

As the two Government members of Eastern Victoria region, we jointly make this submission to the Royal Commission into Family Violence and thank the Royal Commission for the opportunity to contribute to its deliberations.

Background

Family violence is a complex, frequently misunderstood and under-reported social and public health issue affecting our entire community.

Unfortunately, family violence touches many people in Eastern Victoria and across the state as a whole.

The Premier has correctly stated that family violence is the number one law and order issue currently facing our society. As is noted in the Royal Commission's Terms of Reference, it is "the most pervasive form of violence perpetrated against women in Victoria."

The Royal Commission Terms of Reference

It is timely that a Royal Commission is being held to determine what policies and initiatives the government should adopt.

Appropriately, given the complex nature of this problem, the Terms of Reference for the Royal Commission are wide.

They require the Royal Commission to "examine and evaluate strategies, frameworks, policies, programs and services across government and local government, media, business and community organisations and establish best practice" in relation to:

- prevention;
- early intervention;
- support services;
- perpetrator accountability;
- systemic responses; and
- better coordination across government agencies.

Issues relating to Eastern Victoria

It is well established that socio-economic factors such as geographic location, income, ethnicity, financial pressures, alcohol and drug usage, mental illness and social and economic exclusion all affect the prevalence and nature of family violence.

Many of these socio-economic factors are inter-dependent. For example, high rates of unemployment can arise from social and economic exclusion and can, in turn, lead to drug abuse and generate substantial financial pressures.

Importantly for the Eastern Victoria community, many of these socio-economic factors can also be inter-dependent with location. Outer urban and regional communities are often more prone to economic dislocation (including unemployment, underemployment and financial strain) and social isolation (which can lead to drug abuse and have an impact on mental health).

In addition to impacting on the prevalence of family violence, many of the locational issues associated with outer urban and regional communities also create challenges in how the government can respond to family violence.

Providing co-ordinated, effective services to outer urban and regional communities is challenging across the full spectrum of government agencies. It is particularly difficult with a problem as complex as family violence.

We ask that the Royal Commission, in developing its recommendations, have regard to the challenges of delivering effective policies and strategies in relation to family violence in outer urban and regional communities. In particular, we ask that the Royal Commission consider the challenges of addressing prevention, early intervention and the co-ordination of service delivery across agencies in these communities.

In addition, we ask that the Royal Commission have regard to the needs of Aboriginal communities, which are identified in the Terms of Reference as communities with specific needs. There are Aboriginal communities throughout Eastern Victoria, many of which are located in particularly remote areas and which also experience pronounced economic and social dislocation.

Conclusion

This is a once in a generation opportunity to take a significant step forward in how our society thinks about and responds to this issue. I look forward to working with families, individuals and organisations in the not-for-profit sector in the Eastern Victoria community in supporting the work of the Royal Commission and the implementation of its recommendations.

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