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Royal Commission into Family Violence
PO Box 535
Flinders Lane VIC 8009

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: Royal Commission into Family Violence

Campaspe Primary Care Partnership (PCP) supports the inquiry into Family Violence within Victoria. We wish to highlight the needs and experiences of people affected by family violence within regional and rural areas.

This submission has been prepared with the assistance of the local Echuca division of Victoria Police.

The Campaspe community like other rural and regional communities across Victoria is impacted by family violence. A significant proportion of this violence is hidden and consequently difficult to measure. It is however clear that the extent and perceived prevalence and impact of family violence is not limited to victims but widespread.

Background

The harm created by family violence, places a significant burden on the wider community. The local Echuca division of Victoria Police has confirmed that family violence and mental health incidents are the most prevalent incidents attended. Victoria Police attended 215 family violence incidents in Campaspe Shire in 2009-10. Of the incidents reported females were the victims of the violence 78% of the time, and in 62% of cases the relationship of the offender to the victim was the spouse/defacto/domestic partner¹. Victorian Police attended 540 family violence incidents in Campaspe Shire in 2013-14. This represents an increase of more than 257% since 2009-10². These statistics suggest the Shire of Campaspe has the highest rate of incidents across all Victorian Local Government areas.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that many of the incidents attended by Victoria Police within the Echuca region are verbal non-physical disputes. Attendance by Victoria Police at these incidents is

¹ Victorian Family Violence Database Volume 5: Eleven-year Trend Analysis: 1999-2010 – Department of Justice & Regulation 2012.

² Victoria Police 2013/14 Crime Statistics, Corporate Statistics, Victoria Police 2015.

believed to assist in the prevention of the escalation of the violence to include physical assault. However, when attending family violence incidents involving physical assault, the likely hood of a repeat offender is increased.

Evidence suggests that attitudes towards family violence strongly influence perpetration and reporting behaviours. In particular that people with low support for gender equality are more likely to hold violence-supportive attitudes. Of particular concern within Campaspe Shire is that whilst the highest percentage (32%) of offenders are aged 25-34 years. The remaining age cohorts of 19-24, 35-44 and ≥ 45 years all demonstrate similar rates of offence.

Young adults who had been exposed to parental violence as children were 189% more likely than those not exposed, to experience violence in their own adult relationships³. Studies on pathways to delinquency have shown that young offenders are more likely to have been exposed to family violence, compared to their non-exposed counterparts⁴. These offenders are also more likely to become involved in anti-social behaviour, violent crime, substance abuse, further delinquency and adult criminality^{5 6}.

Crime Statistics for Campaspe Shire compared to Victoria identify a higher rate of crimes against persons (per 100,000 people) including

- homicide (10.8) compared to Victoria (2.9)
- rate of rape crimes (65.0) compared to Victoria (37.0) and
- sex (non rape) crimes (222.1) compared to Victoria (128.9)⁷

Whilst these crimes are shocking and demonstrate inappropriate anti-social behaviours, anecdotal evidence suggests that the majority of these crimes whilst committed within the Shire of Campaspe are not perpetrated by Campaspe residents.

The Shire of Campaspe and in particular Echuca/Moama is a major tourist destination with more than 689,000 domestic visitors for the year ending September 2014. Echuca/Moama provides numerous structured attractions and events throughout the year including the Port of Echuca, Southern 80 Ski Race, Riverboats Music Festival, and Winter Blues Music Festival. In addition to these structured events, Echuca/Moama is a popular end of season football, netball, rugby team trip location. Anecdotally rates of crimes against persons within Echuca increase around the time of end of season team trips.

We are concerned that continued exposure of by the community to crimes against persons and family violence will have an intergenerational impact. With domestically abusive families establishing stereotyped gender beliefs through acts of physical abuse. Reinforcing unacceptable behaviours as the norm in their children, whom inturn have an increased likely hood of demonstrating peer aggression and bullying⁸.

Alcohol misuse has long been linked with family violence. Evidence from international research studies suggests a strong association between these two behaviours^{9 10 11 12}. In particular the risk and level of harm associated with family violence are seriously heightened and that resultant injuries are more severe when alcohol is involved.

Health Survey data indicates Campaspe Shire (51.0%) had a higher proportion of population that had consumed alcohol at risky or high risk levels for health in the short term compared to both

³ Amato, P. R. (2000). The consequences of divorce for adults and children. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 62, 1269–1287.

⁴ Steinberg, L. (2000). Youth violence: Do parents and families make a difference? *National Institute of Justice Journal*, 2, 30–38.

⁵ Edleson, J. L. (1999). Children's witnessing of adult domestic violence. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 14(8), 839–870.

⁶ Osofsky, J. D. (1999). The impact of violence on children. *The Future of Children*, 9(3), 33–49.

⁷ Victoria Police 2013/14 Crime Statistics, Corporate Statistics, Victoria Police 2015.

⁸ Baldry, A. C. (2003). Bullying in schools and exposure to domestic violence. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 27, 713–732.

⁹ Abramsky T, Watts C, Garcia-Moreno C, Devries K, Kiss L, Ellsberg M, Jansen H & Heise L (2011). What factors are associated with recent intimate partner violence? Findings from the WHO multi-country study on women's health and domestic violence, *Biomed Central Public Health*, vol. 109, 1-17.

¹⁰ Foran HM & O'Leary KD (2008). Alcohol and intimate partner violence: A meta-analytic review, *Clinical Psychology Review*, vol. 28, issue 7, 1222-1234

¹¹ Gil-Gonzalez D, Vives-Cases C, Álvarez-Dardet C & Latour-Pérez J. (2006). Alcohol and intimate partner violence: Do we have enough information to act? *European Journal of Public Health*, vol. 16, issue 3, 278-284.

¹² Hindin M, Kishor S & Ansara D. (2008) Intimate partner violence among couples in 10 DHS countries: Predictors and health outcomes, *DHS Analytical Studies*, no. 18, Macro International, Calverton, MD.

Victoria (45.3%) and regional Victorian (50.8%) average. The risky or high risk consumption of alcohol by Campaspe males (63.3%) was significantly higher than the Victorian (52.6%) average¹³.

More recently methamphetamines, in particular 'ice' is believed to play a significant role in family violence resulting in physical assault and harm. Anecdotally the extent to drug use and in particular 'ice' use amongst Campaspe residents has and continues to increase and is believed to be significantly higher than represented in the following 2010/11 data

- 72 (0.40%) hospital admissions of Campaspe residents who had a drug related condition or injury as compared to the Victorian average of 0.37%
- 25 (0.19%) hospital Emergency Department presentations for Campaspe residents who had a drug problem as the primary diagnosis

Whilst it is understood that there is no one single factor that leads to family violence, risk factors in individuals and communities include

- low self esteem
- aggressive or delinquent behaviour as youth
- heavy alcohol and drug use
- depression
- anger
- belief in strict gender roles
- low academic achievement
- history of experiencing poor parenting as a child and physical discipline.

Reducing these risk factors will greatly assist in reducing the likelihood of perpetration of family violence.

Recommendations

We believe the most comprehensive intervention is to seek to prevent family violence before it occurs. This requires a range of whole of community interventions which build community capacity, mutually respectful attitudes, behaviours and beliefs. We believe the key in preventing family violence is breaking the cycle of reinforcing unacceptable behaviours as the norm.

Consequently, the response to address family violence within Victoria needs to occur at two levels; firstly to ensure that people who are experiencing family violence have adequate local services and supports to assist them; and secondly to work towards preventing family violence by addressing the cultural and social factors that are contributing. The following targeted initiatives seek to support that response

- coordination and collaboration across sectors and across all levels of government and non-government should be a fundamental principle underpinning any approach to the prevention of, and intervention with family violence. Victorian PCPs are well positioned to support cross-sector prevention interventions.
- improved service coordination and collaboration between family violence and child protection services to assist in preventing early exposure to family violence. In addition provide improved referral mechanisms and improve collaboration between service providers to ensure that the complex needs of all parties can be met through an integrated service system. The Loddon Youth Area Partnerships is the beginnings of this approach.
- immediately increase the availability, accessibility and awareness of services for victims and perpetrators particularly within rural and regional areas. Services such as advocacy, support, accommodation, skill development and counselling for both women and children who are exiting or attempting to exit violent relationships, as well as programs for perpetrators of family violence to reduce repeat victimisation are required.

Victims of family violence in regional and rural communities have limited support and resources available in comparison to metropolitan or larger regional centres. However simply

¹³ Department of Health, Victorian Population Health Survey 2011-12

providing additional services alone is not the answer. Service provision needs to be supported as alone it will not encourage those that require support to engage directly with the service. Further, services that outreach to rural areas provide limited effectiveness. More localised support and service provision is likely to be of greater assistance. Anecdotally, most women do not seek assistance or report experiences of violence to police, and are less likely to report when the perpetrator is their current partner. Empowering the community to support those that require services and intervention will in the longer term have a more significant impact.

- implement early intervention and education programs targeted at young people, including school-based programs that aim to shape appropriate attitudes towards women and violence. We believe that there is an opportunity for partnership between Victoria Police and Victorian Primary and Secondary Schools in establishing a program promoting respectful relationships in school culture and classroom activities. Education provides the opportunity for early intervention and relationship role modelling between mothers and sons and fathers and daughters about acceptable behaviours. Early intervention is key in preventing the cycle of perpetration of violence.

Sporting clubs also play a significant role in the curving stereotyped gender beliefs. The Australian Drug Foundation's Good Sports program should be enhanced beyond working to tackle key health issues of alcohol, smoking, obesity and mental health to include modelling acceptable behaviours and promoting equality and acceptance.

- address alcohol and other substance abuse problems targeting both perpetrators and victims of family violence, including through the development of partnerships between treatment services and family violence programs. A number of studies suggest greater regulation around alcohol sales plays a role in lowering rates of crime and violence generally and family violence incidents specifically. Solely targeting alcohol consumption we believe will not serve to address family violence supporting attitudes or behaviours but should be considered in a whole of community approach.
- continue efforts to improve community attitudes towards violence against women and address prevailing misconceptions regarding the prevalence, nature and acceptability of violence against women.
- increase the involvement of men and boys in the development of programs designed to prevent violence against women by changing male attitudes and behaviours. An excellent example of role modelling and community education and workplace leadership is currently being provided by White Ribbon Australia. Further support and funding to White Ribbon Australia is required to continue to raise awareness and change community behaviours.

Summary

We believe that taking a long term focus on the prevention of family violence is the only way to change community behaviours and attitudes.

In the short term greater support for the victims and the families of victims of family violence is required. Echuca division of Victoria Police highlighted that victims and their families attending the Echuca Magistrates Court have no waiting area separate to that of the general public and the accused. This can and has on occasions resulted in displays of violence's between family members. Providing a space for the victim and their family during this difficult time would be a significant improvement and should be considered at all rural and regional court facilities not only the Echuca Magistrates Court.

In conclusion we are concerned about the rates of family violence and stereotyped gender beliefs within our community and the long term damage being done to our community. We trust that this submission will aid the Royal Commission and we welcome the opportunity to expand upon any matters herein.

Yours sincerely



Rose Miles
Chair
Campaspe Primary Care Partnership