



BARWON AREA

**Integrated Family
Violence Committee**

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

May 2015

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Glossary

ACCO	Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation
AFM	Affected Family Member
BAIFVC	Barwon Area Integrated Family Violence Committee
CASA	Centre Against Sexual Assault
FVIO	Family Violence Intervention Order
FVR	Family Violence Reforms
FVU	Family Violence Unit, Victoria Police
IFVC	Integrated Family Violence Committee
L17	Police Referral form (Family Violence Incident)
MAISM	Multi-agency Information Sharing Meetings
MBCP	Men's Behavior Change Program
MDC	Multi-Disciplinary Centre
RAMP	Risk Assessment Management Panel
SABTP	Sexual Abuse Behaviour Treatment Program
SOCIT	Sexual Offences and Child Abuse Investigation Team
VAWC	Violence Against Women and Children

Executive Summary

The Barwon Area Integrated Family Violence Committee (BAIFVC) commends the Victorian Government on demonstrating its commitment to tackling family violence by calling a royal commission into family violence. The prevalence of family violence is being described as an 'epidemic', a 'national emergency', and there are calls that the 'system is broken'. We would contend that the family violence system is under immense pressure and that the safety of women and children is being compromised. Urgent action is required. The Royal Commission presents an unprecedented, much-needed opportunity to shine a spotlight on Victoria's response to family violence and how it can be improved. We welcome the opportunity to contribute to this conversation.

Key Principles

The BAIFVC supports the principles for family violence reform developed by the No More Deaths Alliance (refer to Appendix 1). In addition, the following principles in particular underpin this submission:

Family violence is gendered violence Most family violence is perpetrated against women by their current or former male partner.

Gender inequality Society needs to challenge, at every opportunity, the beliefs and norms that allow family violence to occur.

Family violence hurts children too Witnessing violence while growing up can have a profound, detrimental and long-term effect on children. Children who witness family violence may grow up to believe violence and power is normal in a relationship.

Co-occurrence of family violence and sexual assault A high proportion of women who experience sexual assault also experience family violence.

Perpetrators must be held accountable The use of violence is a choice.

Wherever women are, whatever time of day The system must have the capacity to respond immediately to women and children to ensure their safety, regardless of where they live and regardless of when they seek help.

Recovery takes time To re-establish a life that is safe and free from violence, women and children require longer term support that extends beyond the immediate crisis.

Addressing family violence is a whole-of-community responsibility Governments at all levels, the non-government sector, justice and legal sectors, business sector, sporting organisations, media, education sector and the general community all have a role to play in addressing family violence.

Immediate attention to improve responses to family violence and sexual assault

The BAIFVC believes that there are a number of issues that require urgent attention if we are to make an immediate impact on addressing violence against women and children, and holding perpetrators to account.

Recommendation 1

That urgent investment is made to enable family violence and sexual assault services to respond to the significant increase in demand.

Recommendation 2

That government invest in services that provide longer term post-crisis support to aid recovery of women and children who have experienced violence.

Recommendation 3

That the unique challenges faced by rural communities are acknowledged and adequately resourced.

Recommendation 4

That there is urgent attention to developing and resourcing a range of evidence-based responses to men who use violence against women and children.

Recommendation 5

That there is urgent investment in the provision of safe waiting areas at magistrate courts for women and implementation of suitable remote witness facilities.

BAIFVC also makes a range of recommendations for strategic and structural attention, reform and investment. These can be found in **Chapter 4: Looking to the Future**.

Invitation

The Barwon Area Integrated Family Violence Committee extends an invitation to the Royal Commission to meet with the Committee to explore any of the issues, innovations and/or recommendations included in this submission.

1. About us

1.1 Barwon Area Integrated Family Violence Committee

The Barwon Area Integrated Family Violence Committee (BAIFVC) is a multi-agency partnership of services that works collaboratively to identify issues and potential improvements in the Barwon Area's response to women and children experiencing family violence and sexual assault, and men who perpetrate it. The BAIFVC drives and monitors the integration of family violence services at the local area level, and oversees the reform process.

The BAIFVC comprises a broad representation of organisations and services that work with those affected by family violence and sexual assault. Member organisations of the BAIFVC include: specialist family violence services, sexual assault service, Aboriginal service, Victoria Police, homelessness and housing service, youth agency, community legal service, and rural health service. DHHS also participates on the Committee. The partner agencies are:

- Barwon Centre Against Sexual Assault
- Barwon Community Legal Service
- Bethany Community Support
- Colac Area Health
- Department of Health and Human Services
- Minerva Community Services
- Time for Youth
- SalvoConnect
- Victoria Police
- Wathaurong Aboriginal Co-operative

In 2014, BAIFVC engaged an independent chair. The Regional Family Violence Integration Coordinator (RIC) is also a member of the BAIFVC and supports the work of the BAIFVC. A full BAIFVC membership list is contained in Appendix 2. A focus of the committee to date has been to encourage co-operative working relationships and to fund and support innovation (see Section 3).

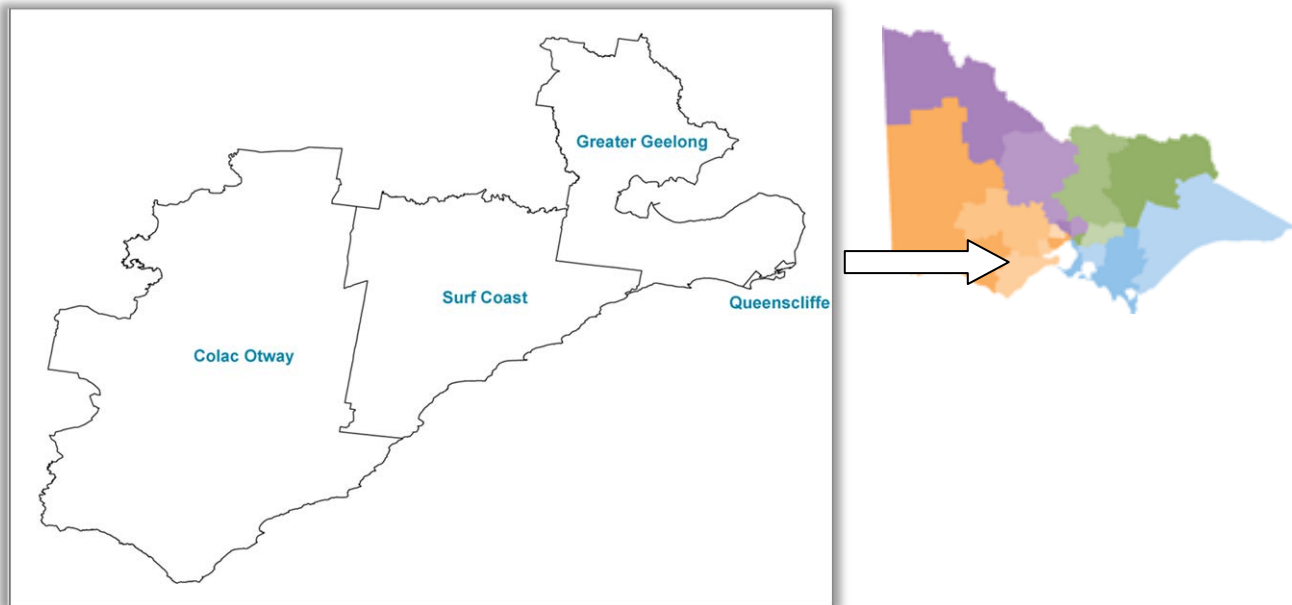
A note about terminology

In our submission, we deliberately name family violence as *violence against women and children*. We also refer to family violence and sexual assault to reflect current laws and the funded service system. Our use of these terms reflects our joint understanding about the gendered nature of these forms of violence against women and children. We encourage Victoria to adopt a human rights and gender-based approach to 'violence against women and children' and to use that terminology. A narrow focus on 'family violence' limits the scope of the discourse to intimate partner and family member violence. This narrow focus can have connotations of individual pathology rather than a structural analysis. In this context, we have seen programs develop for family counselling, anger management and protective behaviours programs for children; well-intentioned but poorly informed and not positioned to address the social determinants of violence against women and children such as gender inequality and violence supportive attitudes.

1.2 About the Barwon Area

The Barwon area comprises the four municipalities located to the south west of metropolitan Melbourne and includes the City of Greater Geelong, Colac-Otway Shire, Surf Coast Shire, and the Borough of Queenscliff. Barwon is a unique mix of residential areas (Geelong is Victoria's second largest city), tourist towns (located along the Surf Coast), and isolated rural communities.

Map of Barwon Area



The Barwon area is culturally homogenous, with low rates of new settlers and people born overseas. However, a large proportion of the new settlers who do arrive are refugees. The proportion of the population who identify as Indigenous is slightly higher than the state average. Barwon has a higher than average level of unemployment. The proportion of low income families is higher than the state average. The area has high approvals for new housing and a relatively large proportion of affordable rental stock. Despite this, the rate of rental stress is considerably higher than the state average. The demand for public housing is high. Demand for child protection and family services is slightly higher than the state average.¹ Most services are located in Geelong.

1.3 Prevalence of family violence in Barwon

The availability of data about the prevalence of family violence in Barwon is not readily accessible. While a range of data sources exist including homelessness services, specialist family violence services, Child First, courts, hospital emergency departments and individual agency data, there is no central collation of this data or single point where it can be accessed. As a result, we are forced to rely on statistics compiled by the Victoria Police which report incidents only. However, it is widely accepted that a significant proportion of family violence and sexual assault incidents are not reported to the police.

¹ Department of Health and Human Services, Barwon Area profile.

Rate of reported family violence incidents

Victoria Police data for the last two consecutive years (2012-2014) indicates that the rate of family violence incidents in the Barwon area was higher than the state average (1101 and 1193 compared with 1065 and 1129 respectively), primarily due to the significantly higher rates in both Colac-Otway and Greater Geelong. Colac-Otway has experienced a staggering 340% increase in family violence rates over the past five years.

BARWON	Family Violence Incident Rates per 100,000 population					
	LGA	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
Geelong	562	746.5	872	1164.5	1250	122%
Queenscliff	97.9	196.1	228.7	162.1	228.9	134%
Colac-Otway	369.4	489.1	774.1	1280.9	1623.7	340%
Surf Coast	375.2	309.3	420	571.4	544.5	45%
Total Barwon	522.9	676.6	811.7	1101.5	1193.9	128%
Total Victoria	658.4	742	894.6	1065.1	1129.2	72%

Source: Produced by Corporate Statistics, Victoria Police, from data extracted from LEAP 18 July 2014.

In 2014, Barwon family violence incidents also featured the following offences:²

- A third of sexual assault and related offences (3,282 of 9,806 offences)
- Almost half of assault and related offences (17,544 of 37,639 offences)
- More than half of stalking, harassment and threatening behaviour offences (5,310 of 10,573 offences)

Between 2013 and 2014, the major offence categories showed a significant upward trend. Sexual assault and related offences were up 9.5 per cent, from 9,806 to 10,738 (7.5 per cent per 100,000 people)

² Victoria Police Crime Statistics 2013- 2014

1.4 Demand for family violence and sexual assault services in Barwon

The increase in reported family violence incidents and sexual assault over the last few years has had a significant impact on the delivery of family violence services across Barwon. Each funded family violence and sexual assault service has experienced a significant increase in demand, yet program targets and funding for the last three years have remained unchanged. As a result, most family violence and sexual assault services are performing significantly over and above their funded targets.

Funded Service	Service Provider	Funded target	Actual Performance (as a % of target)		
			2012/13	2013/14	2014/15 YTD
Family violence counselling	Colac Area Health	29	58 (200%)	50 (172%)	35 (121%)
Family violence counselling	Barwon CASA	134	287 (215%)	314 (240%)	210 (156%)
Specialist Women's service (AFM L17s)	Minerva	119	1417 (1191%)	1501 (1261%)	1615 (1357%)
Sexually Abusive Behaviour Treatment Service	Barwon CASA	20	62 (310%)	55 (275%)	32 (155%)
Men's case management	Bethany	36	NA	84 (233%)	35
Men's Behaviour Change program	Bethany	60	NA	126 (242%)	141* (271%)
Enhanced Men's Intake (Respondent L17s)	Bethany	140	NA	971 (694%)	975 (696%)
		*plus waiting list of 72			

2. Showcasing Barwon innovation

The Barwon area has, for some time, been a leader in developing and trialing local innovative responses to family violence and sexual assault. Below are some of the key initiatives undertaken:

Barwon Multi-disciplinary Centre

The Barwon Multi-disciplinary Centre (MDC) was the third MDC to commence operation in Victoria when it opened its doors in Geelong in July, 2012. The Barwon MDC co-locates the Barwon Centre Against Sexual Assault (Barwon CASA), Department of Human Services Child Protection, the Sexual Abuse Investigation Team (SAIT), and the Victoria Police Sexual Offences and Child Abuse Intervention Team (SOCIT). All partner organisations operate independently but work collaboratively to provide integrated responses at one location to people who have experienced sexual assault.

The model is highly responsive and flexible to the individual needs of clients, with staff available across each organisation for immediate enquiries and coordinated responses. Consultation between the three organisations occurs as a normal part of daily practice, enabling a quality integrated service.

An early evaluation of the the MDC model found that victim satisfaction and stakeholder's experiences with the system had improved.³

In 2013-2014, over 1800 people who experienced sexual assault and family violence were supported by Barwon CASA within the MDC. It is difficult to determine the total number of people who access the MDC as there is not yet a common data collection between Victoria Police, Child Protection and CASA.

Risk Management Assessment Panel

In 2011, the City of Greater Geelong was one of only two sites established in Victoria to test the delivery of coordinated, multi-agency approaches to strengthening family violence risk management and, in particular, trial a Risk Assessment Management Panel (RAMP).

In Barwon, the RAMP involves senior representatives from Victoria Police, Child Protection, Corrections Victoria, specialist family violence services, legal, housing, family and health services. Other services are invited to participate in the RAMP as required. The RAMP is chaired by Bethany Community Support and meets monthly to plan and coordinate integrated risk management responses to families where the risk of death and/or serious injury of women and children have been identified. RAMP has enabled stakeholders to participate in the design, implementation and delivery of coordinated and targeted action plans which have seen risks significantly reduce within agreed timelines, and support the continued case work of professionals with individual clients.

In 2013-14, 44 women and 84 children presented at RAMP, while 42 women and 81 children have presented between July 2014 and April 2015.

The two RAMPs operating in Victoria were evaluated by Thomas Goodall and Associates in 2013 and the model is now being rolled-out across the state.

Adolescent Family Violence

In 2014, a Minerva/Time for Youth partnership was one of only two programs selected by the then Department of Human Services (DHS) to trial a new approach to adolescent family violence. The Barwon Adolescent Family Violence (BAFV) program aims to increase the safety of impacted family members and reduce the rate of re-offending. It uses an integrated youth-focussed, family centred service model which includes intensive case management support and group work programs to support both the parent/s and the young person choosing to use violence. The program works with 48 young people and their families per year.

³ Darwinkel, EC, 2014, *Evaluation of Victoria Police SOCIT-MDC reforms for sexual assault investigation*, Ph.D thesis, Deakin University, Australia

The BAFV program builds on a previous, *Time for Change*, which Time for Youth and Minerva trialled in 2013-14, with financial support from a Geelong philanthropic organisation and the Barwon Integrated Family Violence Committee.

DHHS has engaged the Australian Institute of Criminology to evaluate the funded AFV programs across the state.

CALD Community Engagement Project

The Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Community Engagement Project is a three-year initiative to develop and implement a culturally-sensitive, integrated family violence service model for CALD communities in the Geelong area. The project is being lead by Minerva Community Services and is focusing on the Karen and Karenni communities (ethnic minorities from Myanmar). It aims to empower the Karen and Karenni communities to address family violence from within their own community, as well as improve the cultural sensitivity of mainstream family violence services.

In 2013, the BAIFVC provided Minerva Community Services with a small grant to undertake the initial planning phase for the project. In 2014, Minerva was successful in securing a two-year innovation grant from a local philanthropic organisation to undertake the project. The project is being supervised by two Deakin University researchers and is being evaluated utilising an action-research approach.

Multi-Agency Information Sharing Meetings

The Multi-Agency Information Sharing Meeting (MAISM) is a weekly meeting of key agencies to share information and track identified high risk, recidivist family violence cases. Actions are identified to hold men accountable and promote women's and children's safety.

The MAISM is chaired by the Officer in Charge of the Western Region Division 1 Family Violence Unit Victoria Police situated at the Geelong Police Station. Membership of MAISM includes:

- Victoria Police, Family Violence Unit
- women's specialist service (Minerva Community Services)
- men's case management (Bethany Community Support)
- child protection
- Community Corrections Victoria

Victoria Police 3x3x3 Initiative

The 3x3x3 initiative is a victim-centric contact strategy initiated by the Western Region Division 1 Family Violence Unit, Victoria Police. It involves contacting every AFM in the Geelong area 3 days, 3 weeks and 3 months (3x3x3) after the initial report to police. The aim of the 3x3x3 initiative is to encourage AFMs to engage with support services, and report any further abusive behaviour and/or FVIO breaches. It also seeks to improve the perception of police responsive and increase AFM confidence in the police.

The initiative is currently being evaluated by a post-doctoral researcher from James Cook University (previously Deakin University) with funding support from the BAIFVC.

Operation Sorpresa

Operation Sorpresa is an initiative of the Victoria Police Western Division 1 FVU. It targets respondents, particularly recidivist perpetrators, who have been issued with a Family Violence Intervention Order (FVIO) which includes conditions prohibiting the respondent from contacting or attending the AFM's address. Officers from the FVU attend the AFM's address unannounced to ensure any exclusion conditions are being adhered to and, if not, breach the respondent.

The home visits also provide a further opportunity for police to encourage AFMs to engage with family violence support services and report any breaches, and reinforce that police are committed to enforcing the conditions of the FVIO.

Operation Recall

Operation Recall is a recidivist contact strategy initiated by the Western Region Division 1 FVU, Victoria Police. Victoria Police's Statistical Analysis System Enterprise Guide (SASEG) is used to generate a list of all respondents and AFMs who have been the subject of three or more family violence reports in the past 12 months. Officers from the Family Violence Unit visit all identified AFMs and respondents. Contact with the

AFM is similar to the 3x3x3 strategy but a greater emphasis is placed on informing the AFM that the best predictor of future violence is previous violence, and therefore it is likely that she will again be a victim of family violence, and that it is also likely to escalate. Respondents are informed that they have been identified as a recidivist offender and will closely monitored. They are advised that if they do not modify their offending behaviour, they will be specifically targeted by the FVU.

3. The impact of the reforms

Integrated regional governance and strategic planning

One of the key outcomes of the FVR reforms of the last decade was the establishment of Integrated Family Violence Committees (IFVC). IFVCs have been pivotal in driving reform, service integration and planning at a regional/area level. They have provided a forum to innovate and develop practical responses to local issues. The IFVCs have also played a crucial role in sharing regional/area learnings to guide improvements across the state, and contributing to statewide governance arrangements.

In Barwon, the BAIFVC has funded the trialing of innovative responses to adolescent family violence, community engagement with CALD communities around addressing family violence and evaluation of police initiatives. The Committee is also expanding its membership to engage other organisations to address violence against women and children.

However, insufficient investment, guidance and leadership has meant we have not yet reached the full potential nor the intended benefit of integration. For example, in the Barwon area, there is insufficient engagement between the BAIFVC and the justice sector.

The BAIFVC has identified the need to forge stronger relationships between organisations undertaking the prevention activity the region and the services responding to those affected by family violence and sexual assault. In recognition of this, in September 2014, the City of Greater Geelong, Women's Health and Wellbeing Barwon South-West, the Barwon Area Integrated Family Violence Committee, and G21 Regional Alliance formed a formal partnership to develop an inaugural five year Violence Against Women and Children (VAWC) strategic plan for the G21 region.⁴ The partner organisations had identified that a coordinated effort to address violence against women and children was required in the region. The intent of the plan is to outline a joint vision, objectives, priority areas and actions to guide effort and promote shared commitment across the region. The plan will focus on the delivery of primary prevention, early intervention and responses to violence against women and children.

Uneven investment across the continuum

The BAIFVC believes that the FVR have applied an uneven investment across that continuum which has hampered a comprehensive response to violence against women and children and limited the opportunity to effect long term change. Whilst investment at the response end has largely been consistently applied across the state, this has not the case with early intervention and primary prevention. In the Barwon area, the responses in primary prevention have been much more ad hoc than, for example, responses led by local council that have received specific funding through VicHealth.

There has also been a lack of investment in post-crisis recovery. Recovery from family violence and sexual assault takes time. However, services which provide longer term case management and therapeutic counseling to women post crisis are extremely limited or experiencing high demand in Barwon. The redirection of resources to bolster the crisis service in response to increased demand has further reduced the capacity of services to provide longer term, post-crisis support.

Importance of specialisation

One of the key planks of the family violence reforms was the importance placed on specialisation as a strategy for achieving best practice. However, the focus on specialisation was not accompanied by adequate investment or a comprehensive workforce development strategy and consequently the intended benefits of a specialist response have not been fully realised.

⁴ G21 Geelong Region Alliance is a formal alliance of government, business and community organisations who work together to improve the lives of people within the G21 Region which includes the municipalities of Colac Otway, Golden Plains, Greater Geelong, Queenscliffe and the Surf Coast.

Specialist family violence practitioners

The reforms articulated that responding to family violence is complex and requires that those who work with women and children experiencing family violence and sexual assault must possess a particular set of skills and expertise. Workers need to have a sophisticated understanding of the nature, features and dynamics of family violence and sexual assault, and be highly skilled at risk assessment and safety planning and in managing ongoing risk. They also need to be able to provide therapeutic, trauma-informed, clinical practice to support and aid recovery. Working with men who use violence is equally challenging and demanding, and requires highly specialised skills. The MBCP has experienced a high turnover of MBCP facilitators and staff burnout. Workers may also be more predisposed to suffer from vicarious trauma as a result of working with men who use violence.

To be able to deliver and maintain a highly skilled and professionalised workforce, ongoing capacity building is needed. In recent years, specialist family violence services have struggled to provide the level of workforce development and support required because they are too stretched responding to the overwhelming increase in demand. Furthermore, family violence services are finding it difficult to attract highly experienced, skilled and appropriately qualified specialist workers based within existing funding levels, particularly in rural areas.

Specialist family violence court

In Barwon, the specialist approach has not extended to the court response. The Geelong Magistrates Court has a specialist Family Violence Registrar and the Family Violence list is heard three times a week. However, the Geelong Magistrates Court does not have a separate waiting area for women. Nor are there separate entry and exit points to the court building. Women have frequently reported feeling intimidated by the presence of perpetrators.⁵ Given the sometimes lengthy waiting times for their case to be heard, the absence of a separate waiting area is highly problematic and fundamentally unsafe.

Videolink facilities for AFMs to provide evidence are available but are located within the court building which contradicts the intent of the technology. Requests by women to use videolink facilities have been refused by Magistrates on the grounds that the women are present at court. Remote witness facilities are a priority in the Barwon area region and could be located within the MDC.

In Colac, the family violence list is heard once per week by a Magistrate who attends from Geelong. There is no specialist family violence registrar, separate waiting area or entry and exit points.

The level of understanding of violence against women and children by Magistrates continues to present significant challenges at the Geelong and Colac Magistrates Court. A 2013 report by Deakin University researchers into women's experiences of the Magistrates' Court in Geelong found that both women and support workers felt that specialist family violence training for all Magistrates was urgently needed.⁶ Support workers expressed frustration that Magistrates often failed to recognise psychological, verbal and financial abuse as family violence. The BAIFVC also believes that this lack of understanding also extends to some court staff and some lawyers.

Police Family Violence Unit

The Western Region Division 1 Family Violence Unit (FVU), Victoria Police is situated at the Geelong Police Complex. The FVU is staffed by one permanent full-time senior sergeant who also acts as the Officer in Charge and Family Violence Advisor. A second sergeant works 0.5 FTE. The remaining six officers are seconded to the FVU for a 12 month period, with one officer being utilised predominantly in the Family Violence Court Liaison role. No formalised selection process exists for seconded officers. Officers working in the FVU are not provided with any specific family violence training by Victoria Police, other than what the local FVU unit is able to arrange.

⁵ Jordan, L and Phillips, L, 2013, *Women's experiences of surviving family violence and accessing the Magistrates' Court in Geelong*, Victoria Deakin University

⁶ *ibid*

Demand on services responding to family violence and sexual assault

The last few years has seen an unprecedented rise in reported family violence incidents, including sexual assault, in Barwon, without a commensurate increase in funding by government. Program funding targets have not been reviewed or adjusted to reflect the changes in demand for services. The increase in demand has been felt sharply across the system; by specialist family violence services, centres against sexual assault, police, courts, and housing, legal services and homelessness services.

Specialist family violence services

For specialist family violence services, the increase in demand has resulted in services feeling under immense pressure. To respond to the increased demand, specialist services have had to redirect resources to bolster their crisis intake response. The redirection of resources has been at the expense of longer term support and has jeopardised the capacity of services to provide the level of support required by women and children experiencing family violence and sexual assault, increasing the likelihood they will repeatedly seek assistance. In Geelong, the specialist women's service has had to limit its intervention to three months of service. This, in turn, has had a noticeable impact on demand for Barwon CASA's and Bethany's family violence counseling service who have similarly had to impose more stringent ongoing case reviews. It is of significant concern to the BAIFVC that there is very little longer term case management and counselling support for women post crisis in the Barwon area.

Housing and homelessness

Having nowhere safe to go prevents women from leaving a violent relationship. For those who have left, a lack of affordable housing is the leading reason women return. Women and children need access to a suite of affordable and safe accommodation options so they can be quickly housed and stabilised. Rapid rehousing models are the most effective way to reduce the long term effects of homelessness and family violence, and ensure families remain securely housed in the long term. The housing affordability crisis and the lack of investment in public and community housing is preventing this model from being effectively put into practice.

Safe at Home and Private Rental Brokerage Programs have been successful in housing some women who can afford to service a mortgage or enter private rental. Both of these programs cost significantly less than housing women in crisis accommodation for extended periods of time and transitional housing. However, inadequate funding levels have limited the number of women these programs can support and the extent to which they can help them. Rising rental prices are also limiting the Private Rental Brokerage Program's ability to house women. As other costs of living such as utilities, transport, childcare and food increase, housing women in their local area is becoming increasingly difficult. For women on fixed income support payments, or those working part time or in low paying jobs, accessing private rental is becoming impossible. Many women experiencing family violence have also experienced financial abuse as part of that violence and may have not have an employment history, an income, a rental history or rental references. Women in this situation will not be able to afford private rental.

The supply of public and community housing has not kept pace with demand and the lengthy wait lists, particularly for public housing, has meant that women and their children are having to remain in crisis or transitional housing for extended periods of time. This prevents families from being able to make plans for the future and move on with their lives, and can result in women returning to their abusive partner.

There is also a need to address the availability of affordable housing for perpetrators. Providing perpetrators of family violence with a stable address would make it less likely they will attempt to return to the family home. The current prioritisation of public housing means that there is very little housing available for single men. While it is clearly appropriate to prioritise women and children, the lack of housing for men highlights the need for more affordable housing in general to accommodate perpetrators of family violence and reduce the likelihood of violence in the future. Ensuring perpetrators have a stable address that was known to police and the courts would also ensure that court orders and IVOs could be properly enforced, and that services could remain engaged.

Multi-agency partnerships and information sharing

Barwon has a strong history of forming collaborative partnerships between agencies responding to people affected by family violence and sexual assault. These partnerships have allowed agencies to bring together a broad range of skills and expertise with a shared goal of improving responses to people affected by family violence and sexual assault. For example:

- RAMP
- Adolescent Family Violence Program
- Multi-agency Information Sharing Meetings (MAISM)
- MDC

The BAIFVC is committed to encouraging multi-agency partnerships to improve service integration and coordination and believes there are many opportunities to be gained from existing successful partnerships. For example, the benefits of the co-locating sexual assault workers, Child Protection and SOCIT at the MDC has resulted in a highly nuanced response that promotes a shared understanding of risk and which holds the primacy of safety and accountability at the core of its work. The MDC model in Geelong provides a proven platform for multi-agency partnerships.

However, for multi-agency partnerships to succeed, information sharing amongst partners is critical. Whilst there are examples in Barwon where information sharing is working well (RAMP and MAISM), these are the exceptions. An insufficient understanding about what information can and cannot be shared, and concerns about breaching confidentiality and privacy further hinders information sharing. The lack of an integrated client data system is also a key barrier to information sharing. Agencies use different client data management systems and these systems do not link with other data management systems in use by other agencies.

Comprehensive data on family violence

The data compiled by Victoria Police records family violence incidents reported to the police. It does not reveal how the broader service system is responding to family violence. We currently do not have any way of exposing the full extent of the size and scale of violence against women and children in Barwon. The BAIFVC remains frustrated in its attempts to build a comprehensive data picture to inform its work. Incomplete data sets, lack of congruence amongst existing data sets, and the absence of trend data has hampered efforts to make informed planning decisions, identify areas of need, make decisions regarding the allocation of resources, and monitor the effectiveness of interventions. The lack of comprehensive data has been a key failing of the reforms.

Working with perpetrators

The Barwon area has a fifteen year history of providing specific responses to men who perpetrate violence, particularly in the provision of men's behaviour change programs. The Men's Behavior Change Program (MBCP) facilitated by Bethany is funded to deliver the program to 60 men per annum. However, there has been a substantial increase in demand for the program in recent years, but funding levels have not commensurately increased and targets have remained unchanged for 10 years. The misalignment of program funding with demand has necessitated that the program operate a waiting list and prioritise high-risk men. There are currently 85 men on the waiting list, which equates to a waiting period of between three and six months.

There is also insufficient funding for the partner contact component of the program. Partner contact is a critical component for holding men accountable for their behaviour whilst undertaking assessment for, and participating in, MBCP, as well as providing value to women and children. Most women who receive support through MBCPs are not engaged in any other family violence service and, as such, it is often the only contact that women have with a specialist family violence service.

In addition, there is a lack of a consistent, evidence-based risk assessment tool for MBCPs and, more broadly, in working with men who choose to use violence. Bethany's MBCP primarily uses the CRAF, worker judgment and information provided by ex/partners to assess risk and ensure the safety of women and children, whereas Corrections Victoria uses a Risk-Need-Responsivity assessment process in the assessment of offenders.

The current minimum standards that apply to MBCPs are outdated and in need of review. There is currently no formal accreditation systems in place for MBCP providers, which has resulted in significant inconsistency across the State. This requires urgent attention.

In addition, a shared understanding of what it means to hold men accountable is lacking. Current funding investments indicate a dominant perception that MBCPs are the primary mechanism to ensure men who choose to use violence are held accountable. Greater attention and investment is required to ensure that all services that are providing interventions to men are actively communicating risk and sharing information about a man's behaviour and risk in a timely manner.

Working with adolescents with sexually abusive behaviours

The Sexually Abusive Behaviour Treatment Program (SABTS), which is provided by Barwon CASA, offers therapeutic support for children and young people up to the age of 15 who display problem or sexually abusive behaviour towards others (but do not have a conviction related to sexual offending), and children under 10 years of age who engage in problem sexual behaviour.

The goal of SABTS, through early identification and intervention with the child or young person, is to prevent the pattern of abusive sexual behaviours and return the child or young person to a more normative developmental path. It is the child and young person's capacity for rapid growth and development which provides the impetus for addressing the sexualised behaviour at its onset. This accounts for the optimism in the field that earlier interventions improve the likelihood of change.

Currently, the SABTS program is funded for 10-15 years old; however, Barwon CASA often receive referrals for adolescents up to 17 years of age who have sexualised behaviours, many with developmental delays. The SABTS program is an important early intervention service to address violence against women.

Family violence and particular communities

Challenges faced by rural communities

Rural communities such as Colac face a unique set of issues that challenge their capacity to ensure the safety of women and children experiencing family violence. Service delivery is largely characterised by a number of Geelong-based outreach services attending once or twice a week. This 'fly in, fly out' approach is not conducive to delivering quality services to people rural and remote areas. It is woefully inadequate in providing an immediate crisis response to women experiencing family violence. Given the significant increase in family violence incidents in Colac in recent years, this is of great concern.

The service delivery challenges Colac is currently confronting includes a lack of family violence crisis outreach service. Previously, the women's specialist family violence service based in Geelong provided a one-day a week outreach worker to Colac. However, this worker has been realigned to the Services Connect trial and has not been replaced. Given the substantial increase in family violence incidents in Colac, this level of resourcing is gravely inadequate. Colac does not have its own MAISM. The men's behaviour change program is currently not operating due to challenges in recruiting a male facilitator. The only specific family violence response in Colac is a part-time family violence counsellor (0.5 EFT) and Barwon CASA provides a visiting sexual assault counsellor two days who works closely with the Victoria Police SOCIT based in Colac.

The other challenges Colac faces include high turnover in the Family Violence Police Liaison Officer position, varied outcomes at court depending on the skills and understanding of the police officer and Magistrate, lack of public transport which makes it extremely difficult for women to seek help, a reluctance by women to self-disclose due to a lack of anonymity, and the ramifications of living in a conservative community where seeking help is not encouraged.

Connection with the Aboriginal Community

Whilst there are examples of strong relationships between individual agencies and the local ACCO, engagement with the BAIFVC is not well-developed. The BAIFVC has identified the need to foster a better relationship with the Committee as a key priority.

Impact of family violence and abuse on children

An important focus of the FVR was on the needs, rights and safety of children, and ensuring they are protected from both the long and short term consequences of family violence and abuse. However, the reforms have failed to deliver the necessary service integration, guidance, leadership and resourcing to achieve this goal. There are very few specialist family violence services in Victoria for children affected by family violence, despite the increasing number of children experiencing it.

In Barwon, the refuge in Geelong no longer employs a dedicated children's worker due to insufficient resourcing. The Geelong Strengthening Risk Management Demonstration Project, which was funded specifically for a Children's Case Manager, will cease to be funded post June 30, 2015. Children are being presented to RAMP, along with their mothers, at approximately double the number of women. Barwon CASA provides trauma-informed therapeutic support to children and young people affected by violence and abuse but the service is experiencing significant demand beyond its capacity. The BAIFVC has identified that reducing the impact of family violence and abuse on children and delivering appropriate therapeutic interventions is an priority area requiring urgent attention.

Capability of the mainstream workforce

Developing the capability of generalist workforces to identify, respond and intervene appropriately was a key goal of the FVR. Whilst family violence training (CRAF) has been delivered across Victoria to those working in mainstream workforces who are working with women and children experiencing family violence, not all agencies and their staff have an adequate understanding of the nature and dynamics of family violence, or are able to recognise the associated risk factors. The BAIFVC believes more work is required to build the knowledge and skills of mainstream workers in identifying family violence and sexual assault, undertaking family violence risk assessments, and in making referrals to specialist services.

Unfortunately, the opportunity for specialist family violence practitioners to contribute to the education and skill development of those in mainstream services has not been realised due to the immense pressure family violence agencies are experiencing in responding to the increased demand, and the lack of investment in specialist workers to build capability in the general workforce.

4. Looking to the future

The BAIFVC makes the following recommendations for consideration by the Royal Commission:

Urgent investment in responses to family violence and sexual assault

The BAIFVC believes that there are a number of issues that require urgent attention if we are to make an immediate impact on addressing violence against women and children, and holding perpetrators to account.

Recommendation 1

That urgent investment is made to enable family violence and sexual assault services to respond to the significant increase in demand.

Recommendation 2

That government invest in services that provide longer term post-crisis support to aid recovery of women and children who have experienced violence.

Recommendation 3

That the unique challenges faced by rural communities are acknowledged and adequately resourced.

Recommendation 4

That there be urgent attention to developing and resourcing a range of evidence-based responses to men who use violence against women and children.

Recommendation 5

That there is urgent investment in the provision of safe waiting areas at magistrate courts for women and implementation of suitable remote witness facilities.

Strategic framework accompanied by high level leadership and governance

The BAIFVC strongly supports the need for a high-level, conceptual strategic framework to guide future family violence reforms. The framework needs to contain clearly articulated priorities, be well-resourced, supported by strong governance arrangements, and accompanied by a well-designed implementation and review plan.

Strong leadership from successive Chief Commissioners of Police, senior departmental bureaucrats, and cross-portfolio Ministerial responsibility over the past decade has been critical to driving the family violence and sexual assault reforms. The BAIFVC welcomes the Andrews government's decision to enshrine ministerial responsibility for family violence by creating a Minister for the Prevention of Family Violence, and to establish the Royal Commission into Family Violence. We also applaud the Victoria Police's decision to appoint an Assistant Commissioner to head up the Family Violence Command that also includes the Sexual Offences and Child Abuse Investigation Teams (SOCIT). It is hoped that this leadership will drive further sector reform.

There is currently no mechanism to measure how effectively the system is addressing family violence. There is nothing that tells us the size and scale of the issue, of what is working and what is not, and how effectively we are using our resources to address family violence. The BAIFVC supports the Minister for the Prevention of Family Violence's decision to commission the Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) to examine and advise government on what measures, statistics and data should be included in a Family Violence Index. However, government investment will be required to ensure that the Family Violence Index is successfully implemented.

Recommendation 6

That Government work in partnership with key stakeholders to develop a strategic framework for the renewed reform of family violence services in Victoria.

Recommendation 7

That Government introduce the necessary statewide governance structures to oversee future reforms.

Recommendation 8

That the importance of strong leadership - from both the executive and bureaucratic arms of government - in driving reform is acknowledged.

Recommendation 9

That government commit to implementing the Family Violence Index.

Building on integrated regional governance

BAIFVC supports the ongoing need for integrated regional structures. However, they require a clearer mandate, high level support, and engagement from all parts of the family violence system. For example, they require the resources to fully engage in interventions across the continuum of responses. Regional areas do not have the capacity to support numerous governance structures. Having one body with oversight of crisis response, post-crisis recovery, early intervention and primary prevention responses would allow for a more comprehensive and planned approaches to violence against women and children .

Recommendation 10

That the value of integrated regional governance committees is acknowledged and that any future reforms to the family violence system strengthen and build upon these existing structures.

Whole of continuum investment

The BAIFVC believes that any future reforms need to adequately, sustainably and equally resource the provision of violence against women and children responses across the continuum from prevention, early intervention, crisis responses and post-crisis recovery.

Recommendation 11

That any future reforms and investment in family violence and sexual assault be across the continuum of response, early intervention and primary prevention, and is informed by research and evaluation of what works.

Strengthening specialisation

The BAIFVC believes that addressing violence against women and children requires a specialist response. The importance of specialisation applies across the continuum from prevention, early intervention, crisis response and post crisis recovery. The skills required to deliver responses to women experiencing family violence and sexual assault are not the same as those required in working with men who use violence, providing therapeutic clinical responses to women and children, delivering respectful relationships education to young people in schools, or providing training to organisations in recognising and responding to violence against women and children.

Working with the victims of family violence and sexual assault and those who perpetrate it requires a particular set of professional skills and expertise that includes both case management skills as well as clinical, trauma-informed therapeutic practice.

MDCs have clearly demonstrated the benefits that can be achieved by facilitating collaborative, multi-disciplinary partnerships and co-locating services that respond to violence against women and children. Existing MDC facilities are strategically positioned to expand upon to co-locate a range of services such as specialist family violence services, Victoria Police Family Violence Unit, drug and alcohol, mental health, Office Public Prosecutions, Victorian Legal Aid, Victims of Crime, financial counsellors and health services.. The MDCs have a high profile and are recognised within communities. They are prime facilities to develop into prominent 'Centres Against Violence'.

Recommendation 12

That the importance of the specialist family violence and sexual assault practitioners continue to be acknowledged.

Recommendation 13

That future reforms invest in the development of a professionalised, highly-skilled, specialist workforce capable of delivering a suite of responses to violence against women and children.

Recommendation 14

That the specialist nature of the work undertaken by the Victoria Police's FVU and SOCIT is acknowledged and reflected in permanent staffing arrangements and training for officers.

Recommendation 15

That the MDC model be expanded and resourced to become multi-disciplinary 'Centres Against Violence' by co-locating a range of services and agencies, in particular the Police Family Violence Unit, specialist family violence services, and legal services.

Recommendation 16

That the specialist approach be extended to include specialist family violence courts across the state.

Recommendation 17

That all family violence and sexual assault services, including refuges, have the capacity to provide a therapeutic trauma-informed interventions to children affected by violence and abuse.

Strengthening multi-agency partnerships, information sharing and data collection

Collaborative, multi-agency partnerships are critical to ensuring that women and children are kept safe and perpetrators are held to account. However, to be successful, partnerships need to be able to freely share information. The BAIFVC believes that providing the necessary instruments to support information sharing should be underpinned by legislation.

A more sophisticated approach to data collection is also required. Currently, agencies who work with women and children experiencing family violence and sexual assault, and men who perpetrate it, record client data on different databases, namely SHIP and IRIS. These systems do not link with each other, nor to other data systems used by the Victoria Police, Courts or Corrections Victoria. There is a need for an integrated database that is accessible by all agencies involved in responding to family violence and sexual assault.

Recommendation 18

That any future reforms to the family violence and sexual assault sector continue to encourage, support and resource partnership approaches.

Recommendation 19

That information sharing between partner agencies is underpinned by legislation.

Recommendation 20

That there is investment and commitment to developing an integrated database that is accessible by all agencies involved in responding to family violence and sexual assault.

Building the capability of the mainstream workforce

The BAIFVC believes there is a need to enhance the capacity of professionals working in mainstream services to identify violence against women and children, assess risk and/or refer to specialist family violence and sexual assault services.

Recommendation 21

That any new reforms include a mainstream workforce capability strategy.

Recommendation 22

That mandatory, ongoing training for magistrates, court staff and lawyers in violence against women and children be introduced.

Recommendation 23

That investment be made to enable the specialist violence and women and children sector to participate in building the capability of mainstream workforce to respond to family violence and sexual assault.

Appendix

1. No More Deaths Alliance Principles Framework
2. BAIFVC Membership
3. List of related submissions:
 - Barwon CASA
 - Barwon Community Legal Service
 - Bethany Community Support
 - Colac Area Health
 - The Salvation Army
 - Time for Youth

Appendix 1



PRINCIPLES FRAMEWORK FOR FAMILY VIOLENCE SYSTEM REFORMS

The No More Death Alliance organisations believe that the Victorian Family Violence system should be built on these fundamental principles:

1. Freedom from violence is a basic human right and women and children have a right to live self-determined lives and reach their full potential.
2. Family violence is gendered - it is most frequently and most severely perpetrated by men against women and children.
3. The primary cause of family violence is structural gender inequality and the unequal distribution of power and resources between men and women.
4. The use of violence is a choice.
5. Violence is preventable.
6. Family violence services and systems are informed by and responsive to the lived experiences of women in all their diversity.
7. The system delivers effective responses to family violence across the continuum from primary prevention and early intervention to crisis responses and post-crisis recovery.
8. The needs of women and children and ensuring their safety and well-being underpins all aspects of the family violence system.
9. Effective responses for women and children from groups and communities at highest risk of family violence are led with those groups and communities. For example, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, women from culturally and linguistically diverse communities, women with disabilities and women in rural and regional areas and other marginalised groups.
10. The family violence system is fully integrated and barrier free across sectors.
11. The family violence system is safe, respectful, responsive, consistent, affordable, efficient and tailored to individual needs. It maintains a consistent standard of service quality and a skilled and professional specialised workforce.
12. All aspects of society including governments at all levels, communities, systems, services and perpetrators are responsible and accountable for ensuring that women and children's lives are free from violence.
13. The family violence system, particularly the justice system, keeps perpetrators in view and holds them responsible for their behaviour.
14. Family violence is not incidental or temporary; it is an ongoing, serious and pervasive societal problem. Policies and funding models must reflect this.

Architecture needed for a family violence system built on these principles include:

1. Commonwealth and state government funding arrangements that reflect the serious, complex, cross-sectoral and endemic nature of family violence. This requires a dedicated, guaranteed and recurrent family violence funding stream through Commonwealth and state governments that is protected by legislation, for services across the family violence continuum – crisis support, early intervention, post-crisis recovery and prevention.
2. Minimum standards that apply across every aspect of the family violence system tied to funding and accreditation. These should be informed by best practice across operations, policy, tools, training, governance, cultural competency, disability access, data collection and evaluation.
3. A family violence workforce with specialist skills and expertise which meet recognised standards of certification and continuous workforce development; and generalist services that meet minimum standards for responding to family violence.
4. A Common Risk Assessment and Risk Management Framework for responding to family violence, used consistently across sectors and settings in Victoria.
5. Family violence and risk assessment training, including cross-cultural competency and disability access, for all staff working in services and systems across the sector, including mainstream services and intersecting systems, such as, family services, child protection, health and education.
6. Statewide and regional governance structures and processes based on collaboration, evidence, sustainability and longevity.
7. Structures within government, community agencies and the justice system and dedicated funding to support women who have experienced family violence to formally participate in decision-making in an ongoing way.
8. A legal system that includes access to independent, specialist, free legal advice; family violence specialist support at every point; and courts and court processes that are responsive to the dynamics, impacts and risks of family violence.
9. Effective, transparent family violence death review processes, to inform continuous improvement in systems responses.
10. Consistent, relevant data collection, research and program evaluation to inform continuous improvement of the family violence system.
11. Long term, comprehensive primary prevention work across the community that is evidence-based and appropriately resourced, complemented by whole of government policies to address structural gender inequality.

Appendix 2

BAIFVC Membership

Partner Agency	Name and Position
Barwon Centre Against Sexual Assault	Helen Bolton Chief Executive Officer
Barwon Community Legal Service	Nick Hudson Executive Officer
Bethany Community Support	Bernadette McCartney Executive Manager, Community Support
Colac Area Health	Marg White Director, Community Services
Department of Health & Human Services	Leanne Hodder Local Connections Manager, Barwon Area
Independent Chair	Janice Watt
Minerva Community Services	Pauline Wright Chief Executive Officer
Regional Integration Coordinator	Elaine Williams (RIC auspiced by Bethany Community Support)
Salvation Army	Lorrinda Hamilton Network Director, SalvoConnect
Time for Youth	Pete Jacobson Operations Manager
Victoria Police	Kevin Godfrey Sergeant, Officer in Charge FV Unit/Family Violence Advisor, Victoria Police
Wathaurong Aboriginal Co-operative	Michael Cussens