



Public Health Association of Australia (Victorian Branch) submission in response to the Family Violence Royal Commission Issues Paper

Introduction

The Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA) is a national organization comprising around 1900 individual members and representing over 40 professional groups concerned with the promotion of health at a population level. Key roles of the organisation include capacity building, advocacy and the development of policy. Core to our work is an evidence base drawn from a wide range of members working in public health practice, research, administration and related fields who volunteer their time to inform policy, support advocacy and assist in capacity building within the sector.

The PHAA (Victorian Branch) has over 500 members in public health related occupations in health service, research, and government and community sectors. We work with the National Office in providing policy advice, in organising seminars and public events and in mentoring public health professionals.

Family violence is one of the greatest threats to public health in the Victorian community and the PHAA therefore welcomed the announcement of the Royal Commission and we are pleased to now have an opportunity to provide a written submission. In addition to substantial scientific evidence and community concern underlining the need for action in this area, we also wish to highlight to the Commission that a recent survey we conducted of PHAA members in Victoria indicated that addressing family violence is seen to be one of the highest public health priorities for Victoria.

This submission

This submission is drawn from the PHAA Domestic and Family Violence Policy, developed by the PHAA Women's Health Special Interest Group¹.

¹ Public Health Association of Australia: Policy-at-a-glance – Domestic and Family Violence Policy. Revised 2013. Available at <http://www.phaa.net.au/documents/130919%20PHAA%20Domestic%20and%20Family%20Violence%20policy.pdf>



The PHAA (Victorian Branch) affirms the following principles in relation to family violence:

1. Domestic and family violence can be reduced through primary, secondary and tertiary strategies. Primary prevention strategies focus on the determinants of domestic and family violence including gender inequality, adherence to harmful gender stereotypes, alcohol and drug use, and a range of other factors. Secondary prevention focuses on early intervention, particularly with at risk groups. Tertiary prevention focuses on working with victims and perpetrators of domestic and family violence.² Work must take place at all three levels.
2. Women's refuges and other family and domestic violence support services are vital and must be adequately resourced. Affordable counselling and outreach services for women who do not choose to go into refuges, and initiatives for women to remain in the home, must also be in place.
3. The safety of the victim(s) should be the primary consideration and police and justice interventions with the perpetrator should be tailored to considerations of victim safety based on a risk assessment. The onus should not be on the victim to find a place of safety but for society to keep the victim safe from the perpetrator.
4. Those working in child protection services should be educated regarding the effects of FDV on protective parents' and work with domestic violence services to increase the safety of protective parents as well as their children. Children and young people require support such as affordable and age appropriate counselling.³
5. Legislative systems affect the incidence and impact of domestic and family violence against women and their children.

² VicHealth: Preventing violence before it occurs: A framework and background paper to guide the primary prevention of violence against women in Victoria, 2007, VicHealth, Melbourne.

³ FaHCSIA, Time for Action: The National Council's Plan for Australia to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children, 2009-2021. 2009, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA), Commonwealth Government: Canberra.



The Public Health Association of Australia (Victorian Branch) believes that the following steps should be undertaken:

6. Implement, evaluate, and adequately fund the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022⁴, which provides an important commitment and framework for action on domestic and family violence.
7. Domestic violence death review teams should be established in all Australian states and territories and should be linked to share information and increase understanding of patterns of violence preceding deaths so that these deaths can be prevented.
8. Regular community-wide violence reduction education campaigns should be implemented, together with action to introduce, resource, and evaluate intervention programs, particularly for those women in high risk groups, such as Indigenous, pregnant, young, separated/divorced women, especially those with dependent children.
9. Continue legislative reform, particularly in relation to federal family court and child protection systems, to address persistent problems with legislative management of domestic and family violence.

The PHAA (Victorian Branch) appreciates the opportunity to make this submission. If you have any questions or require any further information in relation to our submission please contact us via email ([REDACTED]).

Yours sincerely

[REDACTED]

Brian Vandenberg, Branch President, PHAA (Victorian Branch).
29 May 2015.

⁴ COAG. The National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010 – 2022. Available at: <https://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/women/programs-services/reducing-violence/the-national-plan-to-reduce-violence-against-women-and-their-children-2010-2022>