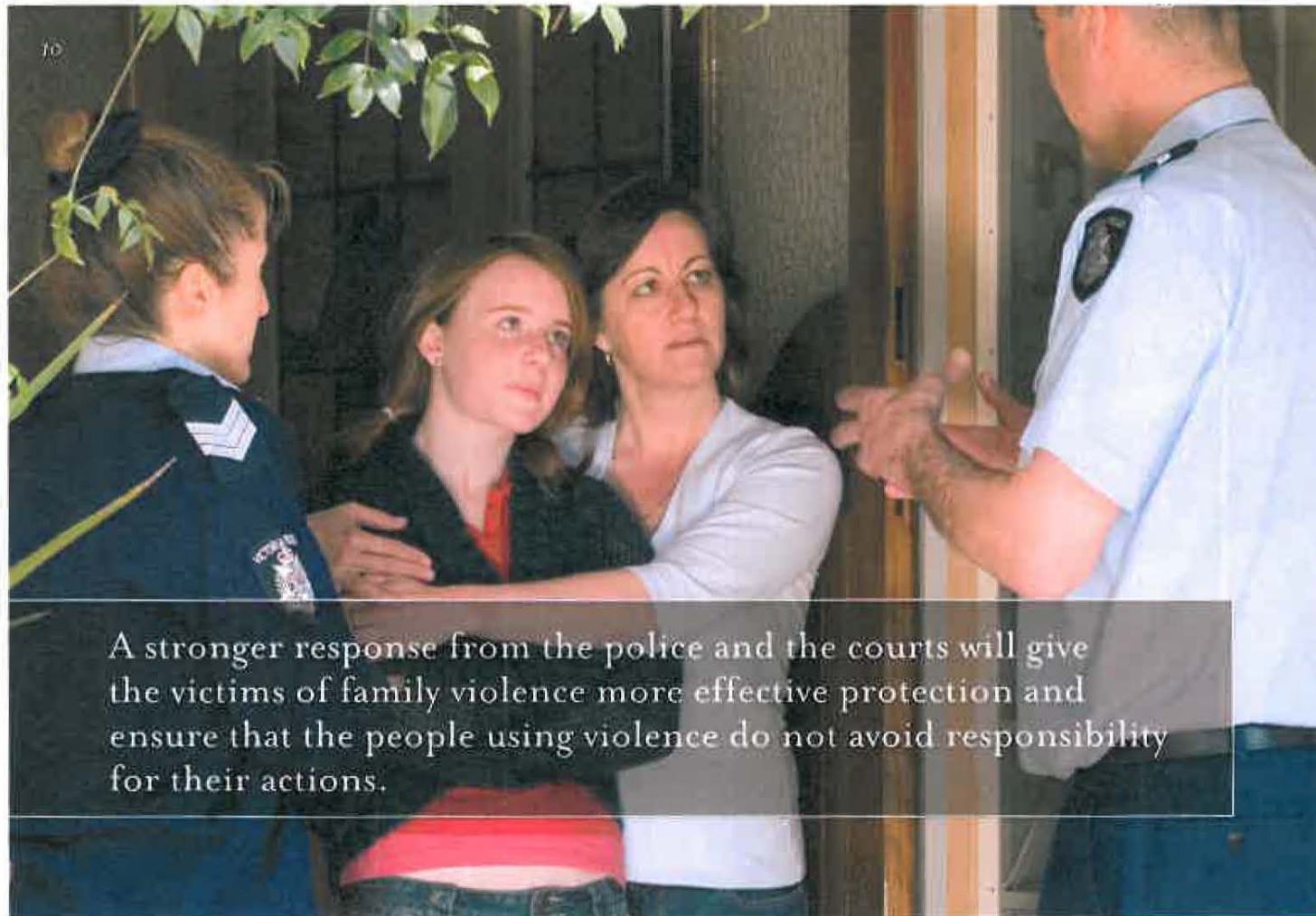
- Reduce deaths, injuries and the emotional impact of family violence.
- Respond more effectively to all women and children experiencing family violence.
- Strengthen the responses of the police and the courts to family violence.
- Increase the accountability of and access to behaviour change programs for men who use violence.
- Empower the rights, needs and safety of children.
- Provide greater support to all workers who deal with victims of family violence.
- Bring the issue of family violence into the open and give all members of the community the confidence to speak out.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Each of the first steps will make a major difference and together, they mark the beginning of significant and far-reaching reform in the way Victoria deals with family violence.

- Right across Victoria, victims of family violence will be supported to obtain immediate assistance 24 hours a day, seven days a week. This will include an immediate police response and telephone support.
- Regardless of which service a person contacts, a common risk assessment tool will be used to gauge the danger to women and children – and make sure they are protected and receive the level of support they need.
- Women and children will have a greater choice of housing options, with more support to help them stay in their own homes and communities.
- More counselling and referral services will be available for family violence victims and more intensive levels of support will be provided to the most vulnerable women and children, including those who seek support on multiple occasions.
- A stronger approach will be taken towards men who use violence, making sure they face the consequences of their behaviour and take steps to stop using violence. This includes a more consistent police response, new emergency housing options to encourage men to leave the home after using violence, referral to behaviour change programs through the courts and more voluntary behaviour change programs for men.
- Adolescent boys showing violent behaviour who have come to the attention of the police and courts will receive help to change their behaviour through an early intervention pilot program. This program will help to prevent adolescent boys from continuing to use violence in their future intimate relationships.
- New services will be provided for Indigenous communities, which experience higher levels of family violence than the rest of the community.
- Better coordination and leadership will be provided by the Government, with five Ministers working together to address family violence and a lead Minister to coordinate the introduction of the new approach.





A stronger response from the police and the courts will give the victims of family violence more effective protection and ensure that the people using violence do not avoid responsibility for their actions.

ACTION THAT HAS ALREADY BEEN TAKEN

The Government has already made two important changes to the way in which the justice system responds to family violence.

Strengthening the police response

We are making sure there is a stronger, more consistent and more accountable police response to reports of family violence through a new Police Code of Practice, introduced in August 2004. Changes introduced through the new Code include:

- Police must now take some action in all family violence situations, choosing from one, or a combination, of three options: a referral option, initiating criminal action and/or initiating civil protective action.
- A strong focus on the police obtaining intervention orders from the courts, including orders that ban the person using violence from the home, allowing victims of family violence to remain in their homes.
- A strong emphasis on police fully investigating behaviour that constitutes a criminal offence.
- Ensuring that all breaches of intervention orders are investigated, with a police supervisor overseeing the decision as to whether there is sufficient evidence to prosecute.
- Ten Police Family Violence Advisors are now in place across Victoria.

Enhancing the justice system response

A Family Violence Court Division of the Magistrates' Court has been established at two demonstration sites in Ballarat and Heidelberg.

In the new Family Violence Court Division:

- The court has the jurisdiction to hear a range of matters related to family violence, including intervention order applications, criminal matters, some family law matters and Victims of Crime applications.
- The court has the power, in certain circumstances, to order male defendants to attend special counselling programs designed to stop their use of violence.
- Children must not be present or called as witnesses in hearings or intervention order proceedings, unless allowed by the court. This will increase the protection of children and reduce the traumatising effects of appearing in court.
- Alternative arrangements for giving evidence can be made, such as the use of remote witness facilities.
- New specialist Family Violence Police Prosecutors, specialist court staff and new support and referral services work together as an important part of the court.

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WORKING TOGETHER TO REDUCE FAMILY VIOLENCE

The Victorian Government's new investment in family violence services is already delivering strong progress across many parts of the system.

New service models are being designed and developed, supported by improved data collection, workforce training and new protocols for collaboration between the police, courts and family violence services.

There is better cooperation right across Government, involving relevant departments and agencies, including Victoria Police. This includes new ways of monitoring and evaluating the performance of the new approach. We are developing ways to measure not only improvements to the lives of individual women and children, but also how effectively services are working together in a more coordinated and integrated system.

The Victorian Government is also aware that the reduction and prevention of family violence relies on more than improvements to services: it involves the entire community. The Government will continue to encourage people and communities to speak out against family violence and raise awareness about the damaging impact of family violence on individuals, families and the broader community.

The new approach will take time to come to fruition. However Victoria is moving ahead with confidence. It is an approach based on the best Australian and international evidence, built on the experience and excellence of Victoria's family violence services and the Government's determination to reduce the damaging impact of family violence and to change the lives of many Victorian women, children and families for the better.



The entire Victorian community shares a responsibility to speak out against family violence and take action to reduce the damaging impact of violence on women and children, families and the broader community.

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The Department for Victorian Communities will provide updated information
about the new approach to family violence and the Women's Safety Strategy
on the Office of Women's Policy website – www.women.vic.gov.au

Helping protect Victorian families
A Fairer Victoria

