

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

Cesar Melhem MP, Member for Western Metropolitan  
Parliament of Victoria

Dear Commissioner,

I am writing on behalf of the families, loved ones, and individuals affected by the 12,188 family violence incidents recorded in 2014 by Victoria Police in my electorate of Western Metropolitan. Western Metropolitan covers seven municipalities in Melbourne's western suburbs, including Brimbank, Hobsons Bay, Hume, Maribyrnong, Melton, Moonee Valley, and Wyndham. This figure, based on statistics from the Crime Statistics Agency of police reports from these seven municipalities, has nearly doubled in the space of only four years, with 7,053 incidents of family violence recorded between January and December 2010.

The breakdown by municipality is reflected in these figures from police reports for the North West Metro policing region:

*Table 1. Family incidents recorded by police region and local government area - January 2010 to December 2014<sup>1</sup>*

	Jan - Dec 2010	Jan - Dec 2011	Jan - Dec 2012	Jan - Dec 2013	Jan - Dec 2014
Western Metropolitan Region					
Brimbank	1,647	1,682	1,905	2,054	2,245
Hobsons Bay	503	536	707	890	1,034
Hume	1,991	2,033	2,383	2,749	2,965
Maribyrnong	328	492	672	811	848
Melton	793	1,104	1,313	1,534	1,790
Moonee Valley	615	688	825	965	944
Wyndham	1,176	1,325	1,789	2,170	2,362
<i>Total</i>	<i>7,053</i>	<i>7,860</i>	<i>9,594</i>	<i>11,173</i>	<i>12,188</i>

Service providers in my electorate such as Women's Health West report that they are "stretched beyond capacity,"<sup>2</sup> with 735 referrals to their service by police in April 2015 alone (compared to 708 referrals for the entire year of 2006/07)<sup>3</sup>. They are just one of approximately 22 such service providers in Melbourne's west.

Domestic violence is the leading contributor to death, disability and illness in Victorian women aged between 15 and 44 years<sup>4</sup>. It is a stark reminder of the fundamental inequity that exists between men and women, in spite of the fashionable, complacent view that feminism is over and gender equality is done and dusted. I am glad our community finally sees the personal crisis of many Victorians for what it is: a national crisis demanding urgent action.

<sup>1</sup> *Crime Statistics Agency, Year Ending 31 December 2014 – family incidents Table 3*

<sup>2</sup> Women's Health West, Update on Rising Police Referrals infographic, 2014/2015, accessed at <http://whwest.org.au/infographic-update-on-rising-police-referrals/>

<sup>3</sup> Women's Health West, Annual Report 2013/2014, fig. 6, p. 11

<sup>4</sup> VicHealth, 2004, *The health costs of violence: Measuring the burden of disease caused by intimate partner violence*, VicHealth, Melbourne. Cited in Women's Health Association of Victoria, *Report: Priorities for Victorian women's health 2014-2018*, p. 21.

I note the case of Ms Fiona Warzywoda, a mother of four from Melton West who was murdered by her de facto partner in broad daylight and in front of her son at a shopping strip in Sunshine. Her partner had a restraining order against him at the time, and a history of domestic violence against Ms Warzywoda<sup>5</sup>. Police were later told that Ms Warzywoda had reported a threat from her partner against her to a court clerk at the Sunshine Magistrates Court, which Ms Warzywoda and her partner had attended the day of the attack.

My recommendations to this commission come down to four key areas:

1. **Education and awareness:** we need to be teaching men to respect women, and teaching men that violence against women is unacceptable. Part of the problem comes down to the disrespect some men exhibit towards women, or the belief that women are less worthy than men. From this stems the belief that women can be owned by men, and that men are entitled to use force against women to enforce obedience and establish control.
2. **Support and services for victims:** we need to ensure that funding for services is rising to meet the rise in demand. Women's Health West report that the increase in demand for their services "has been driven by growing public awareness of family violence as well as significant changes to legislation, public policy and police practices."
3. **Tougher sanctions and penalties:** penalties against offenders do not exist for the purpose of either retribution or re-education. They are there to deter potential offenders, and where that fails, to protect members of the community from being further victimised. The rights of the offenders pale in comparison to the rights of their victims or potential victims to be protected in full by the state. If that means adopting harsh penalties for first or early offences, then so be it. The state has no obligation to show leniency towards men who hit women. The state has every obligation to protect women from being abused.
4. **Diagnosing the underlying causes of men's violence towards women:** what factors lead to men committing violence against women? What role does poverty, unemployment, financial stress, and mental health play? What services can the state provide to help address those problems early, before they reach crisis point?

I commend the commission for its work and eagerly await its findings so they can be put into action as soon as possible. People's lives depend on it.

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<sup>5</sup> Nick Toscano, 'Woman stabbed to death in Sunshine', *The Age*, April 16, 2004  
<http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/woman-stabbed-to-death-in-sunshine-20140416-36r85.html>