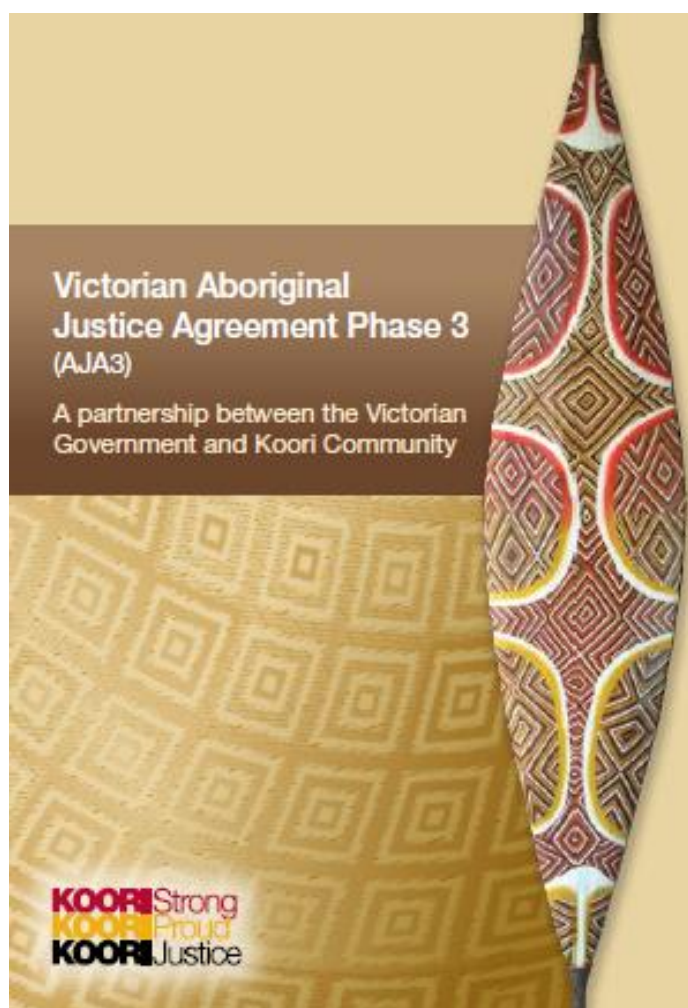
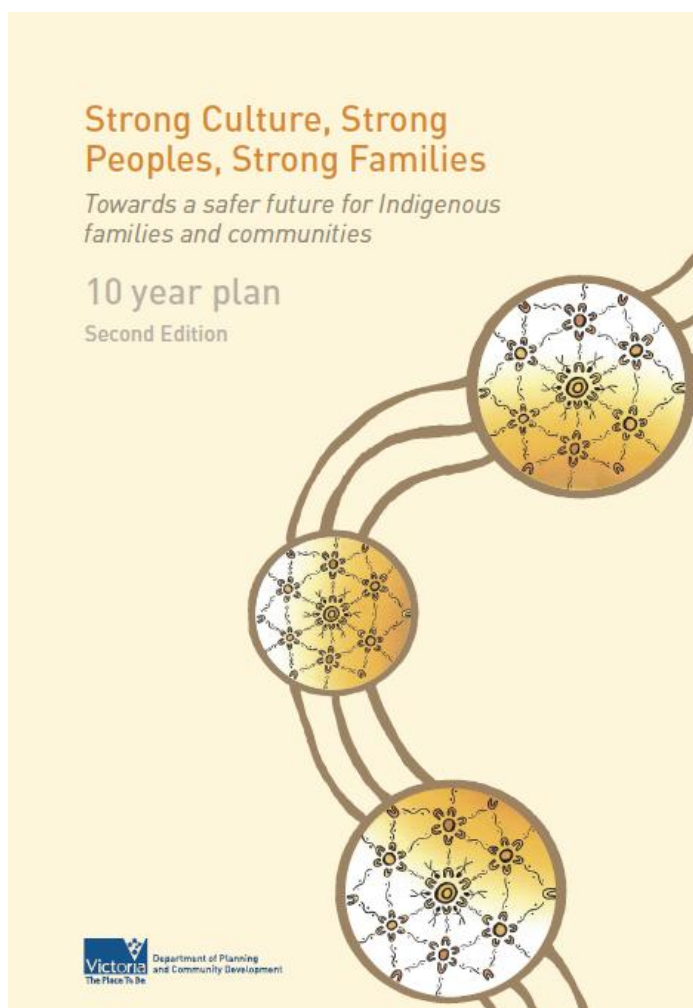


KOORI CAUCUS' SUBMISSION to the ROYAL COMMISSION INTO FAMILY VIOLENCE



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INTRODUCTION

Koori Caucus

The Indigenous Family Violence and Aboriginal Justice Koori Caucus' share in the belief that families are our heart and soul. They generate dreams and values, ideals and visions for our children. Family violence is a crime and is unacceptable within the Aboriginal community. Safety and security for victim/survivors of violence is our number one priority. Members of the Koori Caucus' are committed to breaking the cycle of Aboriginal family violence through the development and implementation of actions and programs that strengthen; honour and respect Aboriginal cultural heritage, cultural practices, individuals, families and communities.

The Koori Caucus' are comprised of Aboriginal community members from both the Indigenous Family Violence Partnership Forum and the Aboriginal Justice Forum. Membership includes representatives from the following:

- Indigenous Family Violence Regional Action Group chairpersons;
- Regional Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committee chairpersons;
- Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated;
- Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association Ltd;
- Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service;
- Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service;
- Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency; and
- Elizabeth Morgan House.

A key feature of the Indigenous Family Violence Koori Caucus is that it provides an opportunity for members to discuss issues, share ideas and experiences, problem solve, develop a common view of key issues and make recommendations relating to family violence matters. This is complemented by the Aboriginal Justice Koori Caucus.

Community Engagement

In recognition of the diverse culture of the Victorian Aboriginal community and the unique nature of family violence within these communities the Koori Caucus were identified as a group who works closely with individuals affected by family violence and were invited to participate in a community engagement activity by the Royal Commission. The consultation session provided members of the Koori Caucus with the opportunity to express their views and opinions on matters relating to family violence within the Victorian Aboriginal community that will generally inform the Royal Commissions work. The session focused around Prevention and Early Intervention; and Safety and Accountability and divided the Koori Caucus into smaller groups to examine a number of detailed questions and developed responses based on their extensive knowledge and expertise.

Each of the groups identified a number of issues and difficulties experienced by Aboriginal individuals, families and communities and shared these with the Commissioners. The groups also highlighted a variety of successful community led programs and initiatives and the positive outcomes they have had on creating awareness and reducing the extent and effects of Aboriginal family violence.

Some of the key themes that were raised during the discussions included;

- the significance of having Aboriginal community led approaches at all times: planning, development and implementation;
- the importance of culturally safe and respectful responses and services;
- the gaps in the systems current responses to services for men, time out, accommodation outside of the home and healing programs;
- recognition of the Indigenous Family Violence Strategy and the need for continued commitment and support by all partners;
- the necessity for education programs to reflect Aboriginal history, cultural respect and valued first nation people;
- the challenges of fragile and short term funding;
- the success of community led initiatives including the White Ribbon Ambassador programs;
- the challenge of acquiring relevant data and the impacts this has on planning and improving service delivery;
- the importance of a holistic approach.

Submission

The members of the Indigenous Family Violence and Aboriginal Justice Koori Caucus' welcome the opportunity to provide a written submission to the Royal Commission in addition to the information provided through their participation in the above mentioned community engagement activity. This submission aims to support and extend on key themes raised during the consultation session and further enhance the Royal Commission's understanding of the extent and impacts of family violence within the Victorian Aboriginal community.

The Indigenous Family Violence Koori Caucus consists of dedicated Aboriginal members who are actively involved in the prevention of and responses to family violence within Aboriginal communities state-wide. The knowledge and experiences of these men and women have been essential in the development of this submission, ensuring that the information provided reflects the issues and challenges experienced throughout the state by individual community members, Aboriginal organisations and service providers responsible for creating a safer Victoria for all Aboriginal men, women, children, Elders, families and communities. This is reaffirmed by the Aboriginal Justice Koori Caucus through its essential focus on justice reforms.

In an Aboriginal community context, family violence includes a wide range of physical, emotional, sexual, social, spiritual, cultural and economic abuses that can occur within families, extended families, kinship networks and communities. This submission addresses the Royal Commission's issues paper from the unique perspective of the Victorian Aboriginal community. It provides the thoughts, ideas and opinions of the Koori Caucus' in response to the themes and questions raised, with a focus on seven key areas:

1. Aboriginal Family Violence
2. Research and Evaluation
3. Cultural Safety
4. Early Intervention, Prevention and Education
5. Safety and Wellbeing
6. Accountability
7. Holistic Healing

These focus areas directly relate to the principals, values and objectives outlined in the Indigenous Family Violence 10 Year Plan developed by members of the Indigenous Family Violence Partnership Forum.

They provide for discussions relating to:

- making Victoria a safer place for all Aboriginal Victorians;
- improving the effectiveness and efficiency of responses to Aboriginal family violence through ongoing research and evaluation;
- increasing the cultural understanding and capacity of the service system to improve responses to Aboriginal family violence;
- early intervention to improve education, awareness and prevention of family violence;
- increasing the safety of Aboriginal families and individuals, especially women and children;
- increasing the accountability of perpetrators of family violence within Aboriginal communities;
- increasing opportunities for healing for victim/survivors and perpetrators.

The Koori Caucus' are of the view that systemic racism and the lack of cultural understanding of the needs of Aboriginal people by government and the mainstream service sector, continues to be a major barrier for many Aboriginal men, women, children, Elders, families and communities accessing the services they require.

The Koori Caucus' have made 30 recommendations to the Royal Commission which aim to assist the Commissioners in making recommendations for change through the provision of expertise concerning how to improve Victoria's awareness of and response to family violence within Aboriginal communities across the state.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Aboriginal Family Violence

1. The Royal Commission and the Victorian government recognise, understand and accept the Aboriginal definition of family violence.
2. Funding to agencies within the family violence sector will require a demonstration by that service that they understand and are more inclusive of the Aboriginal family violence definition when delivering services to Aboriginal people.

Research and Evaluation

3. The Victorian government recognise the importance of and consider investing in improved data collection and monitoring systems relating to Aboriginal family violence at both state-wide and regional levels and making these available to the Aboriginal community annually.
4. The Victorian Police are required to improve the consistency of data collection when recording Aboriginal status and share their family violence related data with relevant Aboriginal community organisations
5. Agencies within the family violence sector are also required to strengthen data collection and promote ethical research into family violence to build an evidence base to better inform, evaluate and identify good practice responses and services to reduce the incidence and impacts of Aboriginal family violence.

Cultural Safety

6. The Victorian government consider providing additional ongoing investments into Aboriginal Family Violence Strategy through the 10 Year Plan (CIF, time out, healing services and refuges) and the Aboriginal Justice Agreement.
7. The Victorian government consider providing ongoing support for community driven responses that allow Aboriginal people to lead the process at all levels.
8. Mainstream service providers ensure the provision of culturally safe and respectful service responses across the whole Aboriginal family violence service sector including, victim/survivors, perpetrators, children, Elders, families and communities. The Victorian government have a responsibility to ensure that mainstream services are accountable to the Aboriginal community through the relevant joint forums for the services they provide.
9. The Victorian government supports the promotion of Aboriginal workforce development.
10. Mainstream service providers recognise the capacity of Aboriginal organisations and agree to work in partnership, not in competition with Aboriginal services.

Prevention, Early Intervention, and Education

11. The Victorian government recognises the importance of prevention and education and will consider providing the Aboriginal community with ongoing adequate funding for the development and delivery of the suite of services required. This will include educational early intervention programs for boys and girls to reduce the likelihood that their learned experience growing up in a family violence environment will be repeated, and education and healing programs that assist all family members to understand and change the dynamics that result in the violence experience
12. The Victorian government supports and commits to an ongoing investment into community led sporting activities that promote health and wellbeing, Family Violence awareness and education in prevention methods.
13. The Victorian government supports and funds the Aboriginal community through sporting organisations, such as the Fitzroy Stars and Rumbalara Football/Netball Club and other community controlled organisations initiatives for the provision of family violence cultural awareness activities and health and wellbeing programs delivered through 'sport'.
14. The Victorian government recognise and understand that each region deals with Aboriginal family violence differently and commit to providing adequate support and the resources required to enable local Aboriginal communities to develop solutions to prevent, reduce and respond to local problems.

15. The Royal Commission acknowledges the good work being done through the IFVRAGs/RAJACs and promotes their initiatives as best practice models.
16. The Victorian government provides investment into service provision for intensive long term, everyday assistance to high risk families.

Safety and Wellbeing

17. The Royal Commission recognises the need for initiatives to be developed, implemented and evaluated in partnership with the Aboriginal community (including Koori Family Violence Police Protocols)
18. The Victorian government will adequately support and resource Aboriginal specific legal services.
19. The Victorian government supports and resources the Aboriginal community to develop and deliver specific Aboriginal family violence training to all Victorian Police, including new recruits with regular refresher courses.
20. The Victorian government develops a systems process to ensure that Aboriginal children are not further victimised. This system will consider the current issues of overrepresentation of Aboriginal children in the Child Protection system and the need for government to review and critically reflect on their role as parent and generational failures in this role.
21. The Victorian government recognise that the Koori Family Violence Police Protocols are not always followed and will work with Victoria Police to improve compliance.
22. The Victorian government considers ensuring that Victoria Police provide Aboriginal community organisations with direct access to L17s.
23. The Royal Commission and the Victorian government understand and accept the role that racism plays in contributing to family violence within Aboriginal communities and supports education to actively reduce the levels of racism in Victoria.

Accountability

24. The Royal Commission recognises and understands that mainstream behaviour change models are not appropriate for Aboriginal men. Aboriginal men need to be held accountable for their actions through education, healing and connection which can be best achieved by other Aboriginal men on country.
25. The Victorian government supports and resources the Aboriginal community to develop and deliver appropriate services for perpetrators.
26. The Royal Commission recognise that making perpetrators accountable is the responsibility of the whole community, which reinforces Aboriginal norms against family violence.
27. Mainstream service providers recognise and understand that gendered/feminist style services are not appropriate for Aboriginal communities.

Holistic Healing Approach

28. The Royal Commission recognises the need for a holistic healing model based around Aboriginal community and family strengthening, collaborative approaches, appropriate resources and flexible service delivery arrangements.
29. The Victorian government commits to the provision of healing services provided by the Aboriginal community using a holistic approach for all men, women, children and families.
30. The Victorian government supports and resources the Aboriginal community in the development of cultural healing programs for youth as well as healing programs for individuals, families and communities to deal with trauma, intergenerational trauma and grief.

Question One

Are there other goals the Royal Commission should consider?

The Royal Commission aims to make recommendations which:

- Consider cultural safety and apply a cultural lens using the Aboriginal family violence definition to make Victoria a safer place for all Aboriginal men, women, children, Elders, families and communities.

ONE: ABORIGINAL FAMILY VIOLENCE

Make Victoria a safer place for all Aboriginal Victorians

- The Royal Commission and the Victorian government recognise, understand and accept the Aboriginal definition of family violence.
- Funding to agencies within the family violence sector will require a demonstration by that service that they understand and are more inclusive of the Aboriginal family violence definition when delivering services to Aboriginal people.

What is family violence?

It is important that the definition of family violence recognises and reflects the perspectives and realities of all communities within Victoria, including Aboriginal communities. The Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Task Force has defined family violence as;

‘an issue focused around a wide range of physical, emotional, sexual, social, spiritual, cultural, psychological and economic abuses that occur within families, intimate relationships, extended families, kinship networks and communities. It extends to one on one fighting, abuse of Aboriginal community workers as well as self - harm, injury and suicide’.

The Aboriginal definition of the nature and forms of family violence are broader and more encompassing than those used in the mainstream. Family violence service providers and the broader family violence sector need to have an understanding and be more inclusive of the Aboriginal definition to ensure the delivery of culturally safe and respectful services to all those in the Victorian Aboriginal community.

Aboriginal family violence encompasses a range of acts that are criminal, such as physical and sexual assault and non-criminal, such as emotional and spiritual abuse. Community violence or violence within the Aboriginal community is also an ongoing concern within Aboriginal communities across Victoria. This violence contributes to overall levels of violence reported by Aboriginal people and the trauma experienced within families and kinship groups.

Family violence includes intergenerational violence and abuse, affects extended families and kinship networks. Violence against Elders is identified as an emerging issue. An individual can be both a perpetrator and a victim of family violence.

The Family Violence Protection Act 2008 (FVPA) is at the core of the justice response to family violence in Victoria and seeks to maximise safety for victim/survivors of family violence, prevent and reduce the incidence of family violence, and hold perpetrators to account.

The FVPA has been marginally responsive to Aboriginal conceptions of family violence through the broad definition of family and family violence. The expanded definition of family in the FVPA includes ‘any relative’. This is described in section 8 of the FVPA to mean a broad range of things including ‘a person who, under Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander tradition or contemporary social practice is the person’s relative’. The definition of family violence in section 5 of the FVPA includes physical or sexual abuse, threatening or coercive behaviour or behaviour that controls or dominates the family member and causes that person to feel fear.

These definitions, whilst slightly more inclusive of the Aboriginal community definition, are still lacking in a true understanding of Aboriginal family violence and the ability to capture the wide-ranging issues relating to its prevalence including intergroup violence; one-on-one same sex-adult fighting; self-injury; suicide; lateral violence; and child abuse.

The Victorian Aboriginal community accepts supports and prefers the alternative Aboriginal definition of family violence when addressing issues relating to Aboriginal communities, as it provides a more accurate interpretation of violence perpetrated against Aboriginal people.

TWO: RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

Improve the effectiveness and efficiency of responses to Aboriginal family violence through ongoing research and evaluation

- The Victorian government recognise the importance of and consider investing in improved data collection and monitoring systems relating to Aboriginal family violence at both state-wide and regional levels and making these available to the Aboriginal community annually.
- The Victorian Police are required to improve the consistency of data collection when recording Aboriginal status and share their family violence related data with relevant Aboriginal community organisations
- Agencies within the family violence sector are also required to strengthen data collection and promote ethical research into family violence to build an evidence base to better inform, evaluate and identify good practice responses and services to reduce the incidence and impacts of Aboriginal family violence.

What do we know about family violence?

Family violence is an issue of serious concern to Aboriginal families and communities within Victoria. Whilst official statistics concerning the extent and nature of family violence are very limited, it is clear that the violence is disproportionately high and that has a detrimental impact on the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal people, families and communities.

The data provided by Victoria Police data indicates that there has been a significant increase in family incident reporting, intervention orders and family violence offending over the past several years in families where Aboriginality is identified. However, this increase could be just the tip of the ice-berg considering there is a high-incidence of under-reporting of family violence amongst the Victorian Aboriginal community. The reasons for under-reporting are varied but are believed to include fear of discrimination and subsequent child protection notifications, need for protection of self or family from further victimisation from the perpetrator or wider family and a lack of, understanding about the criminal justice system.

Reporting of family violence to police remains the most practical way of collecting reliable time series data in relation to family violence. For this reason, significant emphasis needs to be placed on the importance of asking the standard Aboriginal status question and the valuable role recording that information plays in enhancing the evidence base in this area.

Aboriginal demographic and family violence data

The following statistical information has been extracted from a number of sources including the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2011 Census report, the Victoria Police LEAP 2014 database and information provided by the Crime Statistics Agency. It is important to note that the data should be treated as the 'minimum' and interpreted with caution given the large number of family incident reports (FIR) where the Aboriginal status of the affected family member (AFM) was unknown and the suspected high incidences of under-reporting.

The Victorian Aboriginal community is comparatively young and growing at a faster rate than the non-Aboriginal community as demonstrated in the 2011 ABS census. The data showed that Victoria's Aboriginal population rose from 33,517 in 2006 to 47,333 in 2011 and that more than 50 percent were under the age of 25. This young population could have a direct correlation to the over representation of Aboriginal Australian children, young people and their families who come into contact with Child Protection, the Youth Justice System and Family Violence services.

When the relative size of the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations in Victoria is taken into account, the significant toll due to family violence in Aboriginal families and communities is even more significant. FIRs where Aboriginal status was recorded within the last financial year, demonstrated that on average there were 42 FIRs made by Aboriginal AFMs for every 1,000 Aboriginal residents of Victoria, compared to the non-Aboriginal population with only an average of 6 FIRs for every 1,000 non-Aboriginal residents of Victoria. This suggests, there were almost eight times as many FIRs per 1,000 Aboriginal people than for non-Aboriginal people.

The 2013-14 Victoria Police Crime Statistics report indicates that there were 65,347 FIRs recorded across Victoria. 31,856 of these had a non-Aboriginal status, compared with 2,135 with an Aboriginal status leaving a concerning large proportion of the data (31,356 FIRs) recorded as status 'unknown'. Figure 1 and Table 1 below provides further data and information relating to the numbers of FIRs recorded by AFM status.

Figure 1: FIRs where the AFM identified as being Aboriginal

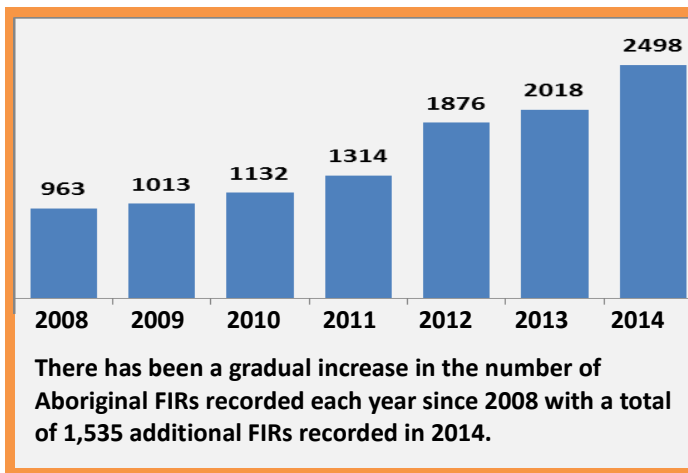


Table 1: Comparison of FIRs recorded by status over 2012-14

	2012-13	2013-14	Difference
Aboriginal	2,127	2,135	▲ 0.4%
Non-Aboriginal	34,161	31,856	▼ - 6.7%
Unknown	24,251	31,356	▲ 29.3%

Between 2012 and 2014 Aboriginal FIRs increased by 0.4 per cent (8 FIRs), compared with a 6.7 per cent (2,305 FIRs) decrease for non-Aboriginal AFMs. There was also a considerable increase of 29.3 per cent (7,105) in the number of FIRs with the AFM status recorded as unknown.

The graph in Figure 2 indicates that since 2008-09 the numbers have increased consistently in both fields with the presence of children increasing by 280 (66 percent) and the number of charges increasing by 735 (237 percent) in 2013-14. Figure 3 demonstrates that 1 in 3 children are present where an Aboriginal person has reported family.

Figure 2: FIRs recorded where children were present and charges were laid

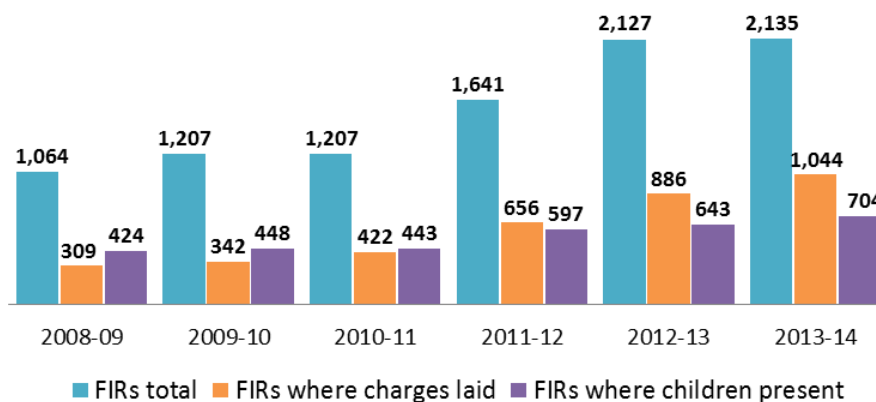


Figure 3: Where children are present



Out of the 2,135 FIRs made by Aboriginal AFMs in 2013-14, 1,044 resulted in charges being laid, 704 where children were present, 373 where IVO was applied for, 146 where a Safety Noticed (SN) issued and 519 where both IVO and SN were present.

There has also been an increase in the total number of Family Violence Intervention Orders (FVIVO) both final and interim orders that were applied for, extended, or had a Family Violence Safety Notice issued by police on behalf of Aboriginal complaints from 1,693 in 2012-13 to 1,887 in 2013-14. However, applications for the extension of a final FVIO have decreased from 136 to 54. The number of FVIVO applications applied for by police against Aboriginal defendants shows a similar pattern, with a total of 1,437 in 2012-13 to 1,579 in 2013-14, and a decrease from 87 to 43.

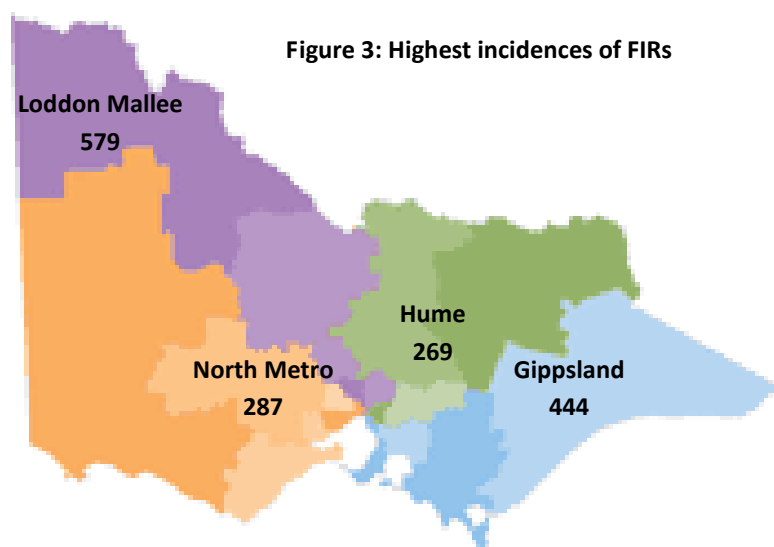
Family violence related victimisation remains prevalent in Victorian Aboriginal communities with 70.9 percent of all reported assaults against Aboriginal people in 2012-13 were considered family violence related by police, compared to 47.6 percent for the non-Aboriginal population

Most FIRs made by Aboriginal AFMs occurred in the Loddon Mallee (27.1 per cent of total FIRs by Aboriginal AFMs), Gippsland (20.8 per cent), North Metropolitan Melbourne (13.4 per cent) and Hume (12.6 per cent) regions.

The representation of FIRs made by Aboriginal affected family members in 2013-14 by RAJAC region is set out in Table 2. The highest incidence of FIRs occurs in Gippsland, Loddon Mallee, North Metropolitan and Hume as displayed in Figure 3.

Table 2: FIRs by RAJAC region

Victoria	2013-14
Loddon Mallee	579
Gippsland	444
North Metropolitan	287
Hume	269
Barwon South West	154
South Metropolitan	150
Grampians	111
East Metropolitan	71
West Metropolitan	70



THREE: CULTURAL SAFETY

Increase the cultural understanding and capacity of the service system to improve responses to Aboriginal family violence

- The Victorian government consider providing additional ongoing investments into Aboriginal Family Violence Strategy through the 10 Year Plan (CIF, time out, healing services and refuges) and the Aboriginal Justice Agreement.
- The Victorian government consider providing ongoing support for community driven responses that allow Aboriginal people to lead the process at all levels.
- Mainstream service providers ensure the provision of culturally safe and respectful service responses across the whole Aboriginal family violence service sector including, victim/survivors, perpetrators, children, Elders, families and communities. The Victorian government have a responsibility to ensure that mainstream services are accountable to the Aboriginal community through the relevant joint forums for the services they provide.
- The Victorian government supports the promotion of Aboriginal workforce development.
- Mainstream service providers recognise the capacity of Aboriginal organisations and agree to work in partnership, not in competition with Aboriginal services.

What has been done so far?

Creating a safer Victoria and promoting healing will take many years, particularly given the disadvantage experienced by Aboriginal people and the ongoing effects of trans-generational abuse and trauma. However, concerted efforts over the past two decades have focussed on improving the understanding and awareness of Aboriginal family violence and the importance of a holistic healing approach to achieve positive change.

The commitment between the Victorian Aboriginal community and the Victorian Government to address the issues of Aboriginal family violence together was initially formed 15 years ago through a number of Aboriginal strategic initiatives and policy documents. These included:

- In June 2000, the *Aboriginal Justice Agreement* was established to reduce the over-representation of Aboriginal people in the youth justice and criminal justice system.
- In October 2001, the *Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Task Force* was established to raise community awareness of Aboriginal family violence and engage communities in the development in local responses.
- In 2002, the Victorian Government released the *Framework for the development of the Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Strategy: a partnership approach between the Indigenous community and government* to support the development of the community led Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Strategy.
- In 2002, as part of the strategy *10 Indigenous Family Violence Regional Action Groups* were established across the state, each with an *Indigenous Family Violence Support Worker* employed to provide ongoing support.
- In 2003, the *Indigenous Family Violence Community Initiative Fund (CIF)* was established. The fund provides annual grants amounting to \$650,000 to support Aboriginal community-based projects that aim to prevent, reduce and respond to family violence.
- In December 2003, the *Indigenous Family Violence Task Force Final Report* was delivered to the Victorian Government, highlighting 28 recommendations for immediate action.
- In October 2004, the government released the *Victorian Government response to the Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Task Force Final Report* which outlined the Victorian Governments commitment to support and build on the recommendations of the task force.
- In April 2005, *The Indigenous Family Violence Partnership Forum (IFVPF)* was established to enable Aboriginal communities to address Aboriginal family violence in partnership with the Victorian Government. A key goal of the Partnership Forum was to oversee the development and implementation of a 10 Year Plan to reduce family violence.

This has resulted in the partnership that exists today, which is strengthened by the following Government strategies that directly respond to issues relating to Aboriginal family violence within the current policy context including:

Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families: towards a safer future for Indigenous families and communities 10 year plan 2008-2018: outlines a 10 year vision, the objectives to reach and the specific actions that need to be taken to make Victoria a safer place for Aboriginal families. It's a living document which will guide, inform and direct joint efforts of the Aboriginal community and the Victorian Government to reduce Aboriginal family violence. It provides a strategic framework to assist services that address Aboriginal family violence in the short, medium and long term.

Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework (VAAF) 2013-2018: The VAAF was developed to strengthen the former Victorian Indigenous Affairs Framework and give greater focus to those areas where Government performance can be improved. An overarching framework for Aboriginal affairs has been in place in Victoria since 2006, to drive a strategic reform agenda. The VAAF builds on previous bipartisan approaches and reinforces the commitment to sustained and strategic effort to improve the quality of life of Aboriginal Victorians.

Aboriginal Justice Agreement Phase 3 (AJA3): which continues the work to improve Koori justice outcomes and reduce over-representation in the criminal justice system. Signed by the Victorian Government and the Koori community in 2013, the AJA3 is the third phase of a long-term change strategy which aims to address the ongoing issue of Aboriginal over-representation within all levels of the criminal justice system, improve Aboriginal access to justice related services and promote greater awareness in the Aboriginal community of their civil, legal and political rights to be rolled out in stages over a generation until the gap is closed.

Cultural safety respects and empowers Aboriginal communities to be involved in services which affect their health and wellbeing. It acknowledges the need of mainstream service providers and governments to analyse the culture of their organisations and stop negative impacts these may have on the cultural rights of Aboriginal communities. In response to the 10 year plan the following initiatives have been developed to assist mainstream service providers in ensuring the delivery of culturally safe and respectful services.

Cultural Competency Guidelines for Family Violence Services: Developed in response to concerns regarding the manner in which consultants engage with Aboriginal people regarding policy and programs relating to Aboriginal family violence. The aim of the guide is to support and assist consultants wishing to engage Victorian Aboriginal communities in processes that

- empowers Aboriginal communities;
- are inclusive and respectful of the diversity of Aboriginal culture;
- reflects an equal partnership between Aboriginal people and consultants; and
- results in better outcomes for children, young people and their families.

(Please note cultural competency now referred to as cultural safety and respect)

Family Violence Risk Assessment and Risk Management Framework: The Aboriginal contextualisation of the Family Violence Risk Assessment and Risk Management Framework, which involved the development of training materials to better equip professionals and practitioners to identify risk factors associated with family violence and respond appropriately to Aboriginal people experiencing family violence. The materials were piloted in Dandenong, Geelong and Mildura throughout 2013-14.

There have been a number of broader government strategy and policy documents that have contributed to creating a culturally safe environment for all Victorian Aboriginal communities. Some relevant examples include:

- Wannik Education Strategy for Koorie students
- Victorian Aboriginal Suicide Prevention and Response Plan 2010 - 2015
- Koori Alcohol Action Plan
- Aboriginal Inclusion Framework 2011
- Victorian Government Aboriginal Affairs Report 2013
- Yalca – a partnership in Education and Training for the New Millennium
- COAG Closing the Gap commitments

Question Two

The Royal Commission wants to hear about the extent to which recent reforms and developments have improved responses to family violence, and where they need to be expanded or altered

Over the past decade police, courts and community services have worked together to develop an embedded integrated response to family violence, in order to improve the safety of women and children who experience violence and improve the accountability of perpetrators who use violence. Since the introduction of the **Women's Safety Strategy** and **Integrated Family Violence Reform Strategy** in 2005, significant measures have been taken to improve the service system response to family violence at a national and state level. Issues arising from the reform initiatives include:

- Typical mainstream service response of refuges and criminal justice sanctions do not encompass broad categories of relationships or address the complex fundamental causes of violence as it occurred in Victorian Aboriginal communities;
- Culturally inappropriate Men's Behaviour Change Program and punitive responses to male perpetrators of family violence; and
- Lack of a holistic healing approach inclusive of men, women, children, Elders, families and communities.

The partnership between the Aboriginal community and the Victorian Government has been the driving force behind the development of a safer Victoria for all Aboriginal families and communities. The community led initiatives including, the **Aboriginal Justice Agreements** and the **Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families - 10 year plan 2008-2018** provides direction for the development of improved responses to Aboriginal family violence by;

- supporting the development of holistic approaches to family violence in regional and local Aboriginal communities, encompassing the social, emotional, spiritual, physical and cultural wellbeing of families that factors in the historical and familial contexts in which the violence occurs;
- providing the platform to allow for interventions involving Aboriginal community members to be community driven, reflective of priorities and issues identified by communities and empower local people to effectively deal with and address family violence as it occurs in their communities; and
- establishing the nine guiding principles for developing and implementing policies and programs.

It is worth noting that those services initially funded when the 10 Year Plan was first implemented have never received an increase in funding, despite the additional documented number of reported family violence incidences within the Aboriginal community. Government partners need to show their ongoing commitment to the Plan by properly supporting these services to deliver the much needed services and improved responses to Aboriginal family violence across Victoria.

Guiding principles

To guide all elements of the plan towards the vision, the Indigenous Family Violence Partnership Forum established nine principles for developing and implementing policies and programs:

1. Family violence is not part of Aboriginal culture
2. Complex nature of family violence within Aboriginal communities
3. Aboriginal culture
4. Partnership, transparency and accountability
5. Adequate resources
6. Empowering Aboriginal communities
7. Local solutions for local problems
8. Holistic healing approach to family violence in Aboriginal communities
9. Early intervention, prevention and education.

Question Three

Which of the reforms to the family violence system introduced in the last ten years do you consider most effective? Why? How could they be improved?

Indigenous Family Violence Partnership Forum (IFVPPF)

The IFVPPF was established to oversee the development and implementation of ***Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families - 10 year plan 2008-2018*** requiring a ten-year Partnership Agreement between the Victorian government and Aboriginal Communities to address Aboriginal family violence together. The partnership forum is a forum for ongoing, high level dialogue between government departments and Aboriginal communities about the needs of Aboriginal communities in confronting issues of family violence. It is attended by senior representatives from government and Aboriginal Community members, to ensure that Aboriginal voices are heard at senior levels of government where programs to address Aboriginal family violence are developed.

Membership is made up of:

- Chairpersons of the 11 IFVRAGs;
- Chief Executive Officers or Chairpersons of key Aboriginal organisations; and
- Senior representatives from Government departments.

The Forum has overseen and coordinated all State government activities associated with Aboriginal family violence including the development of the ten year plan. It enables the Aboriginal community to be a part of all discussions held about family violence to ensure and enable input into the planning and decision making processes of government about family violence issues with Aboriginal communities.

Since the establishment of the IFVPPF, the Aboriginal community has met the challenge of addressing family violence by devising and implementing new approaches; leading the policy debate and reforming mainstream service approaches to improve their responsiveness to Aboriginal clients. However, in order to continue raising awareness of family violence within the Aboriginal community and develop culturally safe and effective responses, there needs to be;

- additional ongoing investment into Aboriginal family violence through the 10 Year Plan;
 - including CIF, Time Out and Healing services, state-wide refuges;
- accountability of government agencies implementing actions that support the plan;
- an investment in the capacity building of Aboriginal services so they can respond effectively at a local level to issues occurring in their community, combined with the appropriate support and resourcing to do so;
- support for the development of prevention services and the establishment of culturally safe and respectful counselling services for both the victim/survivors and perpetrators of family violence;
- recognition of the importance of policies, programs and services that meet the needs of women, children and men together using a holistic healing model;
- further investment in identifying the issues related to family violence in Victoria's Aboriginal communities
- improved data access to enable effective planning, assessing local Aboriginal community needs and mapping service provision and service utilisation;
- more engagement from mainstream agencies and a requirement to develop cross agency linkages and partnerships to improve the provision of services to Aboriginal people affected by family violence; and
- support and adequate resourcing to develop cultural safety and respect training programs for mainstream family violence services and other support services to ensure the delivery of culturally safe and respectful services for Aboriginal community members.

There is cross-representation between the Aboriginal Justice Forum (AJF) and the IFVPPF. It is anticipated that the focus on reducing violence and victimisation under AJA3 will complement initiatives in the Indigenous family violence area by taking a broader approach. AJA3 priorities also include reducing conflict between families, lateral violence and Koori youth offending, and addressing the needs of Koori women in the justice system, particularly their history of trauma and victimisation.

Membership is made up of:

- Chairpersons of the 9 RAJACs;
- Chief Executive Officers or Chairpersons of key Aboriginal organisations; and
- Senior representatives from Government departments.

FOUR: PREVENTION, EARLY INTERVENTION, AND EDUCATION

Intervene early to improve education, awareness and prevention of family violence

- The Victorian government recognises the importance of prevention and education and will consider providing the Aboriginal community with ongoing adequate funding for the development and delivery of the suite of services required. This will include educational early intervention programs for boys and girls to reduce the likelihood that their learned experience growing up in a family violence environment will be repeated, and education and healing programs that assist all family members to understand and change the dynamics that result in the violence experience
- The Victorian government supports and commits to an ongoing investment into community led sporting activities that promote health and wellbeing, Family Violence awareness and education in prevention methods.
- The Victorian government supports and funds the Aboriginal community through sporting organisations, such as the Fitzroy Stars and Rumbalara Football/Netball Club and other community controlled organisations initiatives for the provision of family violence cultural awareness activities and health and wellbeing programs delivered through 'sport'.
- The Victorian government recognise and understand that each region deals with Aboriginal family violence differently and commit to providing adequate support and the resources required to enable local Aboriginal communities to develop solutions to prevent, reduce and respond to local problems.
- The Royal Commission acknowledges the good work being done through the IFVRAGs/RAJACs and promotes their initiatives as best practice models.
- The Victorian government provides investment into service provision for intensive long term, everyday assistance to high risk families.

Reducing/preventing family violence

Initiatives to address family violence within the Victorian Aboriginal community are crucial to fostering positive attitudes, addressing misconceptions and dealing with issues that may give rise to violence before violence occurs. The Indigenous Family Violence 10 Year Plan aims to reduce the incidence of family violence involving Aboriginal people by both preventing its occurrence in the first instance and by improving the effectiveness of interventions supporting victim/survivors and perpetrators.

Since the launch of the 10 Year Plan in October 2008 a number of state-wide and local initiatives have been developed through collaborative partnerships between the Victorian Aboriginal community, the IFVRAGs, government departments and mainstream organisations that have been successful in creating awareness around the issues and impacts of Aboriginal family violence on men, women, children, Elders, families and communities. A number of key initiatives under the plan include the following:

- Aboriginal Healing and Time Out services.
- Aboriginal family violence prevention projects.
- Aboriginal men's group programs, intensive case management for Aboriginal men and Aboriginal men's resource advisory services.
- Victoria Police community awareness campaigns.
- Case management for Aboriginal men and women.
- Training and development including a Certificate IV in Aboriginal family violence work.
- Aboriginal Men's Group Services.
- Sisters Day Out.
- Brothers Day Out.
- Dilly Bay Program.
- Art therapy programs,
- Aboriginal healing service
- Murray River Marathon, state-wide initiative - Wimmera River Challenge.
- Junior carnivals - messages are no violence, drug and alcohol free.

- Family groups - family violence issues.
- Hoops against violence - basketball, community and police.
- Golf - community and police through the IFVRAGs and RAJACs.
- CIF funding - \$59, 000 per year for each IFVRAG region.
- Family retreats.
- White ribbon day activities including community and police soccer match.

Initiatives which aim to enhance responses to family violence include:

Indigenous Family Violence Primary Prevention Framework

Developed as an Aboriginal specific prevention framework for family violence. The Framework is designed to support initiatives relating to the following areas

- Primary prevention capacity building;
- Effective, sustainable activities; and
- Ownership and leadership within Aboriginal communities.

The Framework also provides evidence of the range of community led initiatives that are contributing toward the prevention of family violence in Aboriginal communities in Victoria.

Indigenous Family Violence Regional Action Groups (IFVRAG)

Established across Victoria, to develop and guide community led approaches to preventing, reducing and responding to family violence in Aboriginal communities. The IFVRAG structure engages communities at the local level to encourage community to take ownership of family violence, and to continue the community dialogue necessary to meaningfully address the problem and its associated issues. The IFVRAGs provide an opportunity for individuals, families and groups in communities to receive the support they need to come together, discuss and develop solutions for family violence issues in their families and their communities. Memberships consist of Elders, women, men, young people and community leaders from local Aboriginal communities as well as local Aboriginal community organisations and service providers. There are currently

- 11 IFVRAGs established across the state, to raise awareness of issues of Aboriginal family violence within local communities and to develop local solutions to prevent and respond to local issues of family violence
- 10.5 Indigenous Family Violence Regional Coordinators employed to support each of the IFVRAGs; and
- 1 Indigenous Family Violence State-wide Coordinator employed to support each of the regional coordinators.

Regional Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committees (RAJAC)

Established regionally to develop and implement regional justice plans that address Koori over-representation, articulate the justice-related aspirations of each region and set the agenda for strategic action required to meet regional goals at each phase of the Aboriginal Justice Agreement (AJA). The RAJACs advocate for and support improved justice outcomes and Koori justice initiatives to both Koori communities and government agencies, by promoting and participating in cross agency and partnership forums, such as the Aboriginal Justice Forum, and other initiatives that address Koori disadvantage. Chaired by members of the Victorian Aboriginal community, the RAJAC network supports the successful delivery of Koori programs under the AJA through monitoring and commenting on Koori contact with the justice system at a regional and state-wide level. There are currently;

- RAJAC Regional Justice Plans have been developed that 9 RAJACs have been established throughout Victoria, to facilitate improved relationships at a local level by bringing together Aboriginal community members and senior Justice Portfolio representatives to develop regionally-based strategies to improve justice outcomes for Aboriginal communities.
- 9 RAJAC Executive Officers who manages the day-to-day activities and planning requirements for the committee and support the department's regional model to improve government service delivery and accessibility to meet the needs of Victoria's diverse and growing community.

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.

Reaching out to the community through White Ribbon Day

Each year in November many communities are engaged in activities connected to White Ribbon Day. Many Indigenous Family Violence Regional Action Groups use the impetus of the White Ribbon Campaign to focus on increasing community awareness about family violence.

These activities take many forms such as talking with and supporting men to become White Ribbon Ambassadors, family days and community walks. There is a lot of planning involved, particularly as knowledge of the White Ribbon Campaign has grown rapidly in the past few years. Many Indigenous Family Violence Regional Action Groups link up with other organisations such as Aboriginal sporting clubs, mainstream community organisations, local justice and educational agencies, and Victoria Police members to join in activities, run concurrent activities and to share resources.

The White Ribbon Day events are great activities for reaching out to the whole community; and the events take place across the community. Information packs, t-shirts and caps with messages about not tolerating family violence also feature in White Ribbon Day activities. Photographs are often taken to record the events and feedback from participants about the activities is used in planning events for the following year. Indigenous Family Violence Regional Action Groups also share good ideas for planning events as well as using the outcome of these activities to build on and learn from each other. The White Ribbon Day primary prevention activities often create momentum for future partnerships and prevention activities.

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?

Many of the areas of social disadvantage and risk factors which contribute to violent offending behaviour, including violence against women and Aboriginal family violence, are the same for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, but in many cases the risk factors occur more often in Aboriginal communities and there are often multiple risk factors present.

The high incidence and prevalence of family violence within the Aboriginal Community may be seen in the context of colonisation and dispossession of Aboriginal Victorians. From an Aboriginal perspective the causes of family violence are related to a wide range of factors including

- dispossession of land and traditional culture;
- breakdown of Community kinship systems and Aboriginal law;
- racism and vilification;
- economic exclusion and entrenched poverty;
- alcohol and drug abuse;
- the effects of institutionalisation and child removal policies;
- inherited grief and trans-generational trauma; and
- the loss of traditional Aboriginal male roles and status.

All of these factors contribute to the ongoing social and economic disadvantage within Aboriginal communities, which in turn is linked to the risk factors for violent behaviour.

Question Seven

What circumstances and conditions are associated with the reduced occurrence of family violence?

As the first point of contact in family violence situations an effective police response is essential to increase the safety of victim/survivors and over the long term contributes to a reduction in repeat attendances and likelihood of future violence. Family violence is traditionally an under reported crime, particularly for Aboriginal communities, so it is likely that a significant proportion of the growth in the reported incidents reflects an increase in the level of confidence to report, rather than a substantial growth in the occurrence of family violence. Drivers for this change include encouraging greater community engagement between Aboriginal Victorians and police and improved police responses through the use of risk management strategies.

FIVE: SAFETY AND WELLBEING

Increase the safety of Aboriginal families and individuals, especially women and children

- The Royal Commission recognises the need for initiatives to be developed, implemented and evaluated in partnership with the Aboriginal community (including Koori Family Violence Police Protocols)
- The Victorian government will adequately support and resource Aboriginal specific legal services.
- The Victorian government supports and resources the Aboriginal community to develop and deliver specific Aboriginal family violence training to all Victorian Police, including new recruits with regular refresher courses.
- The Victorian government develops a systems process to ensure that Aboriginal children are not further victimised. This system will consider the current issues of overrepresentation of Aboriginal children in the Child Protection system and the need for government to review and critically reflect on their role as parent and generational failures in this role.
- The Victorian government recognise that the Koori Family Violence Police Protocols are not always followed and will work with Victoria Police to improve compliance.
- The Victorian government considers ensuring that Victoria Police provide Aboriginal community organisations with direct access to L17s.
- The Royal Commission and the Victorian government understand and accept the role that racism plays in contributing to family violence within Aboriginal communities and supports education to actively reduce the levels of racism in Victoria.

Ensuring the safety of people affected by family violence

Providing early intervention services for Aboriginal women and children who are at high risk of family violence, improving their access to crisis services when they experience violence and supporting therapeutic responses to address trauma and violence, we will increase the safety of victim/survivors of family violence.

Key issues contributing to family violence

Many Aboriginal people as youngsters have either witnessed or been victim/survivors of various forms of violence or abuse. The belief that violent traits are inherited comes as an observation of patterns in behaviours. Such patterns are inherent due to a lack of access to support for the abused and no access to family healing. Below are five key issues contributing to family violence as identified by victim/survivors.

1. Alcohol and Drugs

2. Blame themselves

One of the common issues identified by the victim/survivors is that they are to blame for the violence perpetrated against them because of something they have said or done that they shouldn't have. This is because of the low self-esteem and confidence of the victim/survivors.

3. Gambling

Gambling is becoming an increasing problem within Aboriginal communities and one that is exacerbating the family violence issues as the loss of money results in family violence.

4. Children blame themselves saying they were naughty.

The children blame themselves for the family violence because of their behaviour. This is destructive and leads to problems for the victims at a later stage.

5. Want the violence to stop

Many victims say that they don't want to get rid of the perpetrator; they just want the violence to stop.

The experiences of members of the Stolen Generations who were taken from their families with the intention of disconnecting and assimilating them into the non Aboriginal community, often resulted in their so called carers, physically and sexually abusing them. The current Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse has seen many Aboriginal men and women come forward to tell their story. A consistent theme for survivors in their adult life has been difficulty in forming and maintaining relationships and the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) Royal Commission Support Service reports that of those women they have supported -100% experienced family violence in their adult life, and the majority 85% of men have admitted to being perpetrators of family violence. Both men and women express difficulty in maintaining positive nurturing relationships with their children as a result of their childhood trauma and trans-generational trauma.

Government responses to Aboriginal family violence

The Koori Caucus' identified a number of issues regarding police responses to reported incidents of Aboriginal family violence, emphasising that the protection and safety of victims of abuse should be paramount. They expressed concern about police generally responding poorly to reports of violence within the Aboriginal community, with some community people stating that police have failed to respond at all. Further issues have been raised regarding the 'culturally sensitive' of Family Court and other legal processes to the needs of Aboriginal women. Initiatives which aim to address the safety and wellbeing of Aboriginal communities include;

Koori Family Violence Police Protocols: Up until 2012 the Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service (FVPLS Victoria) was commissioned to work in partnership with Aboriginal community, Victoria Police and the Department of Justice to create the Koori Family Violence Police Protocols. The protocols aim to improve response to family violence incidents, improve Aboriginal community confidence and increase referral to support services.

The protocols were launched in the local government areas of Darebin, Bairnsdale and Mildura in 2013. Police in each of these areas will;

- attend Koori Awareness Training that will be developed by local Aboriginal communities and the Victoria Police;
- become more aware of the local support services available to Aboriginal victim/survivors and perpetrators of family violence and will be able to refer Aboriginal clients to the right one; and
- work more closely with the Police Aboriginal Community Liaison Officer, or ACLO, to provide a more appropriate response to family violence matters affecting Aboriginal community members.

The protocols are aimed at an improved, holistic response to all parties including victim/survivors, children and perpetrators and it is expected that there will be an improved response from police when contacted for assistance in relation to any family violence incident.

Protocols are also scheduled to be established in Ballarat, Shepparton and Dandenong. A recently completed evaluation of the Protocols will strengthen their implementation, as will the inclusion of both RAJACs and IFVRAGs on local committees.

Koori Courts: The Koori Court operates as a division of the Magistrates Court and focuses on sentencing Aboriginal defendants who have pled guilty to an offence and who have shown an intention to take responsibility for their actions. In this court, Aboriginal Elders or Respected Persons, the Koori Court Officer, Aboriginal defendants and their families can contribute during a hearing.

The purpose of this court structure is to reduce perceptions of cultural alienation, ensure sentencing orders are appropriate to the cultural needs of Aboriginal offenders, and to assist those offenders to address issues relating to their offending behaviour. The Koori Court currently does not have jurisdiction to hear FVIO contravention matters, nor does it have the jurisdiction to hear sexual offence matters. There is work currently being done to scope out the possibility of hearing FVIO contravention matters at the Koori Court and the justice and cultural implications of this change.

Koori Family Violence and Victims Support Program: In an effort to provide a more culturally safe response to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victim/survivors and offenders in family violence matters, the Magistrates' Court of Victoria implemented the Koori Family Violence Court Support Program (now the Koori Family Violence and Victims Support Program). The program began as a pilot in 2011 and employed a Program Manager, an Aboriginal Men's Family Violence Support Worker and an Aboriginal Women's Family Violence Support Worker.

This program has been expanded by the court to include:

- provision of culturally safe and respectful support to Aboriginal victim/survivors and perpetrators with family violence intervention orders or family violence criminal related matters and VOCAT matters;
- conducting intake assessments, providing support and non-legal advice and guidance to applicants and respondents;
- conducting risk assessments and providing referrals to legal services and ongoing support where required;
- collaborating with police prosecution, duty lawyers and Aboriginal legal services to determine the best approach in offering choices for clients;
- providing secondary consultations to both Aboriginal and mainstream services;
- collecting data to monitor cases and enable the program to build a comprehensive data set to inform future service delivery;
- strengthening relationships and referral pathways with both Aboriginal and mainstream community organisations; and
- management of community engagement along with client support work.

The Program was evaluated in 2012 and the evaluation generally revealed positive results. The evaluation noted clients felt the program had improved their court experience in easing their anxiety and stress about the court process. Service providers reported an enhanced ability to progress cases and make timely referrals. Court staff reported that clients were more receptive to court orders and were more willing to consider service provider referrals.

The main challenges associated with the program related to staffing and in particular the loss of staff during the course of the program. The success of the program and retention of staff would be enhanced by greater certainty of ongoing funding. Based on the outcomes of the evaluation, the program does have the capacity to make a significant contribution toward the long-term goal of improved community confidence in both the courts and the Victorian justice system.

Koori Community Safety Grants: In 2013 the grants for four KCSGP projects were awarded to Aboriginal organisations in Shepparton, Bairnsdale, Mildura and northern metropolitan Melbourne. The three-year time frame, concentration of resources and emphasis on evaluation will allow these grants to function as future responses to violence in Victorian Aboriginal communities. Each of the organisations were funded under the Reducing Violence against Women and their Children Grants Program to provide innovative, community-based projects aimed at preventing violence before it occurs. The four programs were:

- *Family and Community Violence Prevention Project* delivered in the Mallee District and targeted Aboriginal communities Mildura and Swan Hill;
- *Aboriginal Family Harmony Project* delivered in Greater Shepparton;
- *Strong Men; Strong Communities Project* focuses on Aboriginals in the East Gippsland region; and
- *Strong Relationships. Strong Community Project* which services communities in Northern Metropolitan Melbourne.

While all projects were aimed at preventing violence and early intervention in Aboriginal communities, they also sought to achieve additional aims through a combination of different activities. Activities involved all members of the community, and included workshops, behaviour change programs, media campaigns, camps and gender-specific health programs. An interim evaluation of the grants programs revealed that they were achieving;

- an increased understanding of Aboriginal culture, traditions and identity;
- recognition of traditional gender roles and their equal importance;
- new and renewed connections between individuals within the community;
- improved understanding of what constitutes violent behaviour;
- improved understanding of the services available; and
- improved understanding of the issues unique to Aboriginal victim/survivors and perpetrators of family violence.

One of the gender specific programs for women is ***Sisters Day Out***. This is a workshop program aimed at strengthening the role Aboriginal women play in relation to family and community. The program involved Elders and brought Aboriginal women together across generations in celebration of culture, family and community.

An interim evaluation of the programs indicated positive outcomes, with the evaluation revealing the establishment of new partnerships and relationships with local organisations, an increased awareness of violence against women and children and an awareness of appropriate support services.



Supporting the ongoing safety and wellbeing of people affected by family violence

There are a range of targeted programs that continue to support Aboriginal people experiencing family violence, including but not limited to:

- An intensive case management program that enables Aboriginal women to better address the impacts of family violence.
- A case management program to engage Aboriginal men who use violence and are removed from the family home.
- Aboriginal family violence accommodation and support services - Meminar Ngangg Gimba in Mildura was officially opened in September 2012 and Orana Gunyah in Morwell has been operating since April 2014.
- Four Aboriginal Family Violence Healing services and four Time Out services continue to be delivered through a community led approach to ensure services meet locally identified needs.
- Group programs for Aboriginal men who use violence are provided in three locations to assist perpetrators of family violence to change their behaviour.
- The Indigenous Family Violence Community Initiative Fund provides annual grants amounting to \$650,000 to support Aboriginal community-based projects that aim to prevent, reduce and respond to family violence. In 2013-14, funding was granted for 39 projects which responded to priorities identified by Indigenous Family Violence Regional Action Groups.

There are a number of Aboriginal organisations that provide services to enhance the safety and wellbeing of all family members impacted by family violence. These include but are not limited to:

Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA)

The Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) is the lead Aboriginal child and family welfare organisation in Victoria, protecting and promoting the rights of Aboriginal children and young people. We provide programs and services to reinforce Aboriginal culture and encourage best parenting practices, and advise government in relation to child abuse and neglect in the Aboriginal community.



VACCA is a statewide Aboriginal community controlled organisation advocating for the rights of Aboriginal children, young people and families, and providing them with services premised on human rights, self-determination, cultural respect and safety. VACCA provides a range of services for Aboriginal children and families including early intervention and parenting, family violence, consultation to child protection, out of home care services, Link Up (Stolen Generations) services.

Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated (VAEAI)

VAEAI is a state-wide Koorie Community organisation consisting of eight regions. These regions are divided on the basis of traditional networks with a number of Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups (LAECGs) within each region. Our local advisory arrangements are solidly embedded in local Communities through LAECGs, which are constituent units of VAEAI and have representation on the VAEAI Committee of Management. Membership to the LAECG is open to all members of the Koorie Community in their respective localities.



Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service Victoria (FVPLS Victoria)

An Aboriginal community-controlled organisation established in 2002 to provide assistance to victims/survivors of family violence and sexual assault and to work with families and communities affected by violence. FVPLS Victoria provides free legal advice, referrals, ongoing casework and court representation, and assists in the following areas:

- Intervention orders;
- Child protection;
- Family law;
- Victims' compensation; and
- Any other legal problems arising from family violence.



FVPLS Victoria also engages in community legal education and community development activities. They provide case managed support to women experiencing family violence through legal processes, responding to strong evidence that Aboriginal women find court proceedings a barrier to accessing justice responses.

The FVPLS Victoria services **Metropolitan Melbourne** and the following areas through their regional offices;

Barwon South West - Office and staff are based in Warrnambool and cover the entire region including Framlingham, Heywood, Hamilton and Portland;

Gippsland - Office and staff are based in Bairnsdale and cover the entire Gippsland region; and

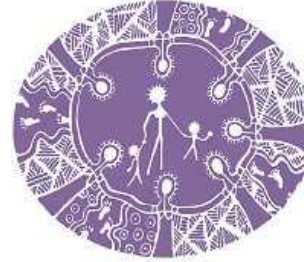
Mildura - Office and staff are located in Mildura and cover the Mildura Local Government Area and Robinvale.

Elizabeth Morgan House

Elizabeth Morgan House (EMH) Aboriginal Women's Services seeks to promote social justice and equity for Aboriginal Women and Children experiencing Family Violence in the community.

Elizabeth Morgan House provides a range of support to Aboriginal women and children experiencing family violence, including:

- Intake and Assessment.
- Secondary Consults.
- Referrals to appropriate services.
- Outreach services include:
 - crisis and intake service, case management service, Intensive Case Management and court support.
 - Confidential family violence counselling to women and children who have links to the North and West regions.



EMH also operates a high security refuge that can accommodate four families in independent units. The refuge can accommodate a range of family dynamics, as units and beds can be rearranged, as needed. Women houses exit into living in the north or west.

Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service (VALS)

The Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service (VALS) was established in 1973 and provides legal advice and representation for the Aboriginal community including victims and perpetrators of family violence. VALS plays an important role in providing referrals, advice/information, duty work or case work assistance to Aboriginal people.

Solicitors at VALS specialise in one of three areas of law, being Criminal Law, Family Law and Civil Law. VALS maintains a strong client service focus which is achieved through the role of Client Service Officers (CSOs) who act as a bridge between the legal system and the Aboriginal community. VALS is actively involved in community education, research and advocacy around law reform and policy development.

VALS strives to:

- promote social justice for Aboriginal people;
- promote the right of Aboriginal people to empowerment, identity and culture;
- ensure that Aboriginal people enjoy their rights, are aware of their responsibilities under the law and have access to appropriate advice, assistance and representation;
- reduce the disproportionate involvement of Aboriginal people in the criminal justice system; and
- promote the review of legislation and other practices which discriminate against Aboriginal people.



Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association Limited (VACSAL)

The Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association Ltd (VACSAL) is a state-wide agency that provides advice to Government on a range of community development issues as well as being a major provider of extensive services to the Aboriginal community in both the metropolitan and some regional communities these services include:

- Bert Williams Aboriginal Youth Services and residential support.
- Aboriginal Best Start Project.
- Gambling Awareness Project.
- Aboriginal Men's Support Programs and more.
- Homelessness programs.



VACSAL

VACSAL is a community based, community controlled organisation comprising of representatives from Koorie organisations across the state.

Established in 1984, VACSAL has been instrumental in assisting the Victorian and Commonwealth Government develop policies and programs in major areas relating to the advancement of Aboriginal people. VACSAL supports and manages a number of community programs as well as providing strategic advice to Aboriginal organisations and Government bodies on issues impacting on Aboriginal people. The organisation is seen as key advocate that has representation on over 85 local, regional and State reference/advisory committees.

SIX: ACCOUNTABILITY

Increase the accountability of perpetrators of family violence within Aboriginal communities

- The Royal Commission recognises and understands that mainstream behaviour change models are not appropriate for Aboriginal men. Aboriginal men need to be held accountable for their actions through education, healing and connection which can be best achieved by other Aboriginal men on country.
- The Victorian government supports and resources the Aboriginal community to develop and deliver appropriate services for perpetrators.
- The Royal Commission recognise that making perpetrators accountable is the responsibility of the whole community, which reinforces Aboriginal norms against family violence.
- Mainstream service providers recognise and understand that gendered/feminist style services are not appropriate for Aboriginal communities.

Making people who have been violent accountable and helping them to change their behaviour

Perpetrators of family violence need to be held accountable for their actions through education, healing and connection. In an Aboriginal community context, family violence is broader than spousal violence and encompasses a mix of harmful, violent and aggressive behaviours that can occur within families, extended families, kinship networks and communities. Within this context, government is seen as having a central role in supporting, empowering and enabling communities to examine these issues and develop solutions appropriate to local conditions and need.

Key issues contributing to family violence

Aboriginal men have identified themselves as being labelled more generally as the perpetrators of violence, breaking down this perception has been difficult. During consultations held by the Task Force male leaders, speaking on behalf of other Aboriginal males, have clearly identified that men too are victim/survivors of violence. Below are six key issues contributing to family violence as identified by perpetrators.

1. I don't know what made me do it

Perpetrators do not understand their own behaviour.

2. Powerlessness

It is recognised that family violence is a way of perpetrators exercising control over the victim. Therefore the powerlessness that is felt by members of the Aboriginal community is leading to the increase in family violence.

3. Blame the victim

Perpetrators blame the victim saying things like "She knows what I'm like. She always does it."

4. Sorry for themselves

Some perpetrators excuse their own behaviour and feel sorry for themselves as a result of it. They are unwilling to deal with the fact that they have a responsibility for their actions.

5. Have to keep my partner in line

There is a feeling that family violence is one way of ensuring that the men are the 'bosses'.

6. Denial that they are responsible

Some men will say that family violence is wrong and shouldn't happen, however, they are sometimes the ones who will go home and bash their wives

One of the clear messages expressed by the Koori Caucus' is the need to provide more services to perpetrators of family violence. In particular, there needs to be access to culturally sensitive and safe men's services, time out centres, accommodation outside of the home, behaviour change programs, counsellors and healing programs. Ongoing support and resources are required to develop and deliver these services so that Aboriginal men and others have a place to go to calm down so that they do not commit a violent act against another person, have a culturally safe environment to discuss the underlying issues of family violence and ultimately have an opportunity to address and change their behaviours. From an Aboriginal perspective, services need to be provided by Aboriginal people, preferably those to whom the person has some respect and connection to. Mainstream behaviour change models are never going to work for Aboriginal men.

Question Fourteen

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

From an Aboriginal perspective, mainstream models appear to be premised on inequality within a spousal relationship which give rise to a service response of refugees and criminal sanctions that do not fully address the complex fundamental causes of violence in Aboriginal communities. Current gaps in service delivery for men include:

- Lack of support networks and men's groups
- Greater employment opportunities needed for men
- Need to forge links to family and culture
- Need to maintain family values
- Young men need to be taught respect for their culture and people
- Welfare systems have made supports so readily available that women feel they are better off without their men
- Male perpetrators who are victim/survivors of violence need support services
- Defacto fathers are not properly recognised as carers of children
- An awareness and community capacity building around perpetrators of family violence and sexual assault
- Funds are not equitable around the issue of family violence
- Lack of Aboriginal people trained to deal with male perpetrators
- Confidentiality within communities is a big issue
- After hours referral services need to be established including service for men

The current focus is not on men or the rehabilitation of men, or programs for men, but rather on the impact of the family violence, mainly on the victim/survivors. There are no support programs to help men to get back into their families after the crisis, and no preventative programs. The few programs that are operating mainly focus on the issues of alcohol and drugs, once again the symptoms of deeper problems. During discussions at different IFVPFs, members of the Koori Caucus' have raised the following issues:

- Men do not have equal representation on committees where family violence issues are being dealt with - they are tacked on
- There are no holistic programs for men where men are involved
- No Koori culturally specific programs for men
- Alcohol and drug issues are dealt with in isolation to other men's issues
- Concerns about men's health issues
- Perpetrators of violence against women and children are ashamed of it, feel helpless to do anything to change their behaviour, are sickened by it, and feel like there is no support for them to change
- Men are concerned about their children and feel that there are not enough role models for the children who learn by example. Men need to lead by example
- Mental illness is increasing in Koori communities, leading to more and more examples of family violence perpetrated against women and children
- The lack of educational qualifications lead to more serious issues for the children
- Current programs pit the women against the men - in order for a woman victim to get help, she has to go against the man - it then becomes a 'them against us' men versus women situation.
- Mainstream service providers need to recognise and understand that gendered/feminist style services are not appropriate for Aboriginal communities.

Question Fifteen

If you or your organisation have offered a behaviour change program, tell us about the program, including any evaluation of its effectiveness which has been conducted.

Aboriginal Centre for Males

The Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association Ltd (VACSAL) operates the Aboriginal Centre for Males (ACM) across the North West Metropolitan region and provides services to Aboriginal men involved in family violence situations.

The ACM provides a range of services to both male victim/survivors and perpetrators of family violence with the primary aim of eliminating family violence from within the Aboriginal community. The center is a critical service that contributes to the government's intention to reduce Family Violence and address violence against women and their children.

Aims and Objectives of the ACM

The ACM has been established to support and assist Aboriginal men and their families to resolve immediate and long term issues associated with family violence.

The objectives of the service include:

- Support the health and well-being of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander males
- Improve access to family violence services for Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander males in the NWMR
- Provide a visible entry point to the service system
- Offer programs that have a prevention and early intervention focus
- Provide a supportive work environment for staff through the grouping of similar services
- Facilitate links between services for clients

Services provided and operating model

The Centre provides a range of services to men who have perpetrated or been a victim of violence and their families. There are three interconnected but distinct elements of the service as outlined in diagram one below.

The centre provides:

- Crisis support and intervention
- Time out for men involved in violence
- Case management
- Intensive counseling
- Health services

In addition, the Centre hosts a range of other support agencies on site. The range of agencies available will change from time to time in response to the changing needs of men.

Generally the services will include:

- Legal Aid
- Centrelink
- Drug and Alcohol Counselling
- Financial Counselling



Diagram one: The cycle of service provision

SEVEN: HOLISTIC HEALING APPROACH

Increase opportunities for healing for victim/survivors and perpetrators

- The Royal Commission recognises the need for a holistic healing model based around Aboriginal community and family strengthening, collaborative approaches, appropriate resources and flexible service delivery arrangements.
- The Victorian government commits to the provision of healing services provided by the Aboriginal community using a holistic approach for all men, women, children and families.
- The Victorian government supports and resources the Aboriginal community in the development of cultural healing programs for youth as well as healing programs for individuals, families and communities to deal with trauma, intergenerational trauma and grief.

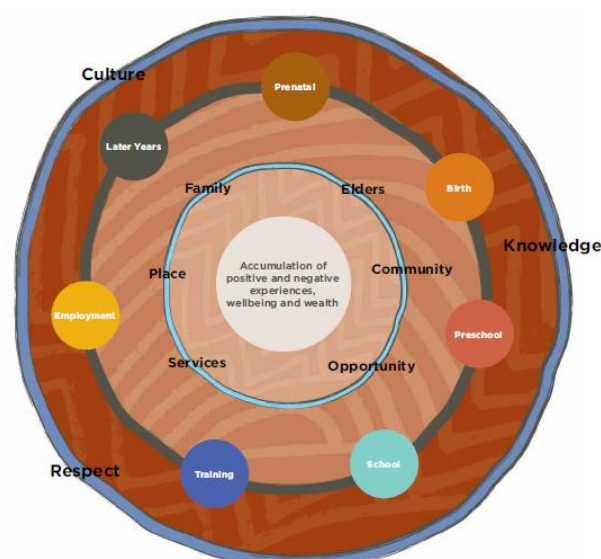
Family violence and particular groups and communities

The Aboriginal community and the Victorian government aim to strengthen community-led initiatives, such as Healing and Time Out Services, that provide opportunities for healing for victim/survivors and perpetrators of family violence and facilitate a therapeutic response to trauma, inter-generational trauma and violence. Family violence issues cannot be seen in isolation of a range of other factors that affect Aboriginal people, families and communities. Decades of colonisation, disconnection from family, land and culture; dislocation from place and the intergenerational trauma, multiple grief and loss issues, all must be considered and responded to when providing services that will meet the needs of Aboriginal communities.

Family violence within Aboriginal communities

Family Violence is not and never was part of the culture of Aboriginal communities, however the incidence of family violence and lateral violence in our community is concerning. The increased occurrence of family violence within the Aboriginal community needs to be understood and considered within the context of a disempowered minority who have no trust or belief in authority and are unlikely to seek help until there is a significant crisis as a result of the violence. This may be one of the reasons so many Aboriginal children are removed as a result of family violence that is significant and while a non Aboriginal family may have sought help earlier, the mistrust and alienation felt by Aboriginal families results in services not being utilized earlier in the history of violence within the relationship. In response to the unique historical context in which Aboriginal family violence occurs, Aboriginal communities have called for a holistic approach to family healing.

Another concern is the continued removals of Aboriginal children at disproportional levels with little consideration or understanding of the history of the parents; and virtually no consideration of the role government has played as the “state parent” and the failure in their obligations to these children.



CONCLUSION

The Aboriginal community is hopeful that any recommendation this Royal Commission make are accepted and implemented by the Victorian government. This community has seen a number of Royal Commission and inquiries developed much needed recommendations that are never accepted or implemented by governments. Of note are the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC) and separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (Bringing them Home Report) which contain a number of vital recommendations that are still relevant today. The Indigenous Family Violence Koori Caucus and the Aboriginal Justice Koori Caucus remain committed to working in strong partnership with the Victorian government to see family violence within the Aboriginal community eliminated.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT



“The whole basis of Aboriginal culture is family and we belong to not only one family but a family of families”

Alf Bamblett 2014

In memory of Dr Alf Bamblett, esteemed partner, colleague, mentor and friend. Uncle Alf was a dedicated and tireless campaigner against Aboriginal family violence. A ministerially appointed Indigenous Family Violence Taskforce member, Uncle Alf was instrumental in the establishment of culturally responsive family violence services for Aboriginal people. Campaigning at a state and National level over many years, Uncle Alf continued to advocate for better outcomes for Aboriginal families, especially children, with passion and conviction. Gone but never forgotten.

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