



**Interface Councils Human Services
Directors Group**

**Submission to the Victorian Royal
Commission into Family Violence**

May 2015

Compiled by:

Interface Councils Social Planners Network



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To the Royal Commission,

The Interface Councils Human Services Directors Group (ICHSDG) welcomes the opportunity to address the Terms of Reference on behalf of the ten Victorian Interface Councils. This submission has been compiled by Melton City Council, with thanks to the Interface Councils Social Planners Network, who represent the ten Interface and growth area Councils, which are:

Mitchell Shire	Casey City	Nillumbik Shire
Melton City	Hume City	Yarra Ranges Shire
Wyndham City	Whittlesea City	Cardinia Shire
Mornington Peninsula Shire		

Where relevant, this submission aims to provide an overview of issues identified as being shared across the ten Interface Local Government Areas (LGA's). Rather than repeating submissions, it aims to provide a general overview of the particular growth and Interface area factors which impact on family violence outcomes, with the intention to compliment individual submissions made by the Interface Councils. Where possible an indication and reference to the individual Council submissions has also been included.

Royal Commission Goals

The Royal Commissions' Family Violence Issues Paper establishes the Commissions goals at item 10, and its intention to make recommendations in the following areas:

In keeping with its 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:
 - o facilitating early intervention before violence occurs
 - o providing fast, effective responses to those who report family violence
 - o 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.

Interface Councils Human Services Directors Group (ICHSDG)

Recommendations of the ten Interface Councils

That the terms of reference be enhanced to include:

1. Establish a state-wide peak body that has responsibility for coordination of primary prevention efforts across sectors in Victoria, to ensure a strategic, consistent and coordinated approach to primary prevention across Victoria, with a particular emphasis of Interface Council Areas.
2. To gain a better understanding of the contributing factors and higher risks associated with violence in growth areas and interface local government areas and how these contributing factors are leading to higher reported incidences of family violence among these LGA's.
3. Fund and resource regional partnerships, to maximise State Government efforts focused on the primary prevention of violence against women and support the delivery of effective and tailored prevention strategies at the local level, particularly among Interface and growth area Council areas.
4. The need for the Victorian Government to increase funding for the primary prevention of violence against women in Victoria that specifically redresses the determinants of violence against women related to gender inequality, as identified in the evidence-base.
5. The need to resource local government family violence prevention partnerships, which not only focus on primary prevention but also target the higher degree of contributing factors present among Interface and growth areas council areas, which lead to an increased risk and actual incidence of family violence reported in these Interface areas.

Question One Are there other goals the Royal Commission should consider?

It is pleasing to note that the goals of the Commission recognise that the days of viewing family violence as anything other than a whole of community concern are over.

Men's violence against women is not inevitable, it is preventable. A significant emerging body of evidence suggests that it is possible to not just reduce men's violence against women, but to prevent it before it occurs. It is now recognised internationally that by identifying the factors that increase the likelihood of violence against women occurring, it is possible to predict its occurrence, and to understand how to prevent it.

The prevention of men's violence against women requires acknowledging that this violence is gender-based, and that gender is essential to understanding the causes and consequences of men's violence, and indeed, how to prevent it. This acknowledgment also recognises that men's violence against women is not the result of one single factor, but a complex interaction of personal, situational and socio-cultural factors; particularly in relation to gender inequality. The evidence base identifies the unequal distribution of power and resources between men and women, and an adherence to rigidly defined gender roles and stereotypes, as the drivers or factors most significantly linked to the perpetration of men's violence against women¹.

The ICHSDG believe that resourcing considerations and continued support for local collaborations will continue to remain the key mechanism to target and reduce family violence. Targeting the social and economic determinants of family violence, as well as militating against some of the contributing factors that are more pronounced among currently under resourced Interface council areas, is a key concern for the ICHSDG. Accordingly, the ICHSDG would support the expansion of the Royal Commission's goals and Term of Reference to incorporate appropriate resourcing and the need for a Victorian peak body to oversee the resourcing and coordination of Victorian Violence prevention activities. Notably, it is from this resourcing and coordination basis that the predominant scope and content that the ICHSDG submission is pitched.

Factors contributing to the present levels of Family Violence

As identified in the Royal Commissions Issues paper, the ICHSDG understands the following aspects of family violence:

- i) Women are at least three times more likely to be victims of domestic violence and most often experience violence at the hands of a current or past intimate partner. In Australia, one in three women will experience physical violence and one in five women will experience sexual violence. Research demonstrates that one in four young people have witnessed violence against their mother or step mother and up to one in five children are subject to violence in the their home.

¹ VicHealth, 2007, *Preventing violence before it occurs: a framework and background prevention of violence against women in Victoria*, VicHealth, Melbourne, Australia.

- ii) The social and economic determinants of violence demonstrate the importance of acknowledging the difference between *causes* and *contributing factors* of family violence. The different causes of violence against women are complex. There are often individual, community or societal explanations as to why such violence happens, however the key determinants to the perpetration of violence against women include:
- The unequal distribution of power and resources between men and women;
 - Adherence to rigidly defined gender roles; and
 - Broader cultures of violence.²
- iii) The various *contributing factors* to family violence include:
- Witnessing or experiencing family violence as a child
 - Income, education and occupation
 - Weak social connections
 - Neighbourhood characteristics, such as service infrastructure, high unemployment rates, poverty and
 - The unequal distribution of material resources.

In addition to the contributing factors indicated above, ICHSDG also recognises the number of localised factors which further compound the present levels of family violence, particularly among the Interface Council areas, these include:

- Housing stress and other financial stresses including fuel vulnerability
- New births
- Equitable Access to services
- Police responsiveness
- The use of alcohol and other Drugs
- Social Isolation and
- The adequacy of policy and community responses to family violence.

As clearly evidenced in the submissions made by the ten individual local government areas involved in the Interface council alliance, council's have established themselves as an essential partner in building gender equitable communities that prevent violence against women before it occurs. This is achieved through council's role as civic leaders, employers, planners, managers of public environments and providers of recreational and frontline whole-of-life services within their communities.

As the arm of government closest to the community, and given the nature by which Council officers work with individuals, families and community organisations, they are ideally suited to

² VicHealth, Preventing violence against women: A framework for action, <https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/programs-and-projects/vichealth-framework-for-preventing-violence-against-women>, accessed 10 May 2015.

deliver community based responses to promote gender equity and prevent family violence. Council's are also uniquely placed to challenge attitudes and behaviours that perpetuate violence against women within the community.

The ICHSDG is particularly cognisant of the significant role councils play in the coordination at the front line in regard to growth area and other Interface council areas. The ICHSDG strongly advocates for the increased resourcing of locally coordinated responses.

FAMILY VIOLENCE IN THE CONTEXT OF INTERFACE GROWTH COUNCILS

About Interface Councils

Interface Councils of Melbourne are comprised of the ten municipalities that form an arc around metropolitan Melbourne and incorporate both green wedge and urban growth boundary. They bridge the gap between metropolitan Melbourne and rural Victoria, sharing characteristics of both urban and rural communities.³

Family Violence in the Interface

The ICHSDG collectively understands that the age of instantaneous access to information, particularly associated with the rise of social media, has lead to a ubiquitous heightened awareness, along with a commensurate degree intolerance, indignation and outrage in relation to reports of family and community violence.

Along with this heightened maturity of community understanding, comes a commanding resolve and expectation for deliberative action to eliminate family violence. The degree of sophistication and increased appetite for holistically integrated responses has for some, continued to expose the failings of the existing institutions and systems designed to protect, mitigate and eliminate family violence.

This increased appetite for intervention, has intensified the role for locally responsive, innovative action which is reflected in Council Plans, priorities and service responses. This is particularly true among the Interface growth area councils. As evidenced by the following discussion and supporting figures, the incidences of family violence experienced within the Interface growth area council areas is significantly higher than other inner metropolitan Melbourne areas.

Supporting Evidence

The Victoria Police reported incidents of family violence in 2013-14 highlights that growth area councils have higher numbers of family violence incidents compared to the Victorian rate (1,129 incidents per 100, 000 people), non-growth Interface councils and to other Metropolitan Melbourne local government areas (LGAs).

³ Interface Councils: Creating Liveable Communities in the Interface 2013

Chart 1

**Number of Family Violence Incidents Reported to Victoria Police, including
with Children Present, Metropolitan Melbourne, 2013-14
(*growth area councils)**

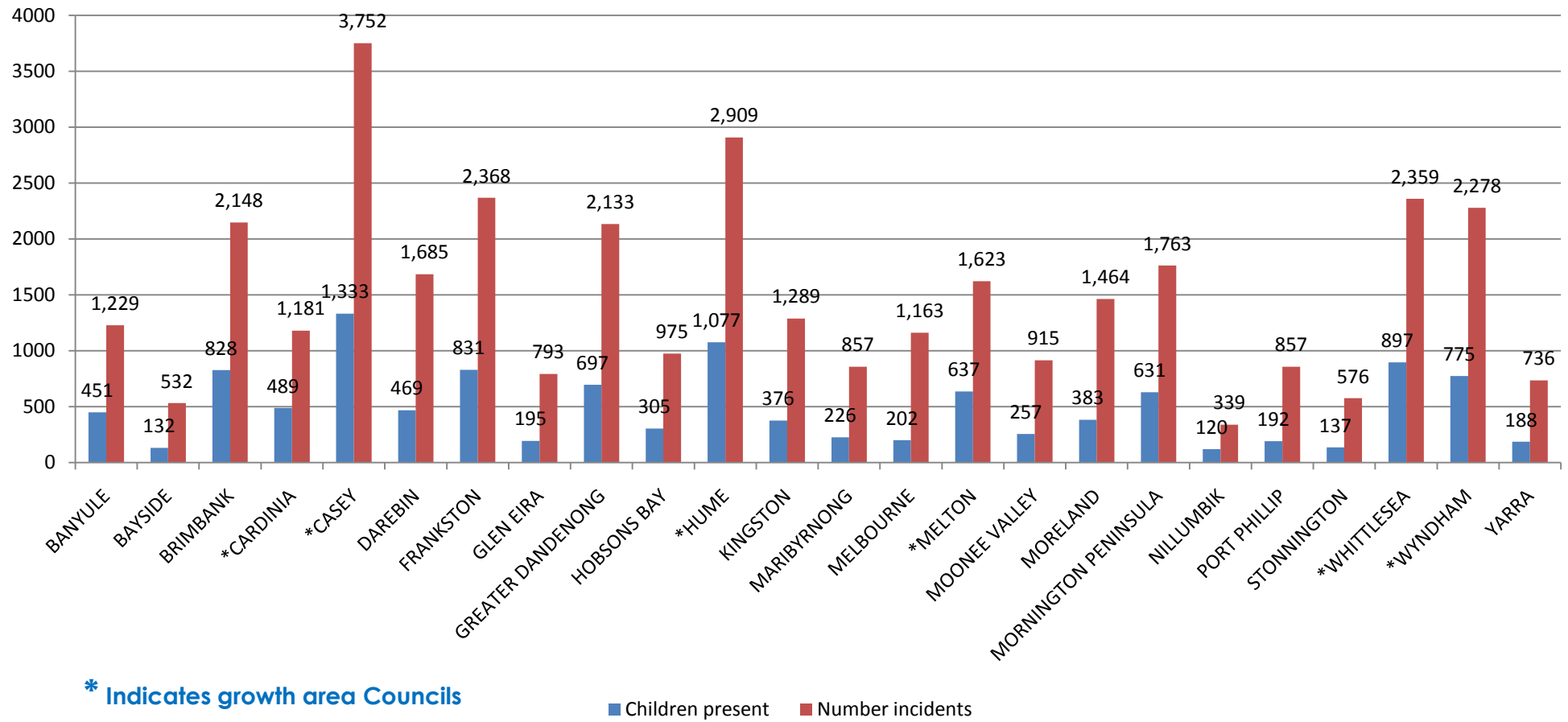
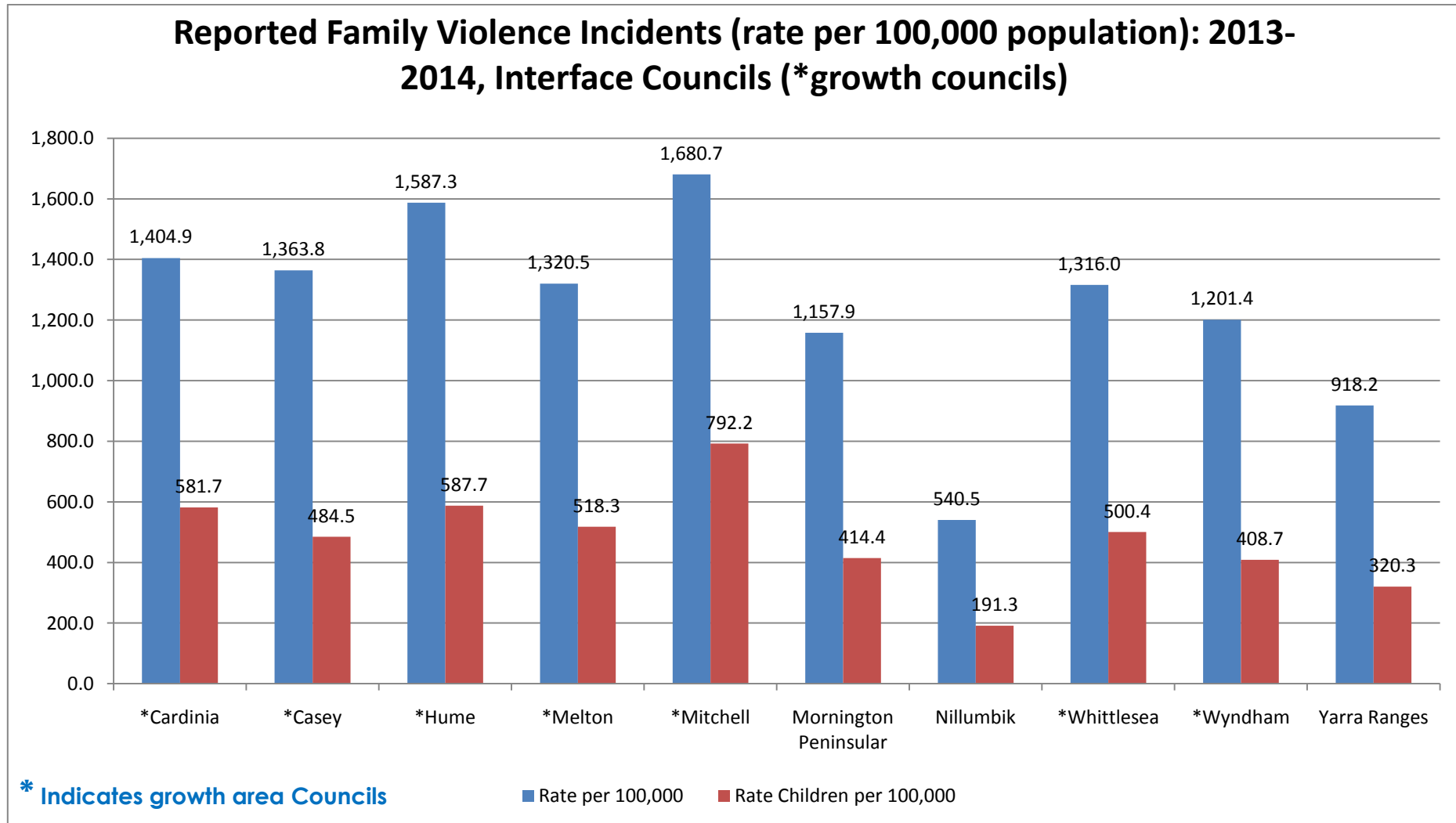
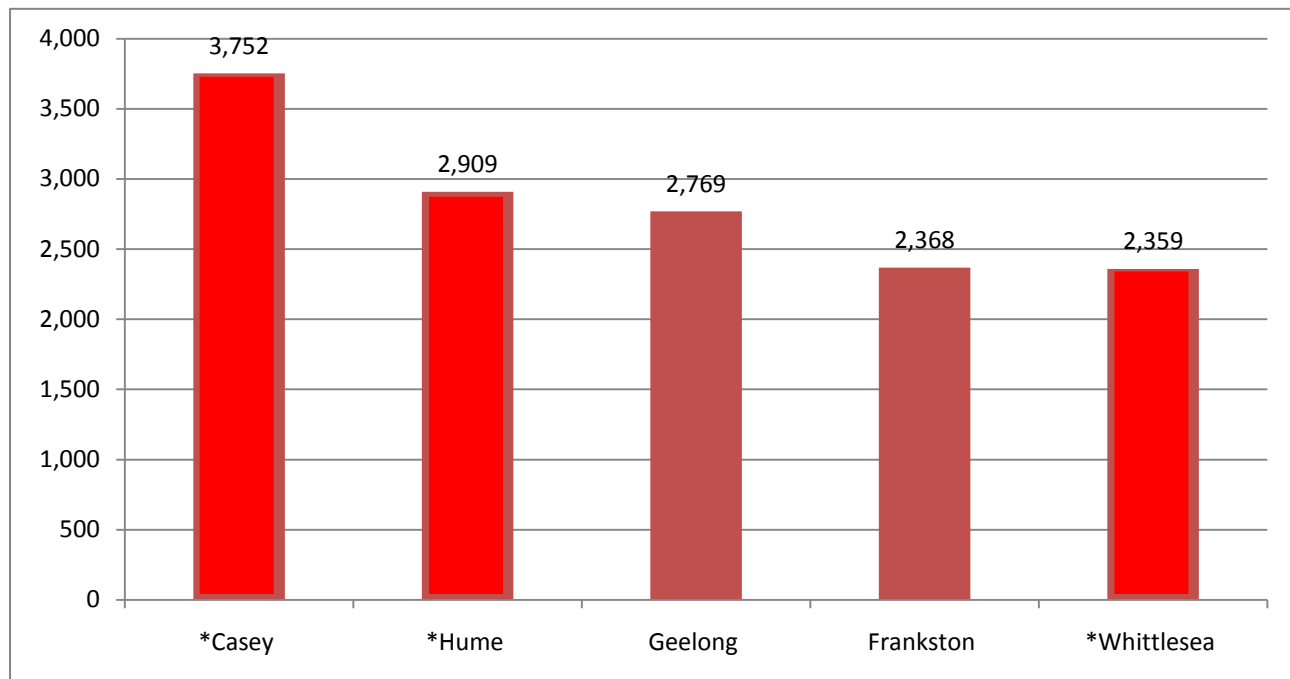


Chart 2



As evidenced by Charts 1 and 2, residents in growth areas experience specific and complex contextual factors that contribute to experiences of family violence. Despite having some of the highest levels of family violence in the State, they experience significant barriers to accessing specialist family violence services.

Chart 3
Highest Number of Family Violence Incidents in Victoria (by LGA) reported to Victoria Police⁴ (*growth councils) 2013-14



*Growth area Councils

Whilst the family violence referrals have more than tripled in Northern Metropolitan Melbourne since 2009/10 and 8.7% in 2013-14, the biggest increases in the past year have been seen in the Growth Council LGAs of Whittlesea (12%) and Hume (14%).⁵ However, despite the increasing demand there has not been a proportionate increase to the workforce, program funding or additional resources in the family violence sector. Already-stretched services supporting women and children and holding men accountable for their violence are under severe pressure.

Key data facts for Growth Council LGAs: Family Violence Incidents reported to police

Metropolitan Melbourne

- The total number of reported family violence incidents in Growth Council LGAs makes up almost 40%⁶ of the total number of family violence incidents for Metropolitan Melbourne LGAs; despite only being 6 LGAs out of 24.

⁴ Victoria Police Family Violence Incidents 2013-2014, cited in The Age 'Family Violence Rates Higher in Victoria's Country Areas' 4 March 2015, Richard Willingham <http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/family-violence-rates-higher-in-victorias-country-areas-20150303-13th4x.html> accessed 20 April 2015.

⁵ Women's Health In the North (WHIN), Violence Against Women: Information and Facts 2013-2014 (Northern Metropolitan Region) available at <http://www.whin.org.au/resources/preventing-violence-against-women.html>

⁶ 39.25%

- Four Growth Council LGAs, Casey (3,752), Hume (2,909), Whittlesea (2,359), Wyndham (2,278), are included in the top five LGAs⁷ for highest family violence incidents in Metropolitan Melbourne.

North West Metropolitan Region of Melbourne

- Growth Council LGAs make up almost 45%⁸ of the total number of reported family violence incidents for the North West Metropolitan Region of Melbourne; despite only being 4 LGAs out of 14.
- Three Growth Council LGAs, Hume (2,909), Whittlesea (2,359), Wyndham (2,278), are included in the top five LGAs⁹ for the highest family violence incidents in the North West Metropolitan Melbourne (Growth Council Melton comes in at 6th).

South Metropolitan Melbourne

- Growth Council LGAs make up almost 33%¹⁰ of the total number of reported family violence incidents for the South Metropolitan Region of Melbourne; despite only being 2 LGAs out of 10.
- The Growth Council of Casey (3,752) has the highest number of family violence incidents in the South Metropolitan Melbourne and Growth Council Cardinia (1,181) comes in at 6th highest.¹¹

Family Violence incidents reported to Police where children were present

Metropolitan Melbourne

- Growth Council LGAs make up 44.03% of the total family violence incidents with children present reported to police for the Melbourne Metropolitan Region; despite being 6 LGAs out of 24.
- Growth Council LGAs of Casey (1,333), Hume (1,077) and Whittlesea (897) have the highest number of incidents of family violence with children present.

North West Metropolitan Region

- Growth Council LGAs make up nearly 50%¹² of the total number of reported family violence incidents with children present for the North West Metropolitan Region; despite being 4 out of the 14;
- Growth Council LGAs Hume (1,077), Whittlesea (897), Wyndham (775) and Melton (637) make up 4 out top 5¹³ for the North West Metropolitan Region.

⁷ Casey (3,752), Hume (2,909), Frankston (2,368), Whittlesea (2,359), Wyndham (2,278)

⁸ 44.33%

⁹ Hume (2,909), Whittlesea (2,359), Wyndham (2,278), Brimbank (2,148), Darebin (1,685), Melton (1,623)

¹⁰ 32.36%

¹¹ Casey (3,752), Frankston (2,368), Greater Dandenong (2,133), Mornington Peninsula (1,763), Kingston (1,289), (Cardinia (1,181)

¹² 49.68%

¹³ Hume (1,077), Whittlesea (897), Brimbank (828), Wyndham (775) and Melton (637)

South Metropolitan Region

- Growth Council LGAs make up 36.34% of the total number of reported family violence incidents with children present for the South Metropolitan Region; despite being 2 LGAs out of the 10; growth LGA of Casey (1,333) tops the list with Cardinia fifth (489).

Some of the known risk factors for family violence, such as, drug and alcohol misuse, weak social connections and social cohesion, limited access to systems of support, and financial stress, are more prevalent in growth areas than in the remainder of metropolitan Melbourne. The National Growth Area Alliance (NGAA) reports that “Growth areas are characterised by levels of disadvantage and unemployment higher than those of metropolitan Australia. There are lower levels of education, and higher incidences of risk behaviours. The combination of these risk factors with the lack of appropriate and accessible services means that families and children in growth areas are more likely to experience problems. Outer metropolitan growth areas have significantly less community services than the metropolitan average, examples include:

- \$9.8 billion lag in infrastructure provision
- \$10 billion required to complete proposed rail and road works
- 40% of health care services are located in inner Melbourne where only 20% of Melbourne's population lives
- \$36 billion will be needed over the next 30 years to provide all of the infrastructure needs of greenfield sites.¹⁴

This means families do not have the same levels of support as do families in inner metropolitan areas making them more vulnerable and less resilient than their inner metropolitan counterparts.¹⁵

The NGAA recommends establishing a Suburban Community Infrastructure Program and to extend the Regional Development Australia Fund to prioritise outer metropolitan growth areas to ensure this growth is adequately catered for.¹⁶

Without adequate resourcing, population growth will continue to put strain on service providers. In the next 20 years¹⁷ it is estimated that the City of Whittlesea will have an additional 133,900 residents, including an additional:

- 10,809 infants and preschool children aged 0 to 4 years (69% increase)
- 25,293 school aged children (5 to 17 year olds) (80% increase)
- 14,621 residents aged over 70 years (105% increase)
- 26,415 families* (69% increase)

¹⁴ Interface Councils: Creating Liveable Communities in the Interface 2013

¹⁵ NGAA, Supporting More Sustainable Growth Areas, June 2010

¹⁶ http://www.ngaa.org.au/media/830/tomorrow_s_healthy_and_productive_communities_-_the_case_for_community_infrastrucutre_in_outer_metropolitan_growth_areas_-_brochure.pdf

¹⁷ 2015 to 2035

- 19,167 couple families with dependents (69% increase)
- 5,447 one parent families (71% increase)

One of the attractors of living in growth areas is lower house prices, however, families living in growth areas are faced with high living costs, such as mortgages and petrol due largely to the lack of public transport services as well as fewer opportunities to access local jobs and community amenities. Economic influences include financial hardship, problem gambling and unemployment have also been identified as contributing factors to family violence.

These high living costs, lack of resources and absence of meaningful community connections, are known contributing factors which need to be redressed in order for Interface and growth area councils to be able realise a reduction in family violence Incidents.

Exploring the role of Increased reporting and need for resources to respond

Increased reporting of family violence has not been matched with a service system appropriately resourced to be able to respond. Instead, primary Intervention, early Intervention and tertiary intervention programs and service struggle to keep pace with the requisite and increasing need being realised.

All of this is particularly true for those LGA's within the Interface, which are responsible for the bulk of Victoria's residential and community growth. The importance of what we do now, our ability to adapt, evolve and mature to ensure timely, culturally sensitive support is provided to our communities to remove all forms of violence and support resilient individuals and communities into the future, is perhaps the most profound for those of us living, working and growing within the Interface LGA's. This is such a the key concern to the ICHSDG, it is reflected in the ICHSDG Work Plan.

Question Four If you or your organisation have been involved in programs, campaigns or initiatives about family violence for the general community, tell us what these involved and how they have been evaluated.

The Interface Human Services Directors Group Work Plan 2015-2017

The ICHSDG Work Plan identifies family violence, fragile families and at risk youth among its top three priority areas. I also prioritise one major piece of research in the area of fragile families and at risk youth. A key aspect of this research is to be family violence and its relationship to social and economic circumstances of those living at the Interface.

It is clear that the ICHSDG views appropriate resourcing and opportunities for continued local collaborations as being a key element for consideration currently missing from the Terms of Reference of the Royal Commission. Accordingly, it is within this context, that as a collegial and collective authority that the Interface Councils Human Services Directors Group commends its overall submission, together with the attached summaries of the ten Interface Council areas for your due consideration.

The need for the establishment of a peak body to oversee the coordination of Primary prevention and local area responses, monitor resources and advocate the needs and equitable resourcing for local responses within growth area and Interface Councils is a key recommendation of the ICHSDG. This is reflected in the recommendations of the ICHSDG.

OVERVIEW OF INDIVIDUAL SUBMISSIONS MADE BY INTERFACE COUNCILS



CITY OF MELTON

Overview of the City of Melton

The City of Melton is located in Melbourne's outer west, in one of the fastest growing regions in Australia. The current growth rate is 4.3% and the population is 130,451.¹⁸ The municipality has a SEIFA rating of 1002, making it the 10th most disadvantaged municipality in metropolitan Melbourne.¹⁹ The municipality consists of the Melton Township, the Eastern Corridor – which has developed rapidly over the past 10-15 years, a number of isolated townships and rural areas. It has a large culturally and linguistically diverse population that continues to grow.

Prevalence of violence against women

As noted within the Royal Commission's Issues Paper, the prevalence of violence against women in Australia is widespread and the impact of this violence is significant. In addition to the figures outlined within the Issues Paper, a range of other sources highlight the breadth and prevalence of men's violence against women in Australia, including:

- Each week a woman dies at the hands of her current or former partner²⁰
- Of women aged 15 and older:
 - 29% have experienced physical assault²¹
 - 17% have experienced sexual assault²²
 - 25% have experienced emotional abuse²³
 - 24% of women have also experienced unwanted sexual touching.²⁴
- Women in Australia are three times more likely to experience violence at the hands of their partners than men²⁵

The effect of violence on women and the community more broadly is significant and costs Victoria an estimated \$3.4 billion per year²⁶. Effects range from acute physical and mental

¹⁸ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2011) Census of Population and Housing, ABS: Canberra, available at: <http://www.abs.gov.au/census>

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Dearden, J, & Jones, W (2008). *Homicide in Australia: 2006 – 07 National Homicide Monitoring Program Annual Report*, Australian Institute of Criminology, Canberra

²¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2006). *Personal Safety Survey*. Cat. No. 4906.0, Australian Bureau of Statistics: Canberra

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Office of Women's Policy (2009). *A right to respect: Victoria's plan to prevent violence against women 2010-2020*. Victorian Government: Melbourne.

health problems through to increased need for health and support services. More detailed effects of the impacts of men's violence against women include:

- Male partner violence is the leading contributor to death, disability and illness for women aged 15 to 44 years, more so than obesity, high cholesterol and high blood pressure²⁷
- Children who witness family violence are found to be at higher risk of mental health issues such as anxiety and depression, as well as loneliness, pervasive fear and low self-esteem.²⁸ Witnessing violence is also found to place children at high risk of impaired social learning and effective functioning.²⁹
- Violence affects women's ability to attain and keep stable employment; affecting their long terms income and financial security.
- Women currently comprise 66% of clients accessing Victoria government-funded homelessness services, and, of women with children seeking access to supported accommodation, 55% have experience violence.³⁰

Promising practice examples

Regional and state-wide action plans and partnerships

Partnerships play an important role in driving social, cultural and behavioural shifts required to eliminate violence against women and their children. State government support for these initiatives is essential to ensuring long-term sustainability and consistency across Victoria.

Melton City Council is a signatory to:

- Preventing Violence Together: the Western Region Action Plan to Prevent Violence Against Women
- Action for Equity: A Sexual and Reproductive Health Plan for Melbourne's West,
- Western Region United Project to Prevent Violence against Women

The Western Region were the first in Victoria to develop a regional strategy and partnership between local governments, community health and women's health, dedicated to preventing violence against women. The Action Plan and governance/ partnership structure provide a promising model to replicate.³¹

²⁷ VicHealth (2004). *The health costs of violence: Measuring the burden of disease caused by intimate partner violence*. Victorian Health Promotion Foundation: Melbourne.

²⁸ Laing, L. (2000). *Children, young people and domestic violence: Issue Paper 2*. Australian Domestic & Family Violence Review

²⁹ Flood, M. & Fergus, L. (2008). *An assault on our future: The impact of violence on young people and their relationships*. White Ribbon Foundation: Sydney.

³⁰ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2011). *Government-funded specialist homelessness services: SAAP national data collection annual report 2009-10: Victoria*. Cat No. HOU 241, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Canberra.

³¹ Preventing Violence Together (2010) *Preventing Violence Together: the Western Region Action Plan to Prevent Violence Against Women*, PVT: Western Metropolitan Region, Melbourne, available at: <http://whwest.org.au/resource/preventing-violence-together-the-western-region-prevention-of-violence-against-women/>

Since 2007, Melton City Council has taken a leadership role to prevent violence against women and their children through a range of strategies including promoting gender respect and equity. We have worked in partnership with and been guided by many others including:

- Victorian Governments
- VicHealth
- Municipal Association of Victoria
- Women's Health Victoria
- Women's Health West
- Domestic Violence Victoria
- the Western Integrated Family Violence Committee
- Regional Crime Prevention Network
- Western Region Integrated Violence Network

Local action plans and partnerships

As the arm of government closest to the people, local government is well placed to deliver community based responses to family violence. Councils enjoy unrivalled reach and access across their local communities, and are on the frontline of whole-of-life service delivery and are responsible for a range of services and functions. These include roads, parks, waste, land use planning, local laws, urban planning, recreation, community development, health promotion, early years, services for young people, personal and home care, emergency management, building and maintaining assets and advocating for community needs.

Council officers work closely with individuals, families, community organisations, local businesses, sporting clubs, academic institutions and more. This means Council is ideally situated to promote whole-of-community efforts to address the key determinants of violence against women.

To this end, Melton City Council adopted the *Preventing Violence against Women and their Children Strategy and Action Plan (2013-2016)*, and *Preventing Violence Against Women and their Children Policy (2013)*, to establish Council's vision and strategic direction for a violence free community. The Strategy and Action Plan identify four (4) preventative strategies:

1. Strong Partnerships
2. Council Services Creating Supportive Environments
3. Council as a Violence Prevention Leader
4. An Informed and Vocal Community

Overall 45 actions are included in the three year action plan and a number of these have been delivered in its first 12 months. A number of actions are on-going and continue to be embedded in Council practice and service delivery.

The causes and contributing factors of family violence require a whole of government response. As such, all tiers of government need to work towards eliminating the causes of

violence, role modelling gender equity practices and ensuring the adequate support services are available and accessible such as housing provision and legal support.

Community awareness campaigns

Melton Says No to Family Violence (2007)

There is good evidence that school-based interventions targeted to young people in secondary school settings are effective in changing attitudes and behaviours associated with violence against women. Such programs target a population understood to be at high risk of perpetrating and experiencing violence at a stage of the cycle when attitudes are being formed. The 'Melton Says NO!' Project was implemented in 2007 with the main aim to work with students from primary and secondary schools to:

- Engage them in dialogue about development of respectful non-violent relationships, and
- Develop a campaign to address the issue of prevention of violence against women by using media and art forms to influence attitudes of the community.

White Ribbon Campaign (2010—present)

Through primary prevention initiatives and an annual campaign, White Ribbon Australia seeks to change the attitudes and behaviours that lead to and perpetuate men's violence against women, by engaging boys and men to lead social change. The White Ribbon Campaign has been promoted by Melton City Council since 2010. In 2014, a White Ribbon Action Team was established at Melton City Council, comprising of 11 members from across all Council services.

The White Ribbon Campaign provides an opportunity for a community response to family violence, and a change in discourse from family violence as a 'private' issue to one in the 'public' domain. This is challenging due to misinformed and patriarchal views about the causes of violence being so dominant and entrenched at a public and societal level. Attitudes and understanding about violence against women and gender inequity in the public sphere directly influences and reinforces attitudes about the vulnerability and objectivity of women and are taken into the home and enacted through personal relationships in the private sphere, which can result in violence against women. Local government's legislative role is to create healthy communities for all and the scope for influencing what happens in the home is limited. By creating safe, equitable and inclusive communities and places outside the home, these principles will begin to filter into the home. Campaigns like White Ribbon allow local governments to engage in changing prevailing discourse and build awareness about the causes of violence against women.

Workforce development

The VicHealth Indicators Survey found that the City of Melton residents are less prepared to intervene in a situation of family violence, 89.9% as compared to the Victorian average 93.1%.³² Over half of Melton City Council's staff lives within the municipality. To this end, Melton City Council implemented the *Take a Stand against Domestic Violence: It's Everyone's Business Workplace Training* program (2013) to:

- Prevent violence against women using the workplace as the setting by addressing its causes or determinants (including unequal power relations between women and men; adherence to rigid gender stereotypes; and broader cultures of violence)
- Strengthen the organisational capacity of workplaces to promote equal and respectful relationships between women and men; and
- Engage employees in skills development to speak up against attitudes and behaviours that sustain violence in our community.

Take a Stand Training Program Evaluation data showed that the training has had a positive impact on the level of staff knowledge about domestic violence, and the likelihood that staff members would 'take a stand' against domestic violence. A key indicator that the training had a positive impact on participants was that their knowledge about domestic violence and its causes increased. It was also hoped that participants would feel better equipped to speak up against violence-supportive attitudes and behaviours, and use new tools and strategies to take a stand against domestic violence. The post-training feedback sheets showed an increase in the likelihood of this occurring. The data collected through evaluation indicates that the training program was effective in meeting the aim of engaging employees in skills development to take a stand against domestic violence. Importantly, most participants recognised and valued the investment made by Melton City Council in the program violence.

To further support the implementation of Take a Stand Program, Melton City Council adopted a Family Violence Workplace Policy and Procedures (2013).

Investment in workforce development strategies better enable local governments, a large sector within the Australian workforce to understand and engage in primary prevention of violence against women. Systematic ongoing participatory evaluation of these strategies is essential to contribute to the emerging evidence-base and improve systems and structures. To address the causes of violence against women, investment and support for gender equity initiatives across all levels of government is imperative.

The Australian Human Rights Commission 2010 Gender Equality Blueprint's 15 recommendations provide an important framework for action to redress gender inequity.

³² 2011 VicHealth Indicators Survey. Available at vichealth.vic.gov.au. Viewed April 2013

Strategies include:

- Traineeships and recognition of prior learning as additional pathways for women;
- Initiatives that support women to enter into traditionally male dominated sectors and industries;
- Support and retention of women in leadership roles;
- Improved parental leave opportunities;
- Flexible work options for women and men as part of the workplace culture;
- Increase of government benefits, affordable, accessible and quality child care, carer support and increase and maintenance of the disability insurance scheme (with a gender lens applied).³³

The leadership role and mandate of local governments within their communities provides an essential strength for undertaking a whole-of-community approach. Workforce development to achieve greater gender equity and prevent violence against women is necessary.

³³ World Economic Forum (2013) *The global gender gap report*, World Economic Forum: Switzerland, available at: <http://www.weforum.org/reports/global-gender-gapreport-2013>

MITCHELL SHIRE COUNCIL



Mitchell Shire

The Mitchell Shire is located in the heart of Victoria, approximately 40 kilometres from the Melbourne CBD and covers 2,864 square kilometres. The dominant character of the Shire is rural but there is also a significant urban growth area at the south of the Shire. Wallan and Beveridge are the existing townships which are located within this urban growth corridor and it is projected that they will experience rapid population growth over the coming decade.

As at June 30 2012, Mitchell Shire had an Estimated Residential Population of 36,244. This is projected to more than double to 79,646 by 2031.

Mitchell Shire has the highest rate of reported family violence incidents per 100,000 of all the Interface local government areas. Compared to the rest of Victoria, Mitchell Shire is ranked 15th out of 79 Councils for police callouts for domestic violence incidents. Over the past five years, the number of family violence incidents reported to police increased by 53 per cent. Last year, a child was present at almost half the family violence incidents reported to police.

Plans and Policies

The Mitchell Shire Enterprise Agreement 2014-17 includes a section on Family Violence which entitles staff to additional leave and individual support that will allow them to fulfil their role.

Family violence is identified within the Mitchell Municipal Health and Wellbeing Plan under Priority Area 2: Strengthen Community Resilience and Minimise Harm. A key target under this priority is to develop and implement strategies which focus on family violence, and ultimately reduce rates of family violence.

Mitchell shire is also signed up to the Victorian Local Government Women's Charter.

Campaigns

'Elly the Elephant in the Room' family violence awareness campaign is a campaign to raise awareness of family violence in our community. Elly who is a fibreglass life-sized baby Elephant, will travel throughout Mitchell Shire and be exhibited in a range of venues, including sporting clubs, health centres and neighbourhood houses. At her size, Elly is certainly be eye catching and is a clever play on the phrase 'the elephant in the room'. The aim is to inspire the Mitchell community to speak up about family violence in a bid to raise awareness of family violence, to help those who are suffering from family violence and to continue to find preventative measures. People will be encouraged to interact with Elly through 'feeding' her with comment slips through the slot on her back. These comments will be posted on Elly's Facebook page as 'Elly's food for thought'. You can also be able to track Elly's travels throughout the shire through this page (<https://www.facebook.com/EllytheElephantinMitchellShire>). To accompany Elly, there will

also be information provided about where to find further information and support regarding family violence.

- Mitchell Shire commits to hold a White Ribbon Day event each year. This year, the local Cricket Team took part in the inaugural White Ribbon Day Cup. The day was an opportunity for local men in the community to stand up and demonstrate that violence against women will not be tolerated.

Local and Regional Partnerships

Regionally, participation in networks is important for sharing information and good practice, as well as establishing an advocacy platform for improving services to respond to common issues. Mitchell currently participates in the *Hume Region Preventing Violence against Women and Children Network* and *Municipal Association of Victoria Preventing Violence Against Women Network*.

Locally, partnerships between local government and family violence service providers is important for the referral process and raising awareness of the issue within the community. Mitchell Shire Council currently partners with Nexus Primary Health for community education and awareness campaigns relating to family violence.



**City of
Whittlesea**

CITY OF WHITTLESEA

Local Context

The City of Whittlesea is one of the fastest growing municipalities in Australia. In 2014, the City's population was approximately 186,368 (50.4% female) and is expected to grow substantially by 2036 to 333,696 (an increase of 79%). The City is located 20km north of Melbourne's CBD. Covering 490 square kilometres, it is a large municipality containing established urban, growth and rural areas.

Prevalence of family violence

Incidences of family violence in the City increased in 2013-2014 to 2,359 incidents, a rate of 1,316 per 100,000 people.³⁴ The number of incidents of family violence is one of the highest in the Northern Metropolitan Region of Melbourne and is the fifth highest in the state of Victoria. The rate per 100,000 people has increased by 35% in two years and more than 250% since the introduction of the Code of Practice for Victoria Police in 2009.³⁵

Key facts about family violence in the City of Whittlesea³⁶

- Family violence incidents continue to increase year upon year.
- Over the past 14 years (since the introduction of the Code of Practice for Victoria Police) there has been an increase of 268% for the rate of family violence per 100,000 people in the City compared to 172% for Victoria.
- The rate of family violence incidents per 100,000 people has increased 35% in two years.
- The rate of children present in family violence increased 15% on the previous year; it is higher than the rate for the state of Victoria, and one of the highest in the Northern Metropolitan Region.
- 60% of all assaults recorded by police arose from family violence.
- 85% of perpetrators of Intimate Partner Violence were male and 85% of victims were female.
- Family violence was the context for 31% of all rapes, and 34% of all other sex offences; men accounted for 100% of the alleged offenders.

³⁴ Victoria Police Family Violence Incidents 2009-2014

http://www.police.vic.gov.au/content.asp?a=internetBridgingPage&Media_ID=72311

³⁵ Ibid, and, Women's Health In the North, Violence against women in Whittlesea: Information and Facts, 2013-2014, <http://www.whin.org.au/resources/preventing-violence-against-women.html>

- 84% of attendances by police were to recidivist addresses (where police have attended three or more times in the past 12 months).³⁷
- The current level of specialist family violence services available to residents is not sufficient to meet the current demand.
- The majority of agencies (family violence and others) which provide services for residents are struggling to keep up with demand and some are going without access to the services they need.³⁸

City of Whittlesea Responses

Workplace support

One way in which the City is directly providing support to women experiencing family violence is through the City of Whittlesea Family Violence Workplace Support Policy. Whittlesea was one of the first councils to introduce a family violence clause into the Enterprise Agreement in 2011. This clause is now rated as best practice for its support for employees and because it contains all seven of the principles endorsed by the ACTU Congress 2012 in the Work, Life Policy.³⁹ⁱ

Workplace support

The City is proud to be one of the first local governments to introduce a family violence clause in the Enterprise Agreement 2011. The clause includes 20 days of paid leave and underpins council's policy to support staff experiencing family violence. Given that around 45 incidents of family violence are reported to the police each week in the municipality and that more than half of the Council's workforce lives in the municipality, the leadership team recognised that it is highly likely that there are people affected by family violence working at the council. Since the introduction of the clause in 2011, about 15 employees have accessed the paid leave to attend court appointments, seek counselling or attend other medical appointments.

The family violence policy seeks to increase the safety of women experiencing violence and support them in the workplace. Including paid leave there are other things that council can provide that will support someone in this situation. For example, providing support for employees to change work hours or location, practical initiatives such as diverting phone and email to providing information about services through mainstream channels such as the staff e-newsletter. The City have developed a set of implementation procedures and training to ensure a coordinated and consistent response to staff.

Family violence training has been provided to "people managers" (anyone who has staff reporting to them) and 16 specialised contact officers are in place as first point of contact to assist staff to access the supports. Promotion of the policy happens regularly through different mechanisms including face-to-face team meetings for offsite staff, intranet and staff events.

The workplace may be the only place a family violence victim can spend a significant proportion of

³⁷ Victoria Police provided in November 2013

³⁸ City of Whittlesea, Human Services Needs Analysis, 2013, <https://www.whittlesea.vic.gov.au/your-council/advocacy#human>

³⁹ ACTU Congress Work, Life, Family Policy 2012 <http://www.actu.org.au/media/599631/work-life-family-policy-final.pdf>

time away from the perpetrator. The workplace is a place in which those experiencing family violence can seek support and find out about family violence support services. The City recognises the impacts that workplace policy has on increasing access to support services for women experiencing violence and how it could engage in the prevention of escalating violence by intervening early through support and paid leave entitlements for staff. The policy helps to develop an environment that promotes gender equity and models non-violent and respectful relationships to prevent family violence occurring; while creating a supportive environment to encourage victims of family violence to seek support.

Council Policy support

Embedding gender equity into council business

International evidence shows countries with high levels of gender equity - which value women's participation and representation and where there are fewer economic, social or political differences in power between men and women - have significantly lower levels of intimate partner and sexual violence. The strongest predictor of high levels of violence against women at the population level is unequal power between men and women. Therefore it can be demonstrated that to reduce and to eliminate violence against women and children, governments and communities should focus on improving gender equality and reducing inequities between men and women.

As one of the largest employers in the municipality, a service provider and an advocate for the community, Council has a responsibility and is well placed to address gender inequities and to build an inclusive and fair community for women and men. Local governments play a pivotal role in creating safe and healthy environments for the communities they serve. Local governments provide a range of community services, safe public spaces and community facilities which can be used as platforms to influence change. Local governments can lead change across policy, planning, programming, service delivery, partnerships, political influence and advocacy, social marketing and integrating gender equity throughout all Council business and as a whole of community responsibility. The **'Gender Equity in Local Government Fact Sheets'**⁴⁰ point to the simple ways gender equity can be integrated in Council's core business through gender analysis; approaches to infrastructure; land use planning and design; promoting women in leadership; workplaces; sports and recreation; and access to services.

The City of Whittlesea has made significant progress in integrating gender equity initiatives in a number of areas including:

- City of Whittlesea Gender Equity Working Group
- City of Whittlesea Gender Equity Strategy and Action Plan
- City of Whittlesea Family Violence Strategy

Key Gender Equity Strategy projects for the City of Whittlesea 2015 include:

- The development of gender-sensitive guidelines for facilities

⁴⁰ Our Watch November 2014, International Evidence Base Policy Brief 3

- Gender lens applied to City of Whittlesea owned sporting facilities, being built and upgraded, to ensure equitable access for women and girls
- Partnering with Planning Institute Australia to host a forum “Women in Growth Areas” to explore the impact of Precinct Structure Plans on women and to unpack opportunities to improve the processes to enhance gender equity in growth area communities
- Gender lens applied in the development and implementation of recruitment strategy and integrated HR Strategy
- Pay equity audit scheduled every 4 years
- Developing indicators of gender equity within the organisation
- Scoping partnerships with schools around importance of respectful relationships and gender equity (Youth Services)
- Parenting programs extended to weekends and after hours increasing engagement with men/fathers
- Facilitate improved opportunities for women's local economic participation and financial capability and security
- Training in application of a gender lens to work and using gender analysis to identify gender-blind practices and opportunities for improvement
- Later in 2015 Councillors will participate in Gender Equity Information Session to build their capacity for gender equitable decision making and applying a gender lens to their work

Gender Equity Strategy and Gender Equity Working Group

*The City is committed to working to advance gender equity, as a major employer, service provider and advocate for the community. Local government plays an important role in creating and supporting environments that enable the community to achieve optimal health and wellbeing. Reducing gender inequality is a key strategy in achieving this goal, as it allows for a more just, inclusive and fair society for everyone. Addressing gender inequality is also one of the key strategies in the primary prevention of violence against women. The City of Whittlesea's **Gender Equity Working Group (GEWG)** chaired by the CEO provides leadership and support to embed gender equity principles and practice in the core business of Council. The GEWG has scoped and developed the Gender Equity Strategy and Action Plan through research, benchmarking and consultation with members, internal teams and external experts.*

Gender Equity Strategy 2014

The Gender Equity Strategy 2014 articulates Council's priorities for advancing gender equity across the organisation and achieving the vision for a community that is inclusive, respectful, fair and safe for people of all genders. The City recognises that addressing gender inequality is crucial to achieve better health and social wellbeing; improved organisational performance; and the prevention of violence against women. The City recognises that men and women have different access to resources, power, responsibilities and life experiences. Therefore different strategies are often necessary to address this disadvantage and achieve equal outcomes for women and men, boys and girls.⁴¹ The Gender Equity Strategy provides the

⁴¹ Gender Equity in Local Government Fact Sheets <http://www.mav.asn.au/policy-services/social-community/gender-equity/gender-equity-factsheets/Pages/default.aspx>

*framework for the **Gender Equity Action Plan** that the GEWG drives across departments, in order to achieve the vision for a gender equitable organisation, community services, facilities and settings. This strategy and working group is supported by the secretariat support of Community Services. Annual reports are provided to Council and regular progress updates are provided to the Executive Leadership Team and Council.*

In addition to a cross-departmental approach to embed gender equitable strategies, the City of Whittlesea Family Violence Strategy 2014-2018 also engages across different council departments on the issue of family violence (prevention, early intervention and response).

Family Violence Strategy 2014-2018

The Family Violence Strategy 2014-2018 has been developed to articulate Council's response/action across the continuum of prevention, early intervention and intervention responses to family violence. Strategies and actions have been developed as they relate to population groups at particular risk and priority settings for action. Primary prevention strategies in the Family Violence Strategy 2014-2018 (attached) seek to prevent violence before it occurs and focus on:

- *Changing attitudes, behaviour and/or building knowledge and skills across the community*
- *The structural, cultural and societal contexts in which violence occurs; and*
- *Addressing the underlying causes of violence against women.*

Key Family Violence Strategy prevention projects for the City of Whittlesea:

- *Identify barriers and opportunities for women's local economic participation*
- *Implement workplace awareness raising activities that promote equal and respectful relationships*
- *Scope opportunities to support and implement 'bystander intervention' programs both in the workplace and in the community*
- *Work in partnership with schools on the important of respectful relationships and gender equity*
- *Facilitate implementation of evidence-based equity and inclusion programs in sporting and recreation clubs*
- *Facilitate improved opportunities for women's local economic participation and financial capability*

Partnerships

Whittlesea Community Futures Partnership

The City facilitates a range of partnerships, predominately the Whittlesea Community Futures Partnership (WCF) which is made up of 45 not for profit agencies and government department representatives. Within the WCF there are a number of clusters including, Early Years (Best Start), Aged, Cultural Diversity, Disability and Youth. The broad partnership as well as the specific clusters focus on planning for services and programs, sharing knowledge and strive for a more integrated service system locally.

Local partnerships are critical in tackling family violence as they provide a platform for early intervention, working collectively to understand the role each partner plays in the delivery of services and/or programs to the local community. Previously the Victorian Government provided the funding for the project worker position to facilitate the WCF. The project worker facilitates the building of stronger collaboration between local service providers. When this State funding ceased the City continued to fund the project worker position.

In a growth area such as the City of Whittlesea there has been a real absence in local funding for family violence, the City and its agencies have relied on the agencies within the WCF to extend their service to our municipality from their established bases in the inner metropolitan areas. This has stretched their resources. Productivity is lost in travel and other associated complications when trying to provide services to a local government area that they are not based in.

Whittlesea CALD Communities Family Violence Project

The Whittlesea CALD Communities Family Violence Project (WCFVP) brings together a range of key local agencies to design, deliver and evaluate an integrated place-based model to reduce and prevent family violence in Whittlesea's culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities.

The WCFVP was designed following a scoping exercise that incorporated a review of international literature with extensive consultation with survivors of violence, community representatives and support agencies. It works across prevention, early intervention and response, aligning with VicHealth Framework for Primary Prevention of Violence against Women and the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children.

The project aims to support CALD communities, newly arrived migrants, refugees and asylum seekers to break the cycle of family violence and empower communities to confront and respond to the challenges of preventing violence against women and children. The project is managed by a steering group consisting of representatives from:

- City of Whittlesea
- Whittlesea Community Connections
- The Salvation Army Crossroads Family Violence Services
- Kildonan Uniting Care
- Berry Street Northern Family and Domestic Violence Service
- Whittlesea Community Futures Partnership⁴²

⁴² A partnership of over 40 human services agencies, community-based organisations and state government departments. The WCF is a voluntary alliance of organisations including the City of Whittlesea, State and Federal Government Departments, and Human Service Organisations, working together with shared commitments and goals for the benefit of the City of Whittlesea's communities.
<http://www.whittleseacommunityfutures.org.au/default.asp>

- Plenty Valley Community Health Service
- Victoria Police
- inTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family violence

In 2014 the WCFVP achieved some major successes in its first full year of implementation. Under the guidance and support of a proactive, action-orientated steering group, the project delivered \$20,000 of brokerage grants to support local CALD women's groups and provided family violence community legal education and training to 74 women from these groups. 1 in 5 women later accessed family violence support from Whittlesea Community Connections and many reported feeling confident to support friends and family to access support services. Six women from these groups went on to form the basis of the project's Women's Advisory Group, a group established and supported to provide ongoing feedback and input to ensure the WCFVP remains responsive to the needs of the community. Initial consultations were held with eight local community and/or religious leaders. This resulted in a family violence forum that attracted 110 participants from the local Chaldean community, and plans to deliver similar forums or activities with other local faith groups. The project explored options for providing early intervention support during the settlement process and received handover of Victoria Legal Aid's successful Settled and Safe program, with a pilot to be adapted and developed with the local Iranian community in 2015. Similar work was undertaken to explore potential models for developing a whole of school respectful and equitable relationship program to be piloted at a local primary school. Funding to further scope and develop this element continues to be sought.

With generous support from inTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence (inTouch), project members came together to raise the funds to pilot an Arabic-speaking Men's Family Violence Group. The WCFVP joined with inTouch to recruit and support two bilingual Arabic-speaking facilitators who are set to complete the Men's Behaviour Change (MBC) facilitator's course at the close of 2014. To our knowledge this is the first time this has occurred in Victoria. The successful implementation of this pilot in 2015 will provide valuable learnings for a fully accredited Arabic-speaking MBC in the future.

2015 brings many exciting opportunities to expand each element of the project. It will also see implementation by the WCFVP of an Our Watch funded project working specifically with the local Iranian community to design and deliver violence against women and children prevention activities – 'Hamdel' project.



Hume City Council

Local Context

Hume City is a rapidly growing, vibrant and multicultural community located on the urban-rural fringe, 20 kilometres north-west of the centre of Melbourne. The population of Hume City is estimated at just over 185,000 in 2014. By 2036 the population is projected to exceed 316,000. The population of Hume City is expected to grow at an average annual growth rate of 2.4% during this time.

According to the 2011 Census Hume City has a youthful age structure, with a substantially large proportion of the population aged under 18 years (27.5% of the City's total population) with the majority of families living in Hume City are largely two-parent families with dependents (46.0% of all households).

Hume is a culturally diverse area with one third of residents born overseas (32%) from more than 160 different countries, and two out of five residents (41%) speaking a language other than English at home.

Hume City has a score of 951.8 on the Index of Relative Socio-economic Disadvantage. This score is ranked 12th out of 79 Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Victoria and is in the 2nd decile (top 20%) of most disadvantaged LGAs in Victoria. In metropolitan Melbourne, Hume City is ranked 3rd out of 31 LGAs and is in the 1st decile (top 10%) of most disadvantaged LGAs.

Hume City's prevalence of family violence

The rate of family violence per 100,000 population in Hume City (1,587.3) is higher compared to Victoria (1,129.2). Hume City has the second highest rate of family violence incidents per 100,000 population across Metropolitan Melbourne, behind Frankston City at 1,773.0.⁴³

In Hume City, reports of family violence incidents have been increasing each year, up from 2,555 in 2012/13 to 2,909 in 2013/14, showing a 14% increase in the number of reported incidents⁴⁴. This indicates that in 2013/14 the Hume municipality exhibited the second highest number of reported incidents in Victoria, behind that of the City of Casey (with 3,752 incidents reported). The number of incidents in Victoria increased at a lower rate in comparison to Hume, increasing from 60,550 in 2012/13 to 65,393 in 2013/14 (7.4%).

⁴³ Victoria Police, Crime Statistics – Family Incident Reports, 2009/10 - 2013/14

⁴⁴ Ibid.

Hume's high risk factors underpinning family violence

Hume City Council is one of Melbourne's ten Interface Councils, located at the edge of the metropolitan area and the rural shires. Not only are the Interface Councils characterised by rapid residential growth, but also for the significant challenges they face in terms of poor public transport networks, time lags in the delivery of social infrastructure and community services, fragile and isolated families, at risk youth and poor health and wellbeing outcomes.⁴⁵

It is reported that many of the Interface Councils experience a concentration of risk factors associated with family violence including: pregnant women with young children, lack of social support services, and housing stress.⁴⁶ The continuance of building within the outer suburbs without the necessary social infrastructure and community services is greatly cautioned, including the need for schools, health and social services, and emergency housing.⁴⁷

There is a high prevalence of risk factors within Hume City, of which many can be found in other Interface Councils. These are briefly discussed below:

Unemployment levels within Hume City are consistently higher than the average unemployment levels of Greater Melbourne.

Vulnerable employment: In 2011, a higher percentage of Hume residents were employed in low skilled industries, which traditionally attract lower wages and can be vulnerable to global fluctuations.

Immigration and lack of family support: Hume City is home to many newly arrived migrants, of which a significant proportion entered Australia under the Humanitarian Migration Stream – some fleeing war torn countries and having little or no family/social connections in Hume. From 2005 to 2011, 2,170 migrants from Iraq settled in Hume, equalling 24.1% of its total migrant population over that period in comparison to Victoria with 3,657 migrants (1.3% of all recently arrived migrants to Victoria from 2005 to 2011).

Mental health issues: The 2007 National Mental Health and Wellbeing Survey revealed that there was an overwhelming link between gender violence and key indicators of women's mental health and wellbeing.⁴⁸ The vulnerability of the Hume community is of particular concern for many of the incident cases contained in the Burden of Disease Report⁴⁹ for Hume City indicate that mental illness is responsible for 21% of the burden of disease in Hume City.

⁴⁵ VCOSS (2014) *In Sight: On the fringes: Tale of two cities*, Issue 10.

⁴⁶ Whitzman (2014) *Better urban planning can reduce the tragedies of domestic violence*, The Conversation.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Creagh (2011): Repeat violence can boost women's mental health risk to almost 90%, The Conversation, <http://theconversation.com.au/repeat-violence-can-boost-womens-mental-health-risk-to-almost-90%>.

⁴⁹ Victorian Department of Health, Burden of Disease 2001.

Disability: It is evident through research that persons suffering from physical or mental health issues can be vulnerable to family violence – or even be perpetrators of family violence - due to factors such as social isolation, dissociative behaviours, distorted perceptions or having the inability to be responsible for their behaviours or actions.

Lower education levels: Hume City demonstrates almost double the amount of residents who did not go to school than those in Greater Melbourne (2.4% vs 1.3%).

High birth rates/pregnancy: The ABS survey into Personal Safety in 2006 identified that women may be at increased risk of family violence during pregnancy and in the period immediately after the baby is born. In 2013, the Hume birth rate for 1,000 women aged 15 to 44 years is significantly higher than those for Greater Melbourne and Victoria – with Hume having 2.1 births per 1,000 women, compared to 1.7 for Greater Melbourne and 1.8 for Victoria.

Hume City Council Responses

Council has undertaken a number of responses to family violence. The following are a few highlights of the work undertaken by the Hume City Council (details are contained in the submission):

Corporate Commitments

- **Social Justice Charter** commits Council to advancing a fair and just society, promoting respect for its citizens, encouraging community participation in civic life, strengthening community wellbeing and reducing the causes of disadvantage.
- **Hume City Council Community Safety Strategy 2009-2013** addresses Family Violence and Women's Safety as one of its five key areas of action. The **Draft Hume City Council Safety Action plan 2015-2019** continues with this strong response to family violence.
- **Hume City Council Enterprise Agreement (No. 5) 2013-2017:** A key objective of the Hume City Council Enterprise Agreement (No. 6) 2013–2017 demonstrates Council's commitment to supporting employees experiencing family violence and ensuring a harmonious employee relations environment.

Programs/activities/projects

Council is an active participant in addressing risks, issues and victims of family violence through its services, programs and targeted projects.

- **The Community Grants Program** in 2014 awarded a total of \$342,900 to community groups and service providers for them to create sustained and positive change within their communities and to further build respect, community inclusion and wellbeing.
- **Hume Moreland Fathering Project:** A fathering project has been successfully implemented in Hume, which strengthens couple and parent relationships by promoting gender equality and respectful non-violent relationships so that parents are able to safely and positively deal with parental and relationships stress and challenge.

- The **'Love Bites'** Program is a vital program available to young people (15-17yrs) and is a school based and community program. The program addresses family violence/domestic violence and sexual assault.

Partnerships

- **Family Early Learning Partnership:** The Family Early Learning Partnership is a program developed to address the needs of the most vulnerable children within the municipality of Hume City Council. It consists of a relationship between Hume City Council Family and Children Services, Hume Moreland Integrated Family Services – Child FIRST, Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies and all early childhood services within Hume City.
- Council is a partner with **Women's Health In the North (WHIN)** in the implementation of the *"Building a Respectful Community – Preventing Violence Against Women - A Strategy for the Northern Metropolitan Region of Melbourne 2011 – 2016"*. This is a very important partnership for Council in addressing address family violence. Council is currently working with WHIN to deliver gender equity training to staff across Council.

Planning and infrastructure

Early Provision of community infrastructure: Council is exploring opportunities for the timely delivery of community infrastructure, where residents can obtain early years and community services as well as have places where they can 'meet-and-greet' and develop social connections. This is of particular importance for residents in new residential estates which are 'disconnected' from the existing urban fabric and existing community services, programs and activities.



Nillumbik Shire Council

Overview of Nillumbik Shire Council

Nillumbik Shire is located in Melbourne's north-eastern suburbs, about 25 kilometers from the Melbourne CBD. It borders the municipalities of Whittlesea, Yarra Ranges, Murrindindi, and Banyule. Nillumbik Shire is 90% rural 10% urban. Relative to other municipalities, Nillumbik has less industrial and commercial land, and lower levels of revenue for services. It covers an area of 431.94 square kilometres.

The Shire comprises close knit communities which range from typical urban settings such as Eltham and Diamond Creek to areas of remote and dispersed bush properties and in and around smaller townships such as Hurstbridge, Panton Hill St Andrews and Strathewen. The area is vulnerable to the environmental impacts of climate change and bushfire. It has a highly complex and varied natural landscape and biodiversity of agricultural land, treed bushland, hills and waterways. Many people are asset rich and income poor, on large tracts of land that are undulating, challenging to maintain and have limited access to services and amenities. 70% of residents travel outside of the Shire to attend their place of employment. Many of these residents need to access services and facilities outside of normal business hours or outside the Shire to meet their health and wellbeing needs.

The purpose of this document is to highlight the particular challenges being managed now by the Nillumbik Shire in relation to the prevalence of violence against women.

Priority action areas identified by Council and its partners include:

1. Recognition of and support for Council and its partners leading family violence presentation and promoting gender equity;
2. Increase family violence prevention in identified priority settings such as the interface councils
3. Providing additional resources for prevention and early intervention;
4. Supporting all ages and stages of life impacted by family violence;
5. Addressing elder abuse

At Nillumbik Shire Council, work in this area has included:

- The adoption of the Family Violence Policy and associated procedures, of which contains ten days per year of family violence leave provisions included in the recent Enterprise Agreement.
- Awareness raising internally and at a community level through annual White Ribbon event/s.
- Endorsement and signing of Women's Health in the North Building a Respectful Community – A strategy for the Northern Metropolitan Region of Melbourne 2011-2016.
- Regular attendance at a range of network meetings including:

- North East Primary Care Partnership Preventing Violence Against Women Collaborative Working Group
- Northern Region Preventing Violence Against Women Advisory Group, chaired by Women's Health in the North
- Municipal Association of Victoria Preventing Violence Against Women Network
- Partners in Prevention Primary subgroup
- Gender Equity in Local Government
- Facilitating, resourcing and capacity building in staff both internally and externally on the issue of preventing violence against women, respectful relationships and gender equity.
- Supporting local families experiencing family violence.
- Development of a parenting program which promotes gender equity and respectful relationships targeting families with children zero to five years.
- Re-convened the Banyule/Nillumbik Family Violence Network (for family violence and generalist direct service providers) as requested by various agencies, including Berry Street and Victoria Police (Diamond Creek).
- Facilitate the relationship between early years, primary and secondary schools and Respectful Relationship Program providers across the region.

Issues for Nillumbik

1. According to the Crime Statistics Agency, the rate of family violence in Nillumbik was 662.5 per 100,000 population in 2014, which shows an increase in 78% over four years from 2010. This is the lowest per 100,000 in the North West Metropolitan Region, but compared to areas of similar socio economic index in Melbourne, Nillumbik has the highest family incident rate per 100,000 population.
2. The following table outlines the family violence incident rate per 100,000 population of the top five Local Government Areas according to socio economic index.

Rank: Socio Economic Index	Local Government Area	Family Violence incident rate per 100,000
1	Nillumbik*	662.5
2	Boroondara	372.6
3	Bayside	599.4
4	Stonnington	592.9
5	Manningham	594.3

***Only Nillumbik is an Interface Council**

3. According to Women's Health in the North - Nillumbik Violence against Women: Information and Facts 2013-2014, children were present at approximately 35% of these reported incidents.
4. Despite the increase in reporting, the numbers of incidents reported are still likely to underestimate the extent of family violence, as it is understood that less than 20% of women report to authorities (Office of Women's Policy, Victorian Government 2002, A Policy Framework: A coordinated approach to reducing violence against women, Women's Safety Strategy).

5. At a recent community meeting convened and facilitated by Nillumbik Shire Council's Family & Children's Services on Thursday 5 March 2015, organisations and program professionals reported the following statistical and anecdotal information:
- Police referrals to Berry Street for 2014/15 have increased in Nillumbik. As of the period between July 2014 - February 2015, there were 227 police referrals, compared to 250 police referrals in total for Nillumbik residents in 2013/14.
 - Home and Community Care services and Berry Street reported increased reporting of elder abuse by adolescent or adult children perpetrators towards a parent. The abuse reported often relating to financial and emotional abuse and control.
 - Seniors Rights Victoria states that Australian studies estimate that the prevalence of elder abuse can be up to 5% (Department of Human Services, Victorian Government, 2009, *With Respect to Age 2009*). This equates to 5% of the population of 65 years of age being subjected to elder abuse, with older women being two to three times more likely to experience elder abuse than men. In Nillumbik with an elder population of 5777 over 65 year olds (2011 census), this equates to 289 elders experiencing abuse. As with other forms of family violence, it is accepted that elder abuse is also underreported.
 - Northern Centre Against Sexual Assault (CASA) stated that a number of clients from Nillumbik have complex trauma relating to the 2009 bushfires. According to the 2013 National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey, women are particularly vulnerable to violence in the aftermath of natural disasters. Natural disasters may compound existing gender inequalities.
6. Other concerns/issues expressed by professionals included the incidence and complexities of:
- Adolescent male perpetrators of violence towards their younger siblings, parents and their adolescent partners.
 - Young people exposed to family violence through their parents' relationship.
 - The influence of drug (marijuana & ICE) and alcohol use in family violence cases.
 - Police report that there is a lack of understanding of the nature and seriousness of all the forms of family violence, such as financial, emotional, social abuse, which leads to a lack of, or delay, in reporting and seeking support.
 - Higher socio-economic area means they can be financially very invested in the relationship.
 - Good family supports and social networks so women tend to not involve services or police response.
 - Presented as relationship or parenting issues rather than family violence.
 - Do not want to involve the police as seen as an excessive response, therefore, tends to be reported when gets to crisis point.
 - Increased reporting of cyber stalking/monitoring.



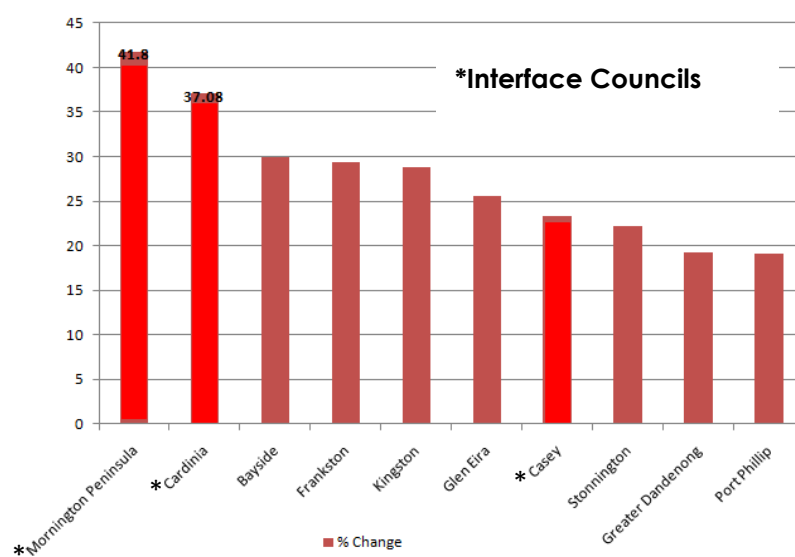
Cardinia Shire

Cardinia Shire is a rapidly developing municipality located approximately 40km south east of Melbourne CBD with an area of approximately 1,280 square kilometres. Cardinia Shire contains a growth corridor with the urban growth areas of Beaconsfield, Officer and Pakenham as well as 27 rural townships. Cardinia's estimated residential population is currently 90,325, and comprises of around 32,174 households. Growth is rapid with approximately three to five families moving into Cardinia per calendar day, and a current birth rate of 150 newborns per month.

Cardinia Shire is currently experiencing high levels of family violence across the municipality. Alarmingly there are also a high number of children that are witnessing this violence and as a result will experience long term emotional and psychological effects. Children were present at 41% of family violence incidents in Cardinia in 2013/14 and in the past five years over 2,000 children have witnessed family violence in Cardinia alone⁵⁰. Furthermore, in 2012 there were on average 4 cases per week of crimes committed where the victim was a child under 17, and 2 substantiated child abuse notifications for children under 17 across the municipality⁵¹.

Cardinia has seen a 37% increase, the second highest per 100,000 population in the Southern Metropolitan Region, of family incident reports over the last three years. Out of these 45% were serious enough to result in charges being laid. In addition, an average of six (6) safety notices and/or intervention orders were issued per week in 2013/14 across the municipality⁵².

Graph 4: Family Incidents Police Reports, per 100,000 population, % change 2010/11 to 2013/14 South Metro Region



⁵⁰ Victorian Police Statistics, www.police.vic.gov.au

⁵¹ Victorian Child and Adolescent Monitoring System, 2012. Indicator 12.3 and 20.1

⁵² Victorian Police Statistics, www.police.vic.gov.au

Anecdotally, local Police tell us that over the last year there were over 7000 reported incidents of family violence in the local division which encompasses Casey, Cardinia and Dandenong (1 every 75 minutes). This is in stark contrast to the unreported incidences which are estimated at up to 8 times this number. This equates to an incident occurring every 9 minutes across the division.

Plans and Policies

Family Violence has been identified by the organisation as the number one priority for Council in the coming years. To this end Cardinia Shire Council has committed to explore localised opportunities and partnerships to address this issue. In particular;

- Cardinia Shire Council will continue to work closely with local police and service providers through attendance at the Cardinia Family Violence Network
- Family Violence support services are recognised as part of our service attraction philosophy and underpin all Council community plans and policy's
- A continued focus on collating and monitoring evidence base data to inform Council decision making
- A cross organisational approach encompassing both indoor outdoor staff.

More formally, Council has established partnerships with relevant stakeholders and key agencies. The most recent of which include:

Partnership with White Ribbon

Cardinia Shire council is currently in the process of becoming a White Ribbon accredited organisation. This accreditation will recognise us as:

- Being proactive in preventing gender-based violence and promoting respectful relationships within the workplace
- Demonstrating a culture of zero tolerance of violence against women
- Equipping us all with the knowledge and skills to address issues of violence against women whether they occur inside or outside the workplace

Challenge Family Violence Project

Cardinia Shire's Challenge Family Violence project in conjunction with Council's Men's Action Group has been establishing initiatives that challenge attitudes and sexist behaviours, promote respect and non-violence within families.

To complement this, Cardinia Shire Council held its annual White Ribbon Breakfast on 25 November, 2014. This event was a call to action for leaders within the organisation and in the broader community to bring about change and eliminate behaviours that support violence against women. Significant guest speakers provided personal insights and useful advice on how to change attitudes and behaviours.

Leaders of the organisation were invited to the breakfast and to bring one influential person (either from within or outside Council) who will encourage others within their network to help spread the message about the need to stop violence against women.

Partnership with Family Life to undertake a collective impact project

Cardinia Shire Council and Family Life have come together to pool our collective experience and knowledge and to take a community approach to finding local solutions to local problems. Our aim to strengthen communities and build local resilience is at the heart of our organisations.

Given the increasing levels of family violence in Cardinia Shire, and the severely corrosive impact of family violence on children's development, there exists a strong sense of urgency in Cardinia for a game changing initiative: we need an initiative to address this complex and deeply entrenched social problem with sustained long term action lead by all sectors of the community and in tandem with government departments and the philanthropic sector: a collective impact initiative with a shared agenda for achieving shared community owned outcomes.

Our project will ensure right from the beginning that those whose life experience is one of family violence are engaged and we are especially committed to exploring a range of methodologies to capture the voices of children.

Family Life and Cardinia Shire Council believe there is in Cardinia Shire a strong, creative, and passionate cross community leadership base from which to launch the initiative, the overall aim of which is to prevent family violence occurring by strengthening families and communities to take action to achieve this outcome; and to help provide sustainable ways in which to break the cycle of family violence. The intent will be to achieve new and lasting cross community collaboration focused

on outcomes for children and their families that will have long term sustainable impact on their safety, health, community connectedness, economic wellbeing and developmental potential. At the same time our Collective Impact approach will also simultaneously work with existing programs, projects and initiatives addressing family violence in the Shire to align these mutually reinforcing activities to the share agenda developed with the partners identified. Currently, agencies and organisations are working cooperatively together but not collectively which requires investment in knowledge sharing and expanding (mindset) on more holistic approach to the long term change in order to maintain momentum and commitment to address this identified social complex issue within Cardinia Shire.

Together, all agencies who work alongside children and families in Cardinia Shire will enable children to be healthy, safe and valued. They will encourage them to make the most of learning opportunities, appreciate their environment and make a positive contribution to their communities.

We know that by working together people can achieve significant change within their communities. We will work with those with a lived experience of family violence and those with the experience of supporting families through this issue to help build a greater understanding, reduce stigma and provide opportunities to look at how the community can come together to find local solutions for a local problem.



City of Wyndham

Family violence is a significant issue in Wyndham; it is experienced across culture, age and socio-economic status. The Crime Statistics Agency data identifies that in 2014, the police received 2,362 reports of family violence in Wyndham – the highest of any of the Western region LGAs.

Wyndham has experienced the largest and fastest growth in all Victorian local government areas and is the third fastest growing in Australia. The official forecasted population for Wyndham City is approximately 201,000 as at June 30, 2015 *1. It is estimated that the residential population will increase by 91% from its current figure to exceed 384,000 by 2036.

Wyndham's population growth has meant that the number of family violence incidents grew more quickly in Wyndham than in almost any other area in metropolitan Melbourne between 2008 and 2012⁵³. Of the growth area LGAs with the highest reported number of family violence incidents – Wyndham, Casey, Hume and Whittlesea – Wyndham has recorded the highest percentage growth in numbers over the most recent five-year reporting period (from 2008/09 to 2012/13)⁵⁴. The rate of growth means that people are moving to newly established suburbs, often not having the support of extended family networks. Furthermore, people, particularly women can feel a sense of isolation which can be compounded by factors such as limited transport and service infrastructure and lack of connection to their local communities.

According to the Western Integrated Family Violence Committee, there were 2,278 reports of family violence in Wyndham over 2013-2014, more than double the previous year's figures. Although these figures reflect an increasing social acceptance of reporting such crimes, Wyndham's level of family violence the highest in Melbourne's West. It also exceeds the state-wide average.⁵⁵

Wyndham is a young municipality. Approximately 37% of Wyndham's population is under 25 years of age.

There has been a 2.6% increase in births from 4,015 in 2013 to 4,120 in 2014. On average, 11 babies are born each day.

It is also a diverse community, with around 25% of its residents born overseas. Key countries of origin include the United Kingdom, New Zealand and India with a number of newly emerging refugee communities moving to the municipality. The main languages spoken at home are English, Hindi and Punjabi.⁵⁶

⁵³ Victoria Police Violence Incidence Reports, 2011-12.

⁵⁴ Family Incident Reports 2008/09 - 2012/13, Victoria Police,

⁵⁵ Preventing Family Violence A Priority For Wyndham City, Press Release, 21.01.2015, http://www.wyndham.vic.gov.au/aboutwyndham/pubmedia/media/2015/january_2015_-_media_releases_preventing_family_violence_a_priority_for_wyndham (accessed on 18 May 2015)

⁵⁶ Wyndham City Council, Demographics and Populations, <http://www.wyndham.vic.gov.au/aboutwyndham/wyndhamcity/demographicsandpopulation/suburbs>, (accessed on 18 May 2015).

Key issues and needs

To date, some of the key issues that have been raised for Wyndham city include:

- Wyndham has inadequate local family violence and related support services. As an example, Women's Health West which is based in Footscray provides an outreach service to Wyndham for only two days a week – one day being based at the Werribee Court supporting women undertaking court proceedings and one day at Werribee Supported Housing service.
- There is a dire lack of housing – Wyndham has no crisis accommodation for women who are fleeing a domestic violence situation. This is compounded by a severe lack of crisis options in the western region that adjoins the municipality. Specialist homelessness services in Wyndham therefore have few options for people in crisis. Women affected by family violence often have to be relocated to private motels and government funded services often in the inner eastern or southern metropolitan areas – far from their community.⁵⁷
- The significant impact of family violence on children and young people – with disengagement from school often being an indicator of family violence. This can be demonstrated by young people moving between schools, truancy, and in particular young people being expelled for acting out behaviours learned at home. Issues of family violence are often revealed when you dig deeper. Schools are generally not adequately resourced to support young people experiencing violence in the home.
- Women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are particularly vulnerable to the effects of violence and face barriers in seeking assistance or disclosing their experience. The increase in the number and cultural diversity of people in Wyndham combined with the anecdotal evidence of specific cultural barriers women face means that this is a significant area of need.

Plans and Actions

- In 2014 Wyndham Council endorsed the establishment of the Preventing Family Violence Sub – Committee (PFVSC). Although in it's early stage of development the PFVSC will work in partnership with local stakeholders in facilitating and supporting ongoing strategic and locally based interventions to reduce the impact and incidence of family violence in the Wyndham community. The Sub-Committee has high level support and is chaired by a Councillor with broad representation from local agencies.
- Wyndham City Council is a signatory to Preventing Violence Together (PVT), a regional partnership to guide the primary prevention of violence against women in the western region of Melbourne. In seeking to end men's violence against women, the Preventing Violence Together regional partnership demonstrates a promising model to advance the primary prevention of men's violence against women in Victoria.
- Reducing the incidence of family violence including intimate partner violence and elder abuse is a key action of the Wyndham Community Health, Wellbeing and Safety Plan 2013-2017.

⁵⁷ H3 (2015) Draft submission to Royal Commission into Family Violence

Other initiatives include:

- Developing strategies to increase the participation of women and girls in sport/recreation including development of more gender inclusive infrastructure and the increased availability of sports/recreational activities that are preferred by women.
- Supporting the delivery of the Respectful Relationships Education in Schools Project in four of our local secondary schools. The project will trial and evaluate the implementation of the new Department of Education and Training resource, *Building Respectful Relationships: Stepping Out against Gender-Based Violence*.
- Convening the Wyndham Family Violence Committee which is a valuable forum for services and workers to network and collaborate.
- Benchmarking of gender equity policies from various Councils to inform Wyndham City's approach to similar policy development
- Undertaking a service planning project for the Wyndham Integrated Justice Precinct. The proposed precinct will significantly improve the availability of and access to, a broad range of justice and related services for the community as a whole, taking into account the particular needs of women affected by family violence.



MORNINGTON PENINSULA SHIRE

Our Commitment for the prevention of family violence;

The Mornington Peninsula Shire has developed and endorsed the Mornington Peninsula Shire "Statement of Commitment for the Prevention of Family Violence". This document states why the Shire recognises family violence as a key social and health issue and acknowledges local government has a vital role in facilitating positive health and wellbeing outcomes of its community. The Mornington Peninsula Shire 'Health and Wellbeing policy statement' acknowledges health is a fundamental human right, promotes compassion and encourages all citizens to live in its community, which embodies peace and dignity (Mornington Peninsula Shire Health and Wellbeing Plan 2013 – 2017 Policy Statement) and the Shire's Access and Equity Policy also advocates for all people to be free from discrimination and to be treated fairly. The Shire acknowledges that no one should be subjected to physical, emotional, sexual, psychological torture or cruel, inhumane or degrading treatments or punishment.

Together as a community we can work to change the attitudes of the past which accepted gender inequity as the norm, where women and children were not seen as equals and domestic violence was viewed as private business. We now understand it is all of our responsibility to challenge gender

based stereotypes, and to recognise that family violence is a crime and that sexism and gender discrimination is unacceptable.

The Shire will work in collaboration with the community and partners to enable and promote:

- The Mornington Peninsula Shire community as a safe place and act to eliminate violence in all its forms;
- Relationships between all members of the community are respectful and promote the rights of men, women and children to live free from violence;
- and that women, men and children have the opportunity to participate equally in all spheres of public and private life without fear or discrimination.
- Increase awareness of family violence as a key social and health issue
- Highlight the need for community awareness towards the prevention of family violence
- Gather support for action that reduces family violence
- Inspire people to act at an individual and community level to eliminate attitudes that support violence and

- Encourage partnerships with key stakeholders to support and educate the community about the prevention of family violence.

Partnerships

The Shire is committed to working in collaboration with strategic partners who are engaged in the prevention of family violence area. Notably this includes the Peninsula Model "Prevention of Violence against Women and their Children" working group. The Shire acknowledges the importance of such partnership and the potential benefits of bringing together resources, skill sets and experience to deliver a greater outcome for the community.

Key Plans and policies

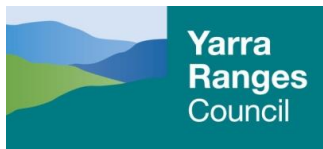
- Key Plans and policies which align with a Statement of Commitment for the Prevention of Family Violence include
- United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women;
- The National Plan to Prevent Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022
- A Right to Respect: Victoria's Plan to Prevent Violence against Women 2010-2020
- Vic Health Framework for the prevention of violence against women
- Municipal Association of Victoria Preventing violence against women initiatives primary prevention initiatives
- Peninsula Model Prevention of Violence against women and their children strategy.

The Mornington Peninsula Shire Statement of Commitment for the Prevention of Family Violence

The Mornington Peninsula Shire community is a safe place and acts to eliminate violence in all of its forms.

The Shire commits to work for the prevention of family violence through the following actions:

1. To work with key stakeholders through relevant forums, including the Peninsula Model, to ensure the Mornington Peninsula is a safe place;
2. To encourage respectful relationships between all members of the community and promote the rights of everyone to live in peace and free from family violence;
3. To provide opportunities for all women, men and children to participate equally in all spheres of public and private life; and
4. To develop and implement a coordinated action plan with relevant partners to assist in the prevention of family violence that promotes health and wellbeing.



Yarra Ranges Council

Yarra Ranges is located in metropolitan Melbourne's outer east, 35 kilometres from the Central Business District (CBD), within the Eastern Metropolitan Region (EMR). It covers 2,470 square kilometres – 25% of Melbourne's total geographic area. The main types of land use are residential (49%), business (12%) and other (34%, including forests).

Yarra Ranges offers a mixture of urban and rural communities. Around 70% of the population lives in roughly 3% of the total land area. The remaining population is distributed throughout mostly rural areas. There are more than fifty-five suburbs, townships, small communities and rural areas in Yarra Ranges, making it one of the most diverse municipalities in Victoria.

As of June 2014, Yarra Ranges had an estimated resident population of 150,098 residents. This is forecast to grow to around 173,000 residents by 2036. Most of the population growth will occur in the urban area of Yarra Ranges - the area closest to the city - with several large residential developments planned for Lilydale and Chirnside Park.

Yarra Ranges has the second-highest rate of family violence incidents within the EMR and the second-highest rate of incidents where children were present; it ranks ninth across the ten interface councils for total incidents. However, whilst its rate is lower than most of the other interface areas, over the past four years Yarra Ranges has experienced much higher growth in its rate of incidents. The rate rose from 457 incidents per 100,000 residents in 2009/10 to 918 to 2013/14, a 101% increase.

Analysis of local level police data has identified a range of risk factors in different localities across Yarra Ranges, including alcohol (a factor in 39% of incidents), drug use (29%), mental health (20%), recent separation, pregnancy/new birth, disability and financial issues.

Children were present at 35% of incidents: and incidents involving both children (including teenage/adult children) and parents accounted for 27% of total incidents. There appears to be a higher level of incidents in both Yarra Ranges' most disadvantaged areas in the outer east and also in its urban areas. In line with the family violence data, Yarra Ranges' rate of child protection substantiations has increased over the past few years, at a time when the Victorian rate has been falling - Yarra Ranges' rate is now more than 10% above the Victorian average.

Evidence compiled by VicHealth identifies that primary prevention activity needs to focus on redressing the unequal distribution of power between men and women, and to challenge rigid gender roles. A lack of gender equality is consistently cited as an underlying determinant of violence against women.

The VicHealth guide to preventing violence against women identified three key roles for councils: implementing evidence-based violence prevention activities; providing leadership

across communities to prevent violence against women by promoting gender equity, and promoting equal and respectful relationships; and influencing and changing Council workplace cultures, in order to promote gender equity and the safety of women. VicHealth identified twelve specific areas for action and Yarra Ranges Council is currently working across the majority of these areas, both through its own activities and through a range of partnership activities, as outlined below.

Response to Issues Paper

Yarra Ranges Council supports the types of recommendations identified in the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence Issues Paper, as outlined on page 2 of this submission. Yarra Ranges Council has responded to selected questions asked in the Issues Paper, those which are directly relevant to Council's areas of knowledge and areas of activity. Council believes it is important that recommendations target violence against all victims and potential victims: women, men, children and older persons, recognising that a wide range of individuals - and their friends and family - are affected by family violence. Internal analysis of small area data has revealed that that anyone can be affected: partners can be victims, parents of teenagers and adults can be victims or perpetrators; and children and teenagers can be victims or perpetrators.

Question One: Are there other goals the Royal Commission should consider?

Additional goals could include:

- Improve understanding of the underlying social factors contributing to family violence (including the need for respectful relationship, but not limited to this), and how these have impacts at a very local level (townships as well as local government areas).
- Extend the goals relating specifically to "family violence" and "family relationships" to be more general. Respectful relationships are necessary to prevent violence in the community and because domestic violence encompasses a range of relationships include non-family relationships (e.g. ex-partners).

Question Four: If you or your organisation have been involved in programs, campaigns or initiatives about family violence for the general community, tell us what these involved and how they have been evaluated

Plans and Policies

Council is committed to providing support to staff who experience family violence. The Yarra Ranges Shire Council Enterprise Agreement 2013 includes a section on Family Violence Support. This entitles staff to counselling, information about support services, additional paid leave, changed hours/duties and a range of other individual supports as needed, which would assist staff affected by family violence/abuse.

Family violence is identified in the Yarra Ranges Health and Wellbeing Strategy under *Priority 2: Positive mental health and wellbeing*. It is highlighted in one of the goals within this priority

area: “Yarra Ranges has a culture of gender equity and respect, and women live free from violence”.

Yarra Ranges has also made a formal commitment to support an Eastern Metropolitan regional approach to preventing violence against women, by signing on to the Women's Health East strategy, *Together for Equality and Respect: A strategy to prevent violence against women in Melbourne's east 2013-2017*.

Campaigns and Projects

Outer Eastern Prevention of Violence against Women Project

This project concluded in December 2014, after more than three years of work. The project took a prevention approach to reducing violence against women, through promoting gender equity, building respectful and safe relationships, and breaking down stereotypes of women. This is a prevention approach in line with Council's Health and Wellbeing Strategy. It also supports a key priority in Council's Community Safety Strategy. The project involved community stakeholders such as Women's Health East and the community health centres in each local government area (Knox, Maroondah and Yarra Ranges).

Leisure Access Project across Yarra Ranges, Knox and Maroondah

The Leisure Access Project involved a gender-based analysis of Council leisure policy and plans. It included two consultation sessions (one internal and one external) to gather information on the ways in which Council can support the inclusion, participation and respect of women and girls in leisure activities. The final report for this project has been completed and the Yarra Ranges recreation team was noted for their strong participation in the project. The project builds on an audit of sporting facilities, which was previously undertaken by Council to identify practical improvements which could be made to support gender equity in local sporting clubs.

Internal working group

Internal planning continues towards the goal of developing a sustainable 'whole of Council' approach to gender equity. This has included the development of an internal Gender Equity Working Group – a cross-organisational group which leads work within Council to build a more gender equitable organisation. The Gender Equity Working Group has developed an action plan for 2015–2017, *Gender Equity is Everybody's Business at Yarra Ranges Council*, to guide Council's work following on from the outer-eastern cluster project. The action plan focuses on staff, and identifies potential ways to change attitudes and behaviours resulting in gender equity within the workplace and services which consider gender equality.

It is anticipated that the working group will provide advice and direction for the implementation of the action plan.

Yarra Ranges Council has made a commitment to employ a dedicated staff member (0.4 FTE) for 2 years and will appoint to this position in May 2015. The position will be located in the People and Culture team and influence across the Council to increase gender equity as a prevention strategy to Prevent Violence Against Women and Children.

White Ribbon Day

Council holds an annual White Ribbon Day event; its November 2014 White Ribbon Day event was attended by around 160 staff. The associated 16 Days of Activism promoted a range of online resources and messaging.

International Women's Day

A range of activities occurred in the week of International Women's Day celebrating women's contribution to the workplace, building leadership and acknowledging women in the workforce who are out-posted e.g. Home Carers, Childcare workers.

Other activities

The criteria for Council's Community Development grants now include support for projects which *"Promote gender equity as a means to prevent violence against women and children, including older women, addressing underlying causes, attitudes."*

In May 2015, Council ran an internal Social Marketing professional development session, which used a gender equity lens to improving staff skills in social marketing.

The Environment and Engineering Directorate organised and hosted a gender equity presentation at the Council Depot to increase awareness of respectful relationships.

Local and Regional Partnerships

You and I

YOU&I is about how young people relate to each other and to their community; and exploring what makes a healthy, equal and respectful relationship. It targets young people in Yarra Ranges with the aim of breaking gender stereotypes and raising awareness of respectful relationships. The partners in YOU&I are Inspiro, Yarra Ranges Council and Eastern Health.

Family Violence Working Group

This group meets bi-monthly. Its work so far has included:

- Information sharing about family violence-related work and services across Yarra Ranges, and identifying priority areas of interest to members.
- Working with Victoria Police and agencies, to understand the data, prevalence and characteristics of violence against women and children in Yarra Ranges' diverse localities. This has included detailed analysis of family violence data, to identify key issues and risk factors by local area.

- A Media and Communications Plan, including The Leader newspaper undertaking a series of prevention of violence against women and family violence stories; stories in Yarra Ranges Local; a wide range of strategies to improve understanding of the issue; and surveying the Yarra Ranges community about attitudes to violence against women.

Monbulk Respect – Family Violence Prevention Project

The Monbulk Respect family violence prevention project is a community-wide initiative which provides an opportunity for Monbulk residents to collaborate with project artists and to create a family violence prevention campaign which targets the whole community. It is an initiative by the Dandenong Ranges Music Council, in partnership with Yarra Ranges Council. The project aims to:

- Continue a community conversation about family violence prevention which was started by the Country Women's Association in Monbulk, at a family violence awareness forum in April 2014 which was attended by fifty-three people.
- Facilitate an opportunity for Monbulk residents to collaborate with project artists and to create a family violence prevention campaign which will target the whole community, especially men.
- Bring together important Monbulk community organisation representatives who can speak to their own members and the wider community about family violence prevention.
- Shift the culture in Monbulk to a place where family violence prevention can be openly discussed and addressed by the whole community.
- Create a prevention campaign which can be utilised by all communities inside and outside the Yarra Ranges, as part of the battle against the rise in the incidence of family violence. The multimedia Monbulk Respect campaign included the creation of a film, song and online blog.

Question Six: What circumstances, conditions, situations or events, within relationships, families, institutions and whole communities, are associated with the occurrence or persistence of family violence?

Alcohol, drug use, mental health, recent separation, financial issues can be associated with family violence; pregnancy/new birth and disability are also factors. Alcohol and drug use are strongly associated not just with being a perpetrator but also with being a victim of family violence. The carer role generally could be considered an associated factor, particularly for issues such as elder abuse.

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?

New arrivals can be more vulnerable due to a range of issues such as financial stress and lack of family support. Financial stress/disadvantage and geographic isolation may make it more likely to occur, and/or harder to provide services and supports to those affected.

Question Eighteen: What barriers prevent people in particular groups and communities in Victoria from engaging with or benefiting from family violence services? How can the family violence system be improved to reflect the diversity of people's experiences?

Living in a small community can make it hard for people to approach the police. For example, the police may know who they are and may know the alleged perpetrator. The same issue can also apply to family violence services in smaller or isolated communities – it is more difficult to preserve anonymity.

Yarra Ranges Council—Reference List

Population estimates: Regional Population Growth, Australia (3218.0) Australian Bureau of Statistics <http://profile.id.com.au/yarra-ranges/population-estimate>

Forecasts: Population and household forecasts, 2011 to 2036 ID Consulting, prepared September 2013 <http://forecast.id.com.au/yarra-ranges>

Family violence incidents: Family incident reports, rate per 100,000 population, 2009/10 to 2013/14 Corporate Statistics, Victoria Police - data extracted from LEAP on 18 July 2014 and subject to variation <http://www.police.vic.gov.au>

Local area family violence incidents and factors: Unpublished data from family incident reports Victoria Police, 2014

VicHealth: Preventing violence against women: Local government action guide no. 6

VicHealth <http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au>

City of Casey Submission for Interface Councils



City of Casey

Introduction

Local Government plays an important role in leading the efforts in preventing, identifying and responding to violence against women. Due to its strong and existing relationships with the local community from birth through to aged care, it is in the unique position to directly impact the attitudes, behaviours, inequality and social norms of a large section of the community, as well as identifying and responding to victims of family violence. However, the role of Local Government is often underestimated by other levels of Government and the family violence service sector.

City of Casey: Local Context

The City of Casey covers the outer south-eastern suburbs of Melbourne and is one of the fastest growing and increasingly culturally diverse regions in Australia, with approximately 281,000 residents. It has the most residents of any municipality in Victoria with a projected population of 459,000 at 2036. Growth is largely driven by young families who have chosen Casey because it offers lower cost housing than inner Melbourne areas. Many families have high mortgages and average incomes, making them vulnerable to increasing interest rates and other living costs.

Currently, the City of Casey has the highest reports of family violence within Victoria with 3,840 reports to Police from January–December 2014; this has increased by 287 incidents from the January-December 2013 period.

City of Casey: Response

The City of Casey has identified family violence as a key priority for their community which has resulted in some innovative work ranging from prevention and early intervention, which is highlighted as follows:

Primary Prevention

The City of Casey was one of the first amongst a small number of Councils to begin to address the issue of Preventing Violence Against Women from 2004. The issue was identified and prioritised for action by the former Safer Casey Partnership – a strategic partnership of Council to address safety issues within the municipality. Since this time, a number of initiatives have progressed to prevent violence against women.

CHALLENGE Family Violence Project, Funded by the Department of Justice 2013-2015

Partnership between the City of Casey, Cardinia Shire, City of Greater Dandenong and

Monash Health. The model focuses on equipping and supporting influential male community leaders to prevent violence against women by promoting respect, non-violence, gender equity and challenging sexism, male privilege and aggressive masculinity within their spheres of influence.

Promoting Peace in Families Project: Funded by the Federal Attorney Generals Department 2007-2009

Provides a model for faith communities to be actively involved in the prevention of violence against women. The model includes sermons, studies, policies and training to equip faith leaders to address the issue within the faith setting.

City of Casey Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2013-2017

Family Violence is an action area within the plan under the key priority action area "A Safe Community".

Human Resources: Family Violence Special Leave Provision and Flexible work arrangements

Enables employees to apply for up to 20 days of special leave within a 12 month period for medical requirements, legal proceedings and other activities related to issues of family violence. Other entitlements are available to staff to access flexible work arrangements such as purchasing additional leave.

Casey Men's Action Team

The team consists of men in leadership positions from various departments within Council. The aim is to provide education and support within the organisation to implement strategies to raise awareness and prevent violence against women.

International Women's Day and White Ribbon Day

These annual events for Council staff provide an opportunity to take the White Ribbon oath, increase awareness of the issue of family violence and acknowledge the achievements of women.

White Ribbon Ambassadors

Male staff leaders are encouraged to apply to become White Ribbon Ambassadors in order to develop male leadership in the organisation around Family Violence Prevention. Male leaders challenge other men to evaluate their attitudes and behaviours toward women.

Applied Gender analysis training

Training is provided to Council staff to increase knowledge and skills to apply a gender lens over services, policies and programs.

Early Intervention

Local Laws: early intervention model

Local Laws was the first local government within Australia to respond to the link between family violence and animal abuse. A ground breaking model was developed which included:

- training for local laws officers to understand family violence and identify risk
- referral pathways established
- partnerships developed with the local Police Family Violence Unit
- policies and standard operating procedures updated to respond to the issue
- supporting housing of animals at risk during periods of family relocation following family violence incidents

This model has been presented to over 200 local laws officers across the State and won an LGPro Award for excellence in 2014 in the Service Delivery Initiative category.

Maternal and Child Health Service: prevention, identification and response

The Maternal Child Health Service (MCH) identify women who at risk or are currently experiencing family violence. All staff are required to ask at their initial contact with the family, or when it is deemed appropriate to do so, whether there are any concerns in regards to Family Violence. If this is identified as an issue, the staff member will complete a Safety Plan with the family members involved, and refer onto appropriate services such as the Enhanced Maternal and Child Service or other Family Violence Agencies.

All families receive a copy of the Family Violence Resource Card at their first contact visit and this is placed in the child's 'green book'. This card contains information of what is family violence, the types of family violence and where the person can receive help.

Enhanced Maternal and Child Health Service

The Enhanced Maternal and Child Health (EMCH) program within Casey consists of a multidisciplinary, bi-lingual team of staff, many of whom have extensive experience working with families experiencing Family Violence. At the initial assessment with the family, the EMCH Assessment Template includes a question for both parents on past or current issues with family violence. If this is identified as a concern, this issue might be a goal that is worked on with the assistance of the EMCH staff, or support and advice is offered along with a referral to an external Family Violence Agency. The EMCH have an advocacy role and have developed strong working partnerships with local family violence agencies including the Police.

Indigenous families who are not linked into, or who require additional support to access, the Universal MCH Service are included in the target group. MCH Services will be encouraged to develop specific action plans to demonstrate strategies to increase the participation of Aboriginal families in both the Universal and Enhanced MCH Services.

Kangoo Bambadin indigenous family violence action group

This action group operates across the Southern Metropolitan Region of Melbourne. It aims to create and develop positive relationships between the community, local organisations and government agencies to assist in the reduction of all forms of family violence impacting on indigenous communities.

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