



**Northern Metropolitan
Indigenous Family Violence Regional Action Group
Submission to the
Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence**

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INTRODUCTION

The Northern Metropolitan Indigenous Family Violence Regional Action Group

The Northern Metropolitan Indigenous Family Violence Regional Action Group (NM IFVRAG) is an inclusive mechanism for the Victorian Aboriginal community to develop local responses that educate, prevent, reduce and respond to Family Violence matters, ensuring they are culturally appropriate and respectful to Aboriginal individuals, families and communities within the Northern Metro Region (NMR).

The NM IFVRAG is committed to reduce the incidence of Family Violence and work towards strengthening community by:

- Raising community awareness of the impact of Family Violence and to improve understanding of Family Violence issues in our region.
- Addressing the social, emotional, spiritual and cultural wellbeing of Families and Communities and reflect the important roles of Children, Elders, Gay and Lesbian Community, Men, people with a disability Women and Youth.
- Ensuring appropriate support and representation for people with disabilities.
- Assessing local community needs and map service provision and utilisation, in order to improve current services and ensure the development of future proactive services.
- Engaging in active problem solving and the development of local community based responses, initiatives and strategies for addressing Family Violence issues. Work with the agencies delivering Family Violence services and support them in program development or funding applications.
- Developing sustainable cross-agency linkages, which promote information sharing at a local level and includes culturally competent service provision for Aboriginal Victorian communities.
- Providing support to the Regional Indigenous Family Violence Coordinator through regular meetings and contact.
- Considering applications received under the Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Strategy Community Initiatives Fund (CIF) for the Northern Metropolitan Region.
- Ensuring that the Regional Action Group engages key stakeholders to ensure that they are committed to promoting the Northern Metropolitan Indigenous Family Violence Action Group, through:
 - Maintaining communication
 - Strengthening current networks
 - Continuing to develop linkages
 - Representation on a state level
 - Remaining community focused
 - Restoring culturally competent practices
- Developing, implementing and reviewing the Regional Indigenous Family Violence Action Plan every three years or as the need arises

Submission

The NM IFVRAG consists of dedicated Aboriginal community members who are actively involved in the prevention of and response to Aboriginal Family Violence within the Northern Metro Region (NMR). The knowledge and understanding shared by these men and women have been essential in the development of the submission, ensuring that the information provided reflects the issues and challenges experienced by the local Aboriginal organisations and service providers responsible for creating a safer Victoria for all Aboriginal men, women, children, elders, families and communities within the NMR.

The submission aims to help improve the Royal Commission's understanding of the impacts and issues of Aboriginal Family Violence within the NMR, highlight effective community-led initiatives, provide examples of best practice models and successful case studies from the NMR, identify gaps and deficiencies in the systems

current approach and make recommendations on how to improve Victoria's response to Aboriginal Family Violence.

IMPACTS AND ISSUES OF ABORIGINAL FAMILY VIOLENCE

Aboriginal Family Violence Definition

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 sensitive and respectful services to all of 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, cultural 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. An individual can be both a perpetrator and a victim of Family Violence.

Background

Family Violence is not a part of Aboriginal culture and is unacceptable within the Aboriginal community. Safety and security for victims of violence is our number one priority.

The prevalence of Family Violence within Victorian Aboriginal communities can be directly related to the loss of land, culture, identity, self-respect, self-worth and the breakdown of traditional roles within communities. Systemic racism has been a significant factor in ensuring Aboriginal communities remain fragmented and disjointed and has supported the dependant relationships many Aboriginal communities face with government organisations.

Victorian Aboriginal communities have been working to address the issue, and associated issues, of Family Violence since the time of colonisation. For too long Aboriginal people have been treated with contempt and prevented from participating in decision-making processes about issues that affect us. This has hindered the healing process, which our families and communities so badly need in order to address our social, emotional, physical, spiritual, and cultural needs.

In the past strategies and programs were implemented by various government departments with little, if any, community involvement or consultation. This stemmed from a generic approach by governments to addressing social problems within society. Consequently many strategies and programs have been tokenistic, culturally inappropriate, and not relevant to our communities and have failed to meet the needs of Aboriginal men, women, children, elders, families and communities.

Today there is some recognition that for communities to access services, communities must have ownership of the service. This is achieved when communities have a say, and control, in the development, design and implementation of services that impact on their communities. Communities in the NMR have a long history of independently developing community-based responses to community needs. Many of these responses have been

developed in spite of no government support.

The future for Aboriginal Australian communities will depend on our children and young people. We therefore need to ensure that our children and young people have every opportunity to develop in a positive, caring, nurturing and culturally sensitive and respectful environment, which is free from Family Violence.

Demographic

The population of the NMR is 940,142 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013), which equates to approximately 16 per cent of the total Victorian population. The NMR covers more than 1600 square kilometres, from inner city Richmond to the Kinglake Ranges and encompassing the Banyule, Darebin, Hume, Moreland, Nillumbik, Whittlesea and Yarra Local Government Areas.

The NMR has three of the 10 Interface Councils, forming the edges of Melbourne, and two of these (Hume and Whittlesea) are identified as growth corridors. This rapid population growth is straining existing infrastructure and highlighting gaps in service delivery.

More than 14 per cent of Victoria's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population reside in the NMR. (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011).

Because there are established Aboriginal communities, community controlled organisations and services located in the NMR, Aboriginal people throughout Victoria and interstate have been, and still are, attracted to this region. This has facilitated a very diverse and unique community in the region.

Historically, and currently, Aboriginal communities experience a greater socioeconomic disadvantage than non-Aboriginal. This is evident by the social issues facing our people today. As a consequence of these disadvantages Aboriginal children, young people and their families are over represented in Child Protection, Juvenile Justice System and Family Violence services. However, Aboriginal people are significantly underrepresented in preventative services.

The Victorian Aboriginal population in general is getting younger, with 55 per cent of the Aboriginal Victorians under the age of 25, compared to 32 per cent of non-Aboriginal Victorians. 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 Juvenile Justice System and Family Violence services.

Family Violence Statistics

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.

'Poverty as the driver' - one of the main contributors into the high number of Family Violence incidences within the Northern Metro Region are the large number of low socio-economic families.

The following Family Incident Report (FIR) and Family Violence Intervention Orders (FVIVOs) data should be treated as 'minimum' and interpreted with caution given the large number of FIRs where the Aboriginal status of the affected family member (AFM) was unknown and the suspected high incidences of under-reporting.

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 and the remaining 31,356 FIRs recorded had the Aboriginal status of 'unknown'.

A considerable number of those FIRs made by AFMs have occurred within North Metropolitan Melbourne (13.4 per cent of the total FIRs made by Aboriginal AFMs)

The lack of relevant data available relating to Aboriginal Family Violence at both state-wide and regional levels is an ongoing concern for the Victorian Aboriginal community, as the limited data makes drawing credible conclusions quite challenging.

Recommendations

1. Substantial investment in improved data collection and monitoring systems regarding matters relating to Aboriginal Family Violence both at state-wide and regional levels.

EFFECTIVE COMMUNITY-LED INITIATIVES

Strategic Reform

Aboriginal Justice Agreement (AJA): was produced in direct response to the summit resolution to develop strategic planning, program delivery and monitoring frameworks in each jurisdiction, aimed at reducing Aboriginal contact with the criminal justice system. Each phase of the Aboriginal Justice Agreement (AJA) builds on the one before it. The first phase laid the foundation for improved Koori justice outcomes in Victoria by developing robust partnerships and infrastructure, and putting in place a range of new Koori justice initiatives. The second phase focused on preventing the progression of young Koories into the system, reducing reoffending, and changing the justice system to be more responsive and inclusive in its approach to Koories. It had a strongly place-based approach, focusing on strengthening community justice responses to address issues locally. In 2013, the Victorian Government and the Koori community signed the Aboriginal Justice Agreement Phase 3 which continues the work to improve Koori justice outcomes and reduce over-representation in the criminal justice system. This is the third phase of a long-term change strategy to be rolled out in stages over a generation until the gap is closed.

Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families: towards a safer future for Indigenous families and communities 10 year plan 2008-2018: was developed by the Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Partnership Forum to address family violence in the Aboriginal community. It 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.

State-wide Initiatives

Indigenous Family Violence Partnership Forum (IFVPF): was established to oversee the development and implementation of 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's 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 so they can have input into the planning and decision making process of Government about family violence issues with Aboriginal communities

Indigenous Family Violence Regional Action Groups (IFVRAG): were developed to engage communities at the local level, to encourage them 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.

Northern Metro Region Initiatives

North & West Metropolitan Indigenous Family Violence Regional Action Plan

Strategic Action Areas

The Regional Action Plan aims to:

- Address locally identified community needs to strengthen community towards freedom from Family Violence;
- Map existing services and programs and identify service gaps;
- Increase opportunities for service improvements and prioritise service delivery;
- Build on and increase existing services providers; and
- Increase opportunities for developing partnerships and linkages with local Family Violence Specific networks.

Direction

The Regional Action Plan direction includes:

Vision: Work together on holistic responses to build culturally strong communities that teach strong family values and are free from Family Violence.

Aim: To work together holistically to reduce the incidence and impact of Family Violence and strengthen communities by ensuring that all members have access to culturally sensitive/respectful programs specific to the needs of our community.

Principles: Respect of cultural beliefs and communities is an integral part of Aboriginal Victorian society and includes respect for our land, heritage, ceremonies, customs, language, dance and our interaction with family. We have special relationships, obligations and responsibilities within our Kinship system, which includes a philosophical way of life. These guiding principles include:

- Family Violence and abuse needs to be addressed through “whole of community” action.
- We believe that individuals and the Community must collectively take responsibility to eradicate Family Violence.
- Violence, abuse or neglect, in any form will not be tolerated
- Elders, Men, Women, Youth, Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex (GLBTI) Community members and people with disabilities should be comforted in the knowledge that strong advocacy and leadership is addressing their safety and wellbeing.
- We believe that in order to provide long term sustainable programs and services we require a strong commitment from government to enable the Aboriginal community to enact programs and initiatives to achieve our vision.

Focus Areas

The Regional Action Plan focus areas include:

1. Community Education & Awareness
2. Program Development
3. Service Response & Delivery
4. Partnerships

5. Evaluation/ Monitoring

6. Funding

Recommendations

2. Northern Metropolitan Region requires a full time Indigenous Family Violence Coordinator to enable successful implementation of the Action Plan. The State Government to provide appropriate funding and resources to enable this to happen, for example via DHHS.

BEST PRACTICE MODELS

Aboriginal communities within the Northern Metropolitan Region (NMR) have had a long history of independently developing proactive community based organisations. The location of key Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations is evidence of the community's ability to develop initiatives to address community needs. Through the significant and tireless efforts of community based organisations a number of Best Practice Models have been developed and implemented, resulting in improved outcomes in the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal communities throughout the NMR. These include, but are not limited to the following examples.

Aboriginal Women's Collective Project - This project is developing a framework in relation to Family Violence issues from an Aboriginal women's perspective. The Collective will build on the systems and networks required to support an independent Council of Aboriginal women. This Council will support and voice the values and dreams of Aboriginal women in the region in tackling Family Violence.

Northern High Risk Response Conference - A police led multi-agency information sharing meeting, held twice a month. At each meeting there is a review of 16 cases, where a serious and imminent threat exists and Individual and collaborative actions are decided. Aboriginal services for men and women and Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) both feed into it. The meetings have been running since August 2013 and since then approximately 600 cases have been reviewed. Members/associate agencies include representatives from the following;

- Victoria Police (Family Violence Unit)
- Berry Street in partnership with VACCA
- Child Protection
- Child First
- Kildonan Uniting Care
- Corrections
- Northern area Mental Health Service
- Aboriginal Centre for Males
- Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency
- Men's Active Referral Service
- Victorian Aboriginal Health Service
- Elizabeth Morgan House Aboriginal Women's Service

These meetings have provided opportunities for strong relationship building, networking and collaboration across Family Violence service delivery agencies, where there hasn't been previously.

Koori Police Protocols - Victoria Police and the Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service worked with Aboriginal communities and organisations (including Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Associated Limited, Elizabeth Morgan House Aboriginal Women's Service, Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency, Victorian Aboriginal Legal Services, Victorian Aboriginal Health Service, Regional Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committee, Aboriginal Community Elders Services, Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated) to develop protocols for responding to family violence matters. The protocols aim to improve response to family violence incidents, improve Aboriginal community confidence and increase referral to support services. Protocols were launched in Darebin in 2013.

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

The ACM provides a range of services to both male victims and perpetrators of family violence with the primary

aim of eliminating family violence from within our community including;

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

The ACM is a critical service that contributes to the government's intention to reduce Family Violence and address violence against women and their children.

Elizabeth Morgan House Aboriginal Women's Service - central to all aspects of the work and business is the provision of support and advocacy for the empowerment of Aboriginal women. Along with providing safe and secure accommodation, support and counselling services to Aboriginal women and children experiencing family violence, EMH also undertakes advocacy and advisory work to other service providers, organisations and government. For example EMH developed best practice models on the following, for services and their workers nationally who are assisting Aboriginal women: definition of Aboriginal family violence; safety planning for Aboriginal women; and intake and assessment for Aboriginal women. This was for 1800 Respect, the National Sexual Assault, Domestic and Family Violence Counselling Service for people living in Australia.

CASE STUDY ONE

VACSAL State-wide Junior Football/Netball Carnival 2013

The North-West Metropolitan Region Indigenous Family Violence Regional Action Group (N/W IFVRAG) has been successful in promoting positive community messages against Family Violence, using sports as a tool for engagement.

The North-West IFVRAG in partnership with the Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association Ltd (VACSAL) and the Fitzroy Stars Football, Netball Club developed a project targeted at Aboriginal young people and their families living in the North/West metro region. The project supported five netball teams and four football teams from the north-west metropolitan region to attend the VACSAL state-wide junior football/netball Carnival held in Shepparton on the 2nd and 3rd of October 2013.

Promotion and recruitment for the event was publicised through information flyers, social media, and 3KnD radio as well as at local community events. Training and team selection were held over a four week period leading up to the Carnival. A number of stalls were held at the carnival including, Rumbalara Healthy Lifestyle, Quit, VAGAS Gambling Awareness Program and the IFVRAGs to raise awareness and provide information on the different issues existing within Aboriginal communities.

The implementation of the project was facilitated by VACSAL through the Close the Gap Project and the Bert Williams Aboriginal Youth Services (BWAYS), whilst the Fitzroy Stars Football, Netball Club provided a venue for training as well as coaching services delivered by players from the club. North-West IFVRAG was responsible for the delivery of the Family Violence/strengthening family messages throughout the duration of the project.

The event was supported by the whole Community and provided an opportunity for Aboriginal young people to be engaged in activities that promote healthy lifestyles and cultural wellbeing. Furthermore the North-West IFVRAG assisted the young players and their families to develop culturally supportive and respectful relationships with the aim of providing young people with the tools that instil protective behaviours and reduce risk factors that break the cycle of Family Violence.

Approximately 200 North-West metro community members participated in the event, including 130 players represented across the nine sporting teams, VACSAL staff, Fitzroy Stars players and family members who also attended the event as coaches, team managers and volunteers. All participants and support staff were provided with accommodation, catering and transport during the two day event.

The overwhelming participation in the event enabled sports to be used as a platform to deliver proactive Family Violence messages supporting Cultural Safety, Positive Parenting Practices and Strong families as the foundation

for stronger communities.

Whilst there was no formal evaluation or survey undertaken, the value of the project was clearly evident through the following anecdotal evidence;

- A clear sense of Community cohesion that had an emphasis on cultural safety;
- Involvement from parents in their children's sporting activities, encouraged positive parenting practices; and
- Positive comments and praise given to the organisers regarding the success of the project in effectively supporting the engagement of Aboriginal young people and their families in family strengthening activities.



Recommendations

3. Recurrent funding be provided to enable the NMR to participate annually in the VACSAL State-wide Junior Football/Netball Carnival, including when it is held in rural Victoria

CASE STUDY TWO

'One Day a Week' Project – Engagement resource for Aboriginal Men

The Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association Ltd (VACSAL) developed the 'One Day a Week' project as a way of engaging with Aboriginal males located in the Northern Metro Region. The project provided a culturally safe and sensitive environment, where Aboriginal men could discuss Family Violence issues including any issues relating to breakdowns without fear of judgement or persecution. The project also provided the men with opportunities for pathways into education, training and employment as well as positive interactions with a variety of service providers.





The project was held one day a week over a 12 month period and had a total of 18 men participate. Each week the men would participate in a variety of activities including;

- garden and lawn maintenance for different organisations;
- office cleaning duties; and
- furniture removal.

Some of the regular participants were provided with a couple of days additional work with the Fitzroy Stars Football, Netball Club and the Aborigines Advancement League (AAL) outside of the 'One Day a Week' project.

The men received peer support through activities such as attending different men's camps and were strongly encouraged to attend regular men's groups held at the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service (VAHS) Family Counselling Services, located in Preston as well as Minajalku located in Northcote.

The outcomes of the projects have been very encouraging and opportunities to expand the project state-wide are currently being explored. Positive outcomes include;

- 8 of the men have gained employment;
- Peer support and information sharing;
- Increased participation in rehabilitation programs;
- Positive impacts on the different level of engagement with Aboriginal males and their families;
- Confidence shown by the men, through enrolment in further education courses; and
- A reduction if not the removal of Family Violence within the participants homes.

One of the key learnings of the 'One Day a Week' project is that there needs to be set dates for excursions, camps and other programs, as the males need this information when reporting for their social payments. The fear of having their payments cut off if they attend these aspects of the project, discourages the men from attending the related excursions, camps and/or other programs

Some of the positive aspects of the project were the increased levels of engagement from the men at the Aboriginal Centre for Males (ACM) and within the wider community, the encouraging feedback from mainstream organisations when seeing our males participating in community activities in a positive manner and the Community support shown through ongoing interest in the project.

IMPROVE VICTORIA'S RESPONSE TO FAMILY VIOLENCE

The Northern Metro Indigenous Family Violence Regional Action Group has identified the following gaps and deficiencies in the systems current approach to Aboriginal Family Violence within the Northern Metropolitan Region. Victoria's service responses can be improved by addressing the issues outlined under each of the six focus areas as defined in the North-West Metropolitan Indigenous Family Violence Regional Action Plan.

1. Community Education and Awareness

Family and Community is the cornerstone of Aboriginal people's way of life. Community education is the key to raising awareness of Family Violence and the impact it has on our families and community. We believe it is imperative to build a positive vision in Aboriginal communities, based on strong family values and cultural practices and to use holistic approaches to address Family Violence.

Issues

- Absence of early intervention programs in Early Childhood Centres such as Bubup and Yappera.
- Respectful relationship training needed to educate youth in schools, starting in early years (as early as prep)
- Systemic discrimination issues which continue to impact and impede the service provision to Aboriginal people experiencing family violence

Recommendations

4. The Department of Education and Training in partnership with the Aboriginal community to develop a Family Violence Education Strategy. Strategy should include early intervention and prevention programs as well as schools having an awareness and understanding of the associated risk factors that Family Violence has on Aboriginal children and families and the services that are available.
5. Support and ongoing investment into community led sporting activities that promote health and wellbeing, Family Violence awareness and education in prevention methods.

2. Program Development

Historically Family Violence initiatives and service responses have been developed in isolation from Aboriginal people. They have failed to address the complex issues families experienced.

Issues

- Therapeutic wrap around proposal(3 workers) 1 worker for the children, 1 for male and 1 for women (VACCA, AMS, EHH – proposal was written approx. 10 years ago, didn't get support at the time)
- Services needed for family support (holistic healing approach)
- Lack of specialist services – investment in supporting existing community led
- No programs for female perpetrators, Lack of services for youth who are perpetrators (usually against mothers or elders in the home) - investment in parenting programs and relationships. Grade 6 year 7 early intervention programs aligned with education program.
- Women and children healing service needed in the north to account for the population growth of over six per cent.
- Lack of support for Aboriginal workers, initiatives needed for staff wellbeing to prevent

burnout Recommendations

6. Provide North Metro Aboriginal community organisations with adequate family violence funding and support to further develop locally based prevention strategies that challenge the normalisation of Family Violence, and reinforce its inconsistency with Aboriginal culture

3. Service Response and Delivery

Culturally sensitive and respectful service delivery is one of the most important prerequisites to providing an effective and efficient service to Aboriginal Australian people and is a major challenge for mainstream service providers. Agencies who are working with Aboriginal people need to understand how and why violence occurs within Aboriginal communities, and have a basic understanding of Aboriginal approaches to dealing with Family Violence. Our belief is the mainstream heavily gendered power and privilege approach does not fit for Aboriginal perpetrators of Family Violence and therefore it is no surprise that programs through this lens do not result in any change in those perpetrating Family Violence.

It is critical that all organisations understand that their services must be client driven and promote self-determination and enhancement of self-management within our communities, to address the various issues associated with Family Violence. At minimum real, sustainable, respectful and equitable partnerships with Aboriginal organisations and communities need to be developed and maintained.

Issues

- Lack of support from Aboriginal Family Violence funded mainstream services in developing partnerships with community orgs to ensure collaborative service delivery focused on holistic healing of all Aboriginal

men, women, children, elders, families and communities

- Timeliness of responses is crucial; resources are needed to provide these services.
- Child protection issues - Family Violence used as an excuse for the removal of children from their families- removal of children as a last resort.
- Mandated men's behavioural change program, doesn't work for Aboriginal men (tick the box exercise)
- Isolation - in terms of accessing services
- Access to mainstream

services Recommendations

7. Funding to go to North Metro Aboriginal community organisations to provide a 24/7 family violence crisis mobile support service, delivered in conjunction with police without referral or contacts with stakeholders.

4. Partnerships

The intergenerational impacts of colonisation and the legacy of assimilation policies that led to the Stolen Generations have understandably resulted in Aboriginal communities being highly suspicious of mainstream and government attempts to develop collaboration. Even today, the experience of Aboriginal Services entering such partnerships is that often their role is minimised with the mainstream service provider taking the lead. For partnerships to work they need to be equitable. Where the project is aimed specifically at the Aboriginal community, the Aboriginal Service should be the lead agency.

Mainstream services have greater access to information and resources yet still struggle to engage Aboriginal families. Government departments are looking for solutions to the increasing incidence of Family Violence. The current political climate encourages the development of equitable partnerships between mainstream, government services and Aboriginal organisations.

Issues

- Support needed to allow for the Darebin police protocols to be accepted by all five police north west metropolitan divisions within the NMR. Participation from all division in implementing the protocols across each of their local government areas. Positive outcomes achieved so far include better communications between the police and Aboriginal people, breaking down barriers, understanding and awareness of culturally appropriate services.
- L17s should be referred directly to Aboriginal services for Aboriginal people. Assess the ability for the electronic referral system to include pathways to Aboriginal services rather than just mainstream services

Recommendations

8. Greater investment in transferring and implementing the Darebin police protocols across the three police divisions within the Northern Metropolitan Region.

5. Evaluation and monitoring

Historically funding has not been provided for monitoring and evaluation by Aboriginal organisations.

Programs and service responses need to be monitored for their effectiveness and evaluated for their long-term viability. Program success needs to be understood from an Aboriginal community perspective not only from a government or mainstream understanding of success. It is crucial that Aboriginal services are supported to develop measures of success that clearly demonstrate impact and achievement of objectives that are more than a counting and ticking box exercise. Previous attempts to evaluate and monitor outcomes of programs have been restricted because of under resourcing.

The Regional Action Group in partnership with Government will monitor the effectiveness and efficiency responses to Aboriginal Family Violence.

Issues

- No available data or resources to enable Aboriginal community organisations to map existing services and programs and identify service gaps

- Accessibility of data from Government Departments, Victoria Police, Local Councils (no data sharing)
- A need for improved data collection systems from mainstream service agencies to better inform service responses
- A need to establish mechanisms to ensure that mainstream organisations that are funded to provide services to Aboriginal clients are providing services and not just writing referrals to Aboriginal service providers and ticking the box. Referrals to Aboriginal services should receive appropriate financial assistance that is attached to the individual client.

Recommendations

9. Provide appropriate funding and support for research and evaluation in the North Metro region to find out what works, what doesn't and where.

6. Funding

Historically the Commonwealth and State Governments have provided minimal funding to programs to address Family Violence. Both governments have funded numerous Family Violence strategies and previously the majority of funding was for 'one off' or 'pilot' funding. It has become evident that approaches taken by various governments to address Aboriginal disadvantage has been to match funding with supply, instead of demand. Demand is constantly outweighing supply as a consequence of the Aboriginal population growth.

It is important that funding opportunities are developed and the evidence base is developed to secure long-term funding for programs and service responses to address the risks that Family Violence pose within our communities. In 2008 the Aboriginal Community and the Victorian Government signed a 10 year plan that committed to the provision of adequate funding and resources to achieve, sustainable improvements in the

Aboriginal Communities and Victorian Government practice.

Issues

- Capacity of Aboriginal organisations to deliver services. Funding and resources are limited
- Aboriginal Community Controlled organisations are losing workers to mainstream services as they can't compete with salaries
- Proportionate funding model needed - funding received for service delivery only for Darebin area – funding used to service all of NMR - unable to capture outcomes as doesn't meet reporting requirements - Investment in properly resourcing Aboriginal community organisations service providers
- Securing sustainable and adequate funding is increasingly difficult due to the competitive nature of tendering for funding.
- Examples of funding issues - Elizabeth Morgan House gets funding services for only 3 community outreach workers. Berry Street is funded for approx. 20 - Berry Street share an intake worker 1 day a fortnight with VACCA - Additionally Berry Street have their own Aboriginal specific worker

Recommendations

10. Prioritise and target funding for North Metro Aboriginal community organisations and specialised Family Violence service providers.
11. Ongoing funding for the North Metro region to reinforce and continue best practice programs and activities.

RECOMMENDATIONS SUMMARY

1. Substantial investment in improved data collection and monitoring systems regarding matters relating to Aboriginal Family Violence both at state-wide and regional levels.
2. Northern Metropolitan Region requires a full time Indigenous Family Violence Coordinator to enable successful implementation of the Action Plan. The State Government to provide appropriate funding and resources to enable this to happen, for example via DHHS.
3. Recurrent funding be provided to enable the NMR to participate annually in the VACSAL State-wide Junior Football/Netball Carnival, including when it is held in rural Victoria
4. The Department of Education and Training in partnership with the Aboriginal community to develop a Family Violence Education Strategy. Strategy should include early intervention and prevention programs as well as schools having an awareness and understanding of the associated risk factors that Family Violence has on Aboriginal children and families and the services that are available.
5. Support and ongoing investment into community led sporting activities that promote health and wellbeing, Family Violence awareness and education in prevention methods.
6. Provide North Metro Aboriginal community organisations with adequate family violence funding and support to further develop locally based prevention strategies that challenge the normalisation of Family Violence, and reinforce its inconsistency with Aboriginal culture
7. Funding to go to North Metro Aboriginal community organisations to provide a 24/7 family violence crisis mobile support service, delivered in conjunction with police without referral or contacts with stakeholders.
8. Greater investment in transferring and implementing the Darebin police protocols across the three police divisions within the Northern Metropolitan Region.
9. Provide appropriate funding and support for research and evaluation in the North Metro region to find out what works, what doesn't and where.
10. Prioritise and target funding for North Metro Aboriginal community organisations and specialised Family Violence service providers .
11. Ongoing funding for the North Metro region to reinforce and continue best practice programs and activities.
12. The Northern Metropolitan IFVRAG be resourced to work with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to develop consistent Family Violence strategies. Those organisations that self-identify the need for a Family Violence worker be adequately funded to deliver the strategy.

Northern Metropolitan Region Indigenous Family Violence Action Group Members List

Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association Limited (VACSAL)

Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA)

Aboriginal Community Elders Service (ACES)

Elizabeth Morgan House Aboriginal Women's Service Inc.

(formally known as Elizabeth Hoffman House) (EMH)

Aboriginal Advancement League (AAL)

Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service (AFVPL)

Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service (VALS)

Victorian Aboriginal Health Services (VAHS)

Children's and Protection Society (CPS)

Victoria Police

Women's Health in the North (WHIN)

Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS)