



**Royal Commission**  
into Family Violence

## **WITNESS STATEMENT OF ANTOINETTE CHRISTIAN WINTER BRAYBROOK**

I, Antoinette Christian Winter Braybrook, Chief Executive Officer of 292 Hoddle Street, Abbotsford, in the State of Victoria, say as follows:

1. I am authorised by the Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service Victoria (**FVPLS Victoria**) to make this statement on its behalf.
2. I make this statement on the basis of my own knowledge, save where otherwise stated. Where I make statements based on information provided by others, I believe such information to be true.

### **Current role**

3. I am the Chief Executive Officer of FVPLS Victoria. I have held this position since the service was established in 2002.
4. In my role as Chief Executive Officer, I am responsible for the operations of FVPLS Victoria including governance and financial management. I am also responsible for setting the strategic direction in conjunction with the Board of FVPLS Victoria.

### **Background and qualifications**

5. Prior to my appointment as Chief Executive Officer of FVPLS Victoria, I held the position of Executive Officer for the Grampians Regional Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committee at the Department of Justice for two years. Shortly after completing my law degree, I worked as a Judges Associate in the County Court of Victoria.
6. I am a member of the Victorian Aboriginal Justice Forum, the peak coordinating body responsible for overseeing the development, implementation and direction of Koori initiatives under the Victorian Aboriginal Justice Agreement. I am also a member of the Indigenous Family Violence Partnership.
7. I currently hold the position of National Convenor for the National Family Violence Prevention and Legal Services Forum, which comprises 14 organisations responsible for delivery of the Family Violence Prevention and Legal Services

Program to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victims/survivors of family violence and sexual assault around Australia.

8. I hold a Bachelor of Laws from Deakin University and was admitted as a legal practitioner in Victoria in 2004.

### **Submission to the Commission**

9. I refer to and rely on the FVPLS Victoria's submission to the Royal Commission into Family Violence dated June 2015, which includes 32 recommendations. A copy of that submission is attached to this statement and marked '**AB1**'.

### **Family violence in Aboriginal communities**

10. FVPLS Victoria's submission discusses the prevalence and impacts of family violence on Aboriginal people. As set out in our submission, the statistics and data reveal that family violence disproportionately impacts upon Aboriginal women. In this sense, the evidence is clear that family violence in Aboriginal communities is 'gendered', as it is in the mainstream communities. While men can certainly be victims and their needs must not be overlooked, women and children represent the vast majority of victims/survivors within Aboriginal communities. It is vital that Aboriginal communities acknowledge this fact and ensure that sufficient resources are obtained and made available to keep women and children safe, and that Aboriginal communities support women in their decisions to leave a violent relationship, and to create safe but separated families, rather than bear the burden associated with keeping a violent family relationship together.
11. In addition to gender inequity, Aboriginal women face broad social disadvantage. That social disadvantage includes racial inequity and systemic discrimination, poverty, lack of access to culturally appropriate services, poor housing, educational and employment opportunities. These social disadvantages are experienced by all Aboriginal people, but Aboriginal women experience the additional disadvantages of gender inequity.
12. FVPLS Victoria sees family violence in the Aboriginal community as being driven by a range of factors including:
  - 12.1. Gender structures, stereotypes and power imbalances;
  - 12.2. Racial discrimination and systemic violence;

- 12.3. Social disadvantage;
  - 12.4. Alcohol and drugs which can exacerbate the severity of the violence;
  - 12.5. Inter-generational trauma arising from the legacy of colonisation, racial oppression, forced assimilation and child removal. The removal of Aboriginal children from their families over a number of generations has fractured families and communities and led to profound multi-generational trauma;
  - 12.6. Childhood trauma and experiences of family violence. It is important to note that this experience is not necessarily at the hands of an Aboriginal family member;
  - 12.7. Dispossession of land; and
  - 12.8. Interrupted cultural practices that mitigate against interpersonal violence.
13. FVPLS Victoria recognises that there needs to be appropriate services available for Aboriginal men who use violence, who have often had their own experience of violence as a child and have problems with drugs and alcohol and other issues. However, I am concerned that many Aboriginal organisations (and funding bodies) are not fully recognising the statistics and the extent to which women are the victims of family violence. Men's services should not be prioritised at the expense of the women who are bearing the brunt of the violence.
14. Community concerns and fear about the breakdown of Aboriginal families means that there is often a great deal of pressure put on Aboriginal women to maintain the family, and not to leave the relationship. This means that many Aboriginal women bear the responsibility of maintaining the family by suffering significant violence. Aboriginal communities need to support healthy non-violent families, whether those families are living together or separately.

### **Role of Aboriginal community controlled organisations**

15. As set out in FVPLS Victoria's submission, we strongly advocate for family violence services to be delivered by Aboriginal community controlled organisations. These organisations are centred around the whole family, community and culture.
16. Within Aboriginal communities, it is important to maintain and develop specialist women's family violence and legal services to ensure that there is an Aboriginal

service that Aboriginal women feel they can trust to support them in their decisions. While it is important that all Aboriginal community controlled organisations are involved in preventing, intervening and responding to family violence, women are often reluctant to go to a service to seek help for a number of reasons.

17. Firstly, they may not feel confident that they will be supported to leave the relationship. They may be concerned about the attitude of the organisation or individuals in those organisations to family violence. Secondly, they may be concerned about the relationship that those organisations or persons in the organisation have within the local Aboriginal community, giving rise to concerns such as privacy or being pressured to stay in the relationship and not break up the family. Thirdly, victims/survivors of family violence may not trust a service known for its role in assisting those who perpetrate violence, and women may not feel safe approaching a service that predominantly assists men.
  
18. For the reasons outlined in our submission, Aboriginal women are reluctant to access mainstream services. It is therefore important that there are specialist Aboriginal women's family violence services that women can access safely and privately. This includes accommodation/refuges, support services, legal services, and prevention programs.



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Antoinette Christian Winter Braybrook

Dated: 16 July 2015