



HOW WE WORK

UPDATE RELEASED 17 AUGUST 2015

INTRODUCTION

This document outlines how the Royal Commission into Family Violence works and the way it will conduct its inquiry.¹

If you have any questions about how we work, please send an email to enquiries@rcfv.com.au or call 1800 365 100.

Terms of Reference

1. As required by our Terms of Reference, the Royal Commission into Family Violence will inquire into and report on how Victoria's response to family violence can be improved by providing practical recommendations to stop family violence.
2. Our Terms of Reference are set out in the Letters Patent and are available at our website at www.rcfv.com.au.

Royal Commission goals

3. In keeping with our Terms of Reference, the Royal Commission aims to make recommendations which:
 - foster a violence-free society
 - reduce and aim to eliminate family violence
 - prevent the occurrence and escalation of family violence
 - build respectful family relationships
 - increase awareness of the extent and effects of family violence
 - reinforce community rejection of the use of family violence
 - ensure the safety of people who are or may be affected by family violence, by:
 - facilitating early intervention before violence occurs
 - providing fast, effective responses to those who report family violence
 - providing effective protections to adults and children who have been affected by family violence in the past, and remain at risk of family violence
 - support adults and children who have been affected by family violence
 - hold those who have been violent accountable for their actions
 - help people who use or may use family violence to change their behaviour
 - develop and improve the means by which solutions to family violence are implemented and assessed.
4. Given the Royal Commission's remit and timelines, the Royal Commission will focus on identifying and solving system-wide issues, rather than investigating individual cases or allegations of family violence.

¹ Issued under section 16(1) of the *Inquiries Act 2014* (Vic). This statement may be updated and varied from time to time.

How to contribute

5. To obtain a better understanding about existing systems and how they operate in practice, and to explore opportunities for improvement, the Royal Commission will be gathering information from individuals and organisations (including key stakeholders) through:
 - written submissions
 - community consultations
 - stakeholder and expert roundtables
 - hearings
 - research
 - site visits
 - data and documentation provided by key agencies (including government and domestic and international experts).

Written submissions

6. The Royal Commission sought submissions on any issues relating to our terms of reference from anyone affected by family violence.
7. To help guide people writing a submission, we released an issues paper on 31 March 2015. This can be accessed through our resources page at www.rcfv.com.au/Resources.
8. The closing date for written submissions was Friday, 29 May 2015. This date was selected to enable the Royal Commission time to read and analyse all of the submissions in advance of the public hearings, and to enable us to follow up issues raised as part of our ongoing research and engagement processes.
9. The Royal Commission received some written submissions that were anonymous or confidential. If someone has requested anonymity, all identifying details will be removed. If someone has requested confidentiality, the Royal Commission will keep the submission (or relevant parts of it) confidential and it/those parts will not be published or quoted by the Royal Commission.
10. The Royal Commission will remove or redact (black out) parts of submissions for legal, privacy and/or safety reasons, including if they may identify or contain information about people affected by family violence (other than the person making the submission). The Royal Commission also reserves the right not to publish any submission if it considers it inappropriate to do so.
11. Subject to these considerations, the Royal Commission is in the process of uploading submissions to its website. At this stage, the Royal Commission expresses no opinion as to the content or accuracy of any of the submissions or other materials to which they may refer.

Community consultations

12. The Royal Commission concluded its community consultation program on Tuesday, 7 July 2015.
13. A total of 43 group consultation sessions were held for individuals affected by family violence and those who work closely with them.

14. Over 800 people participated in sessions across metropolitan Melbourne and regional Victoria.
15. Specific groups consulted included older victims, culturally and linguistically diverse women, male victims, perpetrators, female prisoners, sex workers, Aboriginal representatives and services, children and youth services, women with disabilities, Islamic women and community leaders, and representatives from the gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex communities.
16. Some of the key themes raised at the consultations include:
 - the impact of family violence on children and young people and on older victims
 - the importance of developing a range of age-appropriate primary prevention strategies
 - the importance of culturally appropriate responses and services in Aboriginal communities
 - challenges faced by victims who have recently migrated to Australia and who do not use English as their primary language
 - challenges faced by men who have been affected by family violence
 - challenges faced by people with disabilities whose carers are also their abusers
 - the availability of services for victims who live in regional and remote areas
 - the legal and practical issues people affected by family violence face when living and working close to an interstate border
 - the adequacy of justice system responses and the need for people who use violence to be held accountable
 - the value of educating people who come into contact with victims of family violence about the nature and causes of family violence and appropriate ways to respond
 - the important role government, agencies and communities can play in fostering family violence prevention and cultural change
 - difficulties accessing crisis services including housing
 - the importance of appropriate court environments and associated security issues
 - how to break the cycle of intergenerational family violence.
17. While the community consultations will generally inform the Royal Commission's work, the Royal Commission will not disclose a participant's identity or specific circumstances (including in its final report), without that participant's agreement.

Stakeholder and expert roundtables

18. The Royal Commission will be holding roundtable discussions with stakeholders and experts from within and outside the family violence sector.
19. The roundtables with stakeholders and experts will take place in the second half of 2015, and will provide an opportunity for key stakeholders and experts to exchange and debate views with each other in a frank and candid way.

Public hearings

20. The initial round of public hearings commenced on Monday, 13 July 2015 and concluded on Friday, 14 August 2015. Further public hearings are scheduled to be held in the week commencing 12 October 2015.
21. Through the public hearings the Royal Commission seeks to contribute to the public's understanding of the family violence system, and also provide an opportunity for the

public to hear from key stakeholders, experts and government representatives, as they discuss matters which may ultimately be the subject of findings and recommendations made by the Royal Commission.

22. The public hearings are being conducted around a series of modules which explore key issues and questions relevant to the family violence system, including the diverse ways in which people experience family violence, the different consequences of family violence and the various times at which people may engage with current systems.
23. In the first four weeks of public hearings the modules covered:
 - What is family violence and who experiences it, including causes and contributing factors
 - Children – introduction and early intervention
 - Children – intervention and response
 - Financial abuse and empowerment
 - Alcohol and drugs
 - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders – experiences and opportunities
 - Housing and homelessness
 - Mental health
 - Risk assessment and risk management
 - Perpetrator interventions
 - Initial police response
 - Family Violence Intervention Orders – application process
 - Family Violence Intervention Orders – monitoring and enforcement
 - Criminal justice response
 - Overlapping jurisdictions – the role of family law and child protection law
 - Culture change in workplaces and the community
 - Diversity of experiences, community attitudes and structural impediments
 - Role of the health system
 - Integrating services and information sharing.

The content of the future public hearings is yet to be confirmed.

24. Inevitably, it will not be possible for the Royal Commission to explore every issue or point of view through the public hearings in the time available. The Royal Commission is considering all views and perspectives it has heard during the course of its inquiry, including through written submissions and community consultations.
25. The Royal Commission is informing itself in a range of ways and many key issues and questions (including some of those covered in the modules) will also be explored through the stakeholder and expert roundtables.
26. Witnesses called to give evidence before the Royal Commission have been determined by the Commissioners and Counsel Assisting in light of the written submissions, community consultations, stakeholder/expert roundtable meetings and other research activities. A list of witnesses is published on this website prior to hearings.
27. Who is called to give evidence, the questions they may be asked, and the answers they may give, do not reflect any final opinions of, or conclusions reached by, the Royal Commission. The Royal Commission's ultimate findings and recommendations will be contained in its final report due to be delivered by 29 February 2016.

28. Unless otherwise directed, public hearings will be open to the public and web-streamed. Anyone is welcome to attend to watch and listen to the hearings taking place at level 11, 222 Exhibition Street, Melbourne, or follow the proceedings online.
29. Transcripts of the public hearings, along with witness statements and links to submissions where appropriate are uploaded onto this website as soon as practicable.
30. A Practice Direction outlining the procedural aspects of the public hearings is available on the Royal Commission's website.

Information from organisations

31. The Royal Commission will treat any written submissions received from the board or relevant management of an organisation as that organisation's official submission. Otherwise, the Royal Commission will treat any written submission received from any officer or employee of an organisation as that individual's own submission.
32. Representatives of some organisations have had the opportunity to participate in community consultations and/or stakeholder and expert roundtables. Unless the representative is from the board or relevant management of an organisation, the Royal Commission will treat any information received from those representatives as their personal opinion and not the relevant organisation's official position.
33. The Royal Commission will not attribute any information to a particular representative without seeking the agreement of that representative and/or the relevant organisation. If it is uncertain whether any information received represents an organisation's official position, the Royal Commission will treat it as an individual's personal opinion.

Law enforcement

34. During the course of its inquiry, the Royal Commission may provide information to law enforcement agencies and/or child protection agencies (as appropriate) where it believes it is necessary to prevent harm to any person.

Report and recommendations

35. The Royal Commission into Family Violence is due to deliver its report and final recommendations to the government by Monday, 29 February 2016.
36. To keep up-to-date with the Royal Commission's progress, visit www.rcfv.com.au.