

PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA

SUBMISSION TO
THE ROYAL COMMISSION
INTO
FAMILY VIOLENCE

JOINT SUBMISSION FROM

MAREE EDWARDS

STATE MEMBER FOR BENDIGO WEST

HON. JACINTA ALLAN

STATE MEMBER FOR BENDIGO EAST

MINISTER FOR PUBLIC TRANSPORT AND EMPLOYMENT

To enquire into and report on how Victoria's response to family violence can be improved by providing practical recommendations to stop family violence

Introduction

Maree Edwards State Member for Bendigo West and the Hon. Jacinta Allan State Member for Bendigo East, Minister for Public Transport and Employment met with stakeholders and this Issues Paper reflects their views and provides practical recommendations to stop family violence.

Stakeholder consultation included:

- Kim Sykes – Bendigo Community Health
- Jenna Abbot and Alannah Jenkins - Loddon Campaspe CASA
- Bonnie Renou and Chris Casey - Loddon Campaspe Community Legal Centre
- Margaret Augerines - Centre for Non-violence
- Liz March - Castlemaine District Community Health
- McKenna Bryon – Loddon Mallee Women’s Health
- Robyn Trainor - Annie North Women’s Refuge.

We acknowledge the very important work of the above agencies in responding to family violence and the excellent programs that each organisation provides to foster a violent-free society.

Family Violence Protection Act 2008

We support and agree with the principles of the Family Violence Protection Act 2008:

In enacting this Act, the Parliament recognises the following principles—

- (a) That non-violence is a fundamental social value that must be promoted;
- (b) That family violence is a fundamental violation of human rights and is unacceptable in any form;
- (c) That family violence is not acceptable in any community or culture;
- (d) That, in responding to family violence and promoting the safety of persons who have experienced family violence, the justice system should treat the views of victims of family violence with respect.

In enacting this Act, the Parliament also recognises the following features of family violence—

- (a) That while anyone can be a victim or perpetrator of family violence, family violence is predominantly committed by men against women, children and other vulnerable persons;
- (b) That children who are exposed to the effects of family violence are particularly vulnerable and exposure to family violence may have a serious impact on children's current and future physical, psychological and emotional wellbeing;
- (c) That family violence—
 - (i) affects the entire community; and
 - (ii) occurs in all areas of society, regardless of location, socioeconomic and health status, age, culture, gender, sexual identity, ability, ethnicity or religion;
- (d) That family violence extends beyond physical and sexual violence and may involve emotional or psychological abuse and economic abuse;
- (e) That family violence may involve overt or subtle exploitation of power imbalances and may consist of isolated incidents or patterns of abuse over a period of time.

Question One

Are there other goals the Royal Commission should consider?

We support and applaud the Royal Commission goals into Family Violence:

- 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.

Question Eight

Tell us about any gaps or deficiencies in current responses to family violence, including legal responses. Tell us about what improvements you would make to overcome these gaps and deficiencies, or otherwise improve current responses.

The stakeholders are of the view that the following gaps and deficiencies in current responses to family violence are:

- Bendigo court facilities are not of a standard to support those affected by family violence including;
 - no secure waiting areas
 - no confidential interview rooms
 - lack of safety screenings at the court
- Rural and regional need a special category of disadvantage
- Lack of resources for men's behaviour programs and counselling services
- Child protection changes are needed to put the safety and wellbeing of the child first and not necessarily with a focus on family reunification
- Better recognition that Family Violence is not only physical violence but can also be financial and emotional intimidation that includes controlling and bullying behaviour
- Resources needed for first call /first response /first contact with system
- Increase risk of violence and vulnerability because the system is not coping.

Question Ten

What practical changes might improve integration and co-ordination? What barriers to integration and co-ordination exist?

- Ensure there is a consistent, coordinated and integrated response between the law, response agencies, police and service providers

- Improved skills of professionals who deal in children services leading to increased opportunities for early intervention
- Provide a Therapeutic Assessment at first point of contact
- Develop and promote better coordination and interconnectedness of online information material
- Increase awareness of Victorian legislation to promote coordinated approach between Family Violence and Family Law
- Regulate all government agencies and organisations that receive government funding and develop a consistent set of organisational approaches and responses to Family Violence
- Ensure collaboration across all health services and develop alliances with community agencies and organisations including local hospitals, Childcare centres, schools, maternity and child health centres and sporting and cultural groups.

Question Eleven

What are some of the most promising and successful ways of supporting the ongoing safety and wellbeing of people affected by violence? Are there gaps or deficiencies in our approach to supporting ongoing safety and wellbeing? How could measures to reduce the impact of family violence be improved?

- After- hours services need to be resourced
- Swift police /system response needed
- 24 hour police stations a priority
- Integrated family violence teams (rapid response)
- Specialised contact centres for children
- Victim is believed and not ignored or not believed.

Question Fourteen

To what extent do current processes encourage and support people to be accountable and change their behaviour? To what extent do they fail to do so? How do we ensure that behaviour change is lasting and sustainable?

- Generational change is needed through ongoing education programs and public awareness campaigns:
 - Gender equality and gender training in schools
 - Specialised training included in university courses
 - Empowerment of women to take action
 - More public awareness campaigns
- In order to drive cultural change in our social systems and structures regarding attitudes to gender equality and ending violence against women, the Victorian Government, through its department and agencies should, through its procurement and other management policies:
 - Ensure government agencies and the services it funds (government and NGOs) are required to work to, and be assessed against, gender equality standards and targets
 - Ensure practices and service delivery are gender sensitive and are compliant with standards of practice and frameworks relating to the prevention of violence against women

- Ensure practices and service delivery work towards maximising the safety of women and children experiencing family violence and work to hold men who use violence towards family members accountable for their use of violence.

Question Sixteen

If you or your organisation has been involved in observing or assessing approaches to behaviour change, tell us about any Australian or international research which may assist the Royal Commission. In particular, what does research indicate about the relative effectiveness of early intervention in producing positive outcomes?

- US model – family court and family violence sitting together - integrated court model
- Victorian legislation allows for integrated model between Family Violence and Family Law however this is not always utilised.

Question Seventeen

Are there specific cultural, social, economic, geographical or other factors in particular groups and communities in Victoria which tend to make family violence more likely to occur, or to exacerbate its effects? If so, what are they?

- Rural and regional need special category of disadvantage due to some areas in regional Victoria having no services
- Out-reach services are needed particularly in rural areas where there is high disadvantage and poor availability of public transport
- More resources are needed to support local initiatives that are community driven.

Question Twenty-one

The Royal Commission will be considering both short term and longer term responses to family violence. Tell us about the changes which you think could produce the greatest impact in the short and longer term.

We recommend the following:

- Develop integrated policy framework for Family Violence to include cultural change and implement across all sectors including government departments and agencies to ensure best practice
- Support local safety committees to develop local solutions to prevent violence against women e.g. Good Start Program
- Enhance regional capability and leadership through regional planning and integrated policy and plans
- Publically release the Australian Institute of Criminology report on the Meta-evaluation of the Preventing Violence Against Women in our Community Pilot
- Resource family violence specialist agencies to:
 - Provide adequate services within their catchment. This needs to include out-reach services particularly in regional and rural areas where there is high disadvantage and poor availability of public transport.
 - Provide easily accessible information to women in regional and rural areas

- Offer training, based on the Common Risk Assessment Framework, to generalist primary/community service staff to increase the identification and early intervention of family violence
 - Develop clear referral pathways and promote their services via the web, electronic national and local service directories and mobile applications
 - Our partners are currently advocating the inclusion of family violence services in the National Health Services Directory and have contacted 1800Respect to include CNV in the Daisy app.
 - Set up secure electronic referral systems. Connecting Care/Argus is the secure messaging service used in primary health within Mount Alexander and regionally. Our partners are currently supporting CNV to adopt this secure messaging service. The Police have an e-referral system with CNV that will remain in place.
 - Systematically collect and share data to support evidence based practice and measure the effectiveness of local family violence strategies.
- Prioritise upgrading regional and rural court infrastructure to ensure the safety of victims of family violence
 - In order to drive cultural change in our social systems and structures regarding attitudes to gender equality and ending violence against women, the Victorian Government, through its department and agencies should, through its procurement and other management policies:
 - Ensure government agencies and the services it funds (government and NGOs) are required to work to, and be assessed against, gender equality standards and targets
 - Ensure practices and service delivery are gender sensitive and are compliant with standards of practice and frameworks relating to the prevention of violence against women
 - Ensure practices and service delivery work towards maximising the safety of women and children experiencing family violence and work to hold men who use violence towards family members accountable for their use of violence.

Thank you for considering this submission