

WESTERN HOMELESSNESS NETWORK



# **Western Homelessness Network**

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

**May 2015**

**The Western Homelessness Network (WHN) thanks the Royal Commission into Family Violence for this opportunity to make a submission and congratulates the Victorian Government for its focus on elimination of family violence as a key community priority.**

The WHN is a Network of eighteen specialist homelessness funded organisations managing approximately 40 homelessness programs in Melbourne’s West. (See Appendix 1 for further information on the operation of the WHN.)

The WHN is making this submission, in support of the submission lodged by the Council to Homeless Persons, to highlight that:

- **Family violence is the most common cause of homelessness in Victoria and homelessness, as an outcome of family violence, is unacceptable.**

A recent data snapshot undertaken by the WHN showed that, of the 2,300 individuals being supported by the WHN, 62% had experienced family violence and, for 48% family violence was the primary cause of their homelessness.

- **The resources of the Homelessness Service System, like those of the Family Violence System, are inadequate to respond to the needs of the thousands of individuals and households each year seeking homelessness assistance.**

As of December 2014 there were 1,223 households who were awaiting accommodation and homelessness support. This included 3,143 adults and 1,782 children who were experiencing homelessness and who could not, at the time they sought assistance, be provided with the accommodation and support that they required.

Based on the numbers of people that the WHN reported supporting in April 2015, the resources of the homelessness service system would need to be trebled in order to meet this level of need in a timely way.

- **A long term affordable housing strategy must be included as an essential component of any effective response to family violence in Victoria.**

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## 1. Introduction

As the Commission knows, family violence has consistently been cited by those seeking homelessness assistance as their primary reason for accessing the Specialist Homelessness Service System. In fact, family violence is cited as the primary reason for seeking homelessness assistance (28% of clients) nearly twice as often as the next most cited reason – financial difficulty (17% of clients).<sup>1</sup>

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare reports:

In 2013–14, 33% of all people requesting assistance from specialist homelessness agencies across Australia were escaping domestic or family violence (84,744 clients). There were almost 7,000 more clients seeking assistance for domestic and family violence in 2013–14 than 2012–13. This is largely due to an increase in the proportion of clients in Victoria seeking assistance (accounting for 72% of the increase in all clients seeking assistance for domestic and family violence<sup>2</sup>). The highest proportion of clients requesting assistance for domestic and family violence were living as a single parent (with a child or children) household (46%) and at risk of homelessness when first presenting for support (60%)<sup>3</sup>.

In 2013 - 14, 22,213 women in Victoria reported that domestic and family violence was their main reason for seeking homelessness assistance.

The Western Homelessness Network (WHN) has made this submission to the Royal Commission, in support of the submission from the Council to Homeless Persons, to assist in quantifying the extent to which family violence contributes to homelessness and in order to reinforce the need for an affordable long term housing strategy to included be an **essential** component of an effective response to family violence in Victoria.

The WHN recognises that there a number of points of intersection between individuals who experience family violence and those who are experiencing homelessness in our community but also understands that family violence primarily affects the lives of women, children and young people.

The first point of intersection is highlighted by an Australian Act of Parliament<sup>4</sup> that states that those women, children and young people who are subjected to violence in their home are, by definition, already homeless:

### 3 Definitions

In this Act **people who are homeless** includes:

- (a) people who are in crisis and at imminent risk of becoming homeless; and
- (b) people who are experiencing domestic violence and are at imminent risk of becoming homeless.

### 4 Definition of *homeless*

*When a person is homeless*

- (1) For the purposes of this Act, a person is homeless if, and only if, he or she has inadequate access to safe and secure housing.

*Inadequate access to safe and secure housing*

- (2) For the purposes of this Act, a person is taken to have inadequate access to safe and secure housing if the only housing to which the person has access:

- (a) damages, or is likely to damage, the person's health; or
- (b) threatens the person's safety; or
- (c) marginalises the person through failing to provide access to:
  - (i) adequate personal amenities; or
  - (ii) the economic and social supports that a home normally affords; or
- (d) places the person in circumstances which threaten or adversely affect the adequacy, safety, security and affordability of that housing.

**Supported Accommodation Assistance Act 1994**

<sup>1</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Specialist Homelessness Services 2013 – 14, p. 7

<sup>2</sup> Rates of family violence are particularly high in Melbourne's West. During the period 2011-2012, rates of reported family violence in three key municipalities in the West are higher than the overall rate for Victoria, at 910.3 per 100,000 population. The highest rates of family violence for the Western Region were reported in the City of Melton (1,166.1 per 100,000), followed by Brimbank (972.3 per 100,000) and Wyndham (925.1 per 100,000). (Source: Victoria Police Corporate Statistics, 2011/12)

<sup>3</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Specialist Homelessness Services 2013 – 14, p. 39

<sup>4</sup> Supported Accommodation Assistance Act 1994

It is an extraordinary indictment on our community that, for many of these women and children, escaping the family home may free them from the violence and loss of control that they have been experiencing, but frequently leads to further extended periods of homelessness.

Single parents are already the most economically disadvantaged group in our community<sup>5</sup>. Many women and children leave their home to escape violence without access to an adequate income which, in combination with the current crisis in affordable housing, severely limits their options for future housing. Case study 1 shows the devastating impact of the current housing crisis on the options available for women who choose to leave situations of violence and the decisions they are forced to make for themselves and their children.

## 2. Data on intersection between family violence and homelessness

There are five key scenarios in which family violence leads to homelessness. The WHN undertook a data snapshot on 16 April 2015<sup>6</sup>, to assist in quantifying the extent of homelessness resulting from each of those scenarios.

The WHN provided data on 2,289 individuals being supported by the WHN at the time of the snapshot. Of these 63% had experienced family violence. In addition 103 individuals presented to the two Homelessness Access Points in the West on the day of the snapshot. Of these, 33% had experienced family violence.

The difference in reported numbers of people experiencing family violence can be explained by the fact that Homelessness Access Point services provide an initial risk and need assessment, in order to refer to appropriate services. Homelessness support services undertake a more comprehensive assessment in order to provide holistic case management support. They assist individuals and households to find appropriate long term housing and address any issues that have contributed to their experience of homelessness.

- 1. Women and children escaping family violence** – are frequently forced to leave their own home because it is either not safe or because they do not have the financial capacity to continue to fund the family home after the perpetrator of family violence has left.

The data snapshot showed that 78% of the women supported by the homelessness service system in the West on 16 April 2015 had experienced family violence.

	Total clients	Experienced FV	Primary reason for homelessness	One reason for homelessness
Primary clients - Women	751	571	502	514

This data does include data provided by a women's specific homelessness service. Even after removing the data from this service, 62% of those women assisted had experienced family violence.

Of the 747 children supported by the WHN, 64% (480) had experienced family violence and for 55% it was the primary cause of homelessness.

- 2. Young people** – family violence is a common precursor to youth homelessness. Frequently young people leave home because it is no longer tenable for them to continue to witness violence in the home or because a father/step father 'kicks' them out of home.

The data snapshot showed that 61% of the young people supported by the homelessness service system had experienced family violence. Family violence was the primary cause of homelessness for 39% of the young people supported by the homelessness service system.

Homelessness service providers are also reporting an increase in the numbers of young women who are experiencing violence in their relationships, often linked to ICE use by their partners.

- 3. Men** – who are perpetrators of family violence, may become homeless after they are required to leave the family home in order to ensure the safety of women and children.

<sup>5</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, Social Trends 2007, *One Parent Families* (Canberra, July 2008) and Australian Institute of Family Studies), *Occasional Paper No. 48 Parental joblessness, financial disadvantage and the wellbeing of parents and children* (Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, Canberra, 2012)

<sup>6</sup> Homelessness support workers, from the Western Homelessness Network, provided data on all those consumers in their caseload on 16 April 2015. The data was drawn from a worker knowledge and assessment of their clients' experiences. Initial Assessment & Planning (IA&P) workers from the two Homelessness Access Point Services in the West provided data on those people who presented for homelessness assistance on 16 April 2015. The data did not include data from the homelessness funded family violence services but did include data from one women's specific service.

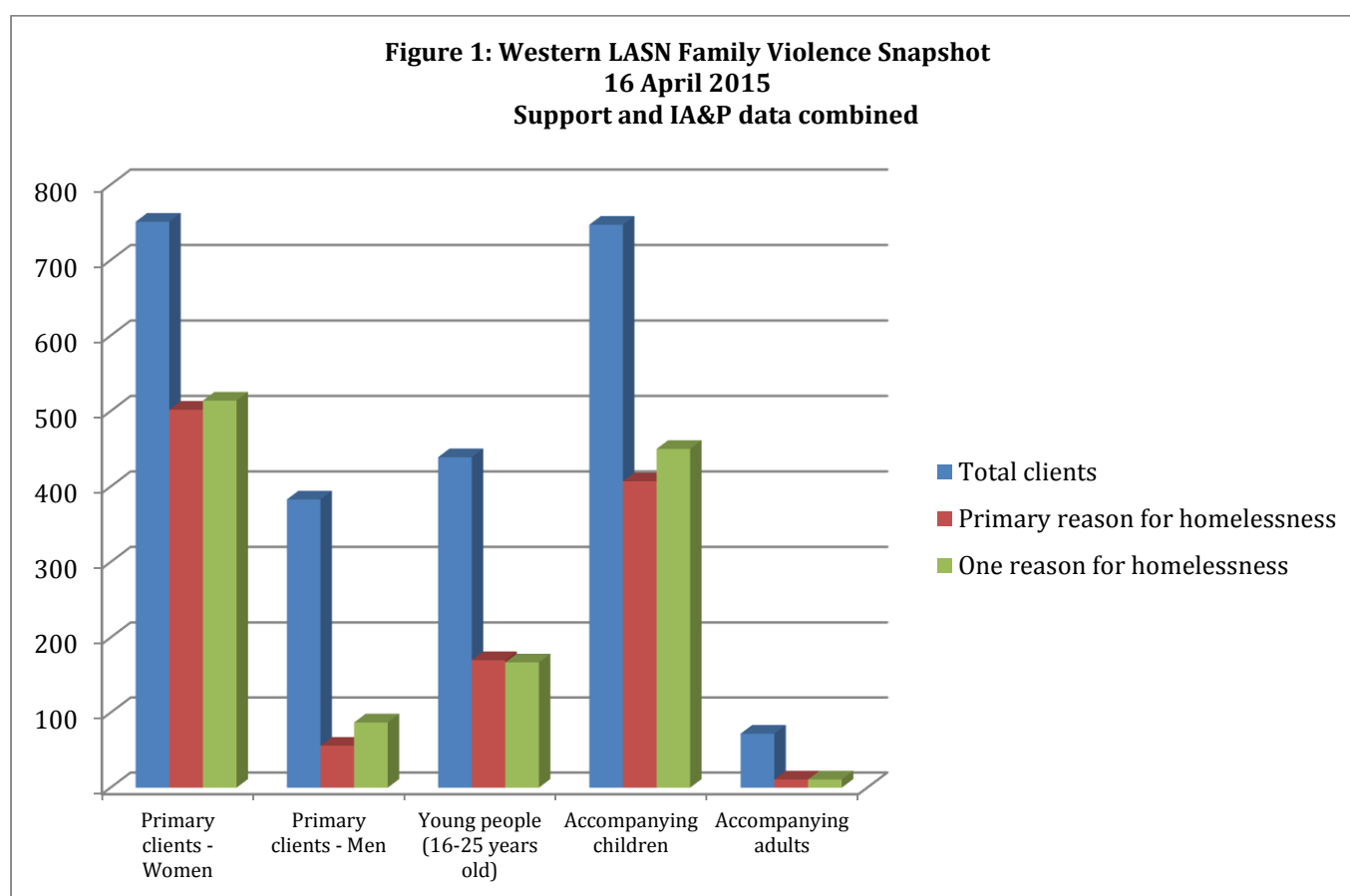
The data snapshot identified that 19% (64) of the men supported by the WHN had been perpetrators of family violence.

The data also showed that 35% of men supported by the WHN had experienced family violence, primarily as children. Research suggests that the greater proportion of those people who are chronically homeless generally became homeless as young people (generally before they turned 18), as a result of violence at home<sup>7</sup>.

4. **Adolescents who are violent towards family** – anecdotally services have reported that the numbers of young people having to leave home because they have perpetrated violence against family members is increasing. Police data shows that in Victoria during the period of 2010-2011 there were 3,252 reports of adolescent violence in the home, equating to 8% of all family violence incidence reports to police, and 16% of intervention orders were undertaken in relation to adolescent violence in the home (Victoria Police 2011)<sup>8</sup>.

14% (61) of young people supported by the WHN in April had perpetrated family violence.

Figure 1 provides a summary of the snapshot findings, showing the proportion of clients assisted by the WHN in April 2015 who have experienced family violence (62%). For 48% of those assisted, family violence was the primary cause of homelessness. Amongst women, this increases to 69%.



	Total clients	Primary reason for homelessness	One reason for homelessness
Primary clients - Women	751	502	514
Primary clients - Men	383	56	87
Young people (16-25 years old)	439	170	167
Accompanying children	747	407	450
Accompanying adults	72	11	11
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,392 (100%)</b>	<b>1,146 (48%)</b>	<b>1,129 (47%)</b>

<sup>7</sup> See for instance: Johnson, G., Chamberlain, C., *Evaluation of the Melbourne Street to Home Program: Final Report* (RMIT Melbourne, March 2015)

<sup>8</sup> Horsburgh, A., *Adolescent Violence in the Home: A Scoping Study and Mapping of Victorian Services* (Good Shepherd Youth and Family Services with RMIT, Victoria, 2012)

The data shows that the vast majority of people who are homeless and who present to the homelessness service system are homeless as a result (directly or indirectly) of family violence. Eliminating family violence from our community would eliminate one of the primary causes of homelessness in Victoria.

At the present time Victoria may not be in a position to eliminate family violence completely. However, while we work together on strategies for the elimination of family violence, access to safe, affordable and appropriate housing options is paramount to enable people to leave situations of violence and alleviate some of the trauma and distress that they have experienced.

## Appendix 1:

### Overview of the Western Homelessness Network

Access to homelessness resources in Melbourne's West is, for the most part, coordinated by two Homelessness Access Point services: Yarra Community Housing and SASHS Western. These services work in coordination with Women's Health West, as the Family Violence Entry Point service for the West and Frontyard Melbourne Youth Support Service, as the statewide youth access point service.

The Homelessness Access Point services provide an *Initial Assessment and Planning* response by undertaking general assessments of an individual or households' housing and support needs, immediate risks and level of personal vulnerability. Support and housing options are discussed with clients and, where possible, immediate assistance is provided.

Homelessness support and accommodation options are rarely available at the point that an individual or household first presents to an Access Point service for homelessness assistance. In order to ensure equitable access to the limited resources of the homelessness service and to enable matching of need to the available resources, the Access Point services maintain prioritised lists of all households in need of further assistance from the local homelessness service system. As accommodation or support becomes available, clients on the prioritisation list are best-matched and referred to each vacancy.

The Access Point services also provide Transitional Housing tenancy management by overseeing the provision and maintenance of medium-term accommodation. This is accommodation in which clients enter into a tenancy agreement and are subject to the provisions of the Residential Tenancies Act (1997). These properties give clients a stable base from which to work with a support provider in order to improve their overall wellbeing and pursue permanent housing options.

The remaining programs are funded as Specialist Homelessness Support Services to assist people to prevent or end the experience of homelessness. Depending on vacancies, these support services provide:

- crisis accommodation and support, such as that provided by a refuge;
- Interim response 2, which is short term assistance that is time limited, targeted support to assist people to either divert away from homelessness or to reduce their crisis while they are awaiting the support and accommodation that they need;
- medium to long term case-managed support, including a variety of support models that may be undertaken on an office or outreach basis.
- family reconciliation for young people who may be appropriately assisted to return home. The key work that all these agencies do is capacity building with people to assist individuals or households to access and maintain permanent housing.
- Private rental brokerage programs providing limited brokerage for households able to maintain private rental accommodation.

#### Level of need for homelessness assistance

In early December 2014 there were:

- 829 households (2,173 individuals, including 1,253 children) who have been provided with initial assistance but are awaiting homelessness support and safe accommodation in the LGAs of Moonee Valley, Maribyrnong, Wyndham, Melbourne and Hobsons Bay.

203 of these households in crisis have been waiting for assistance for longer than a year.

- 394 households (441 adults and 529 children) who have been provided with initial assistance but are awaiting homelessness support and safe accommodation in the LGAs of Brimbank and Melton. 255 of these households have not yet been able to access homelessness support and all are awaiting access to safe housing.

Case study 1 (Appendix 2) highlights the devastating impact on women and children of this overwhelming level of need for homelessness assistance.



## Appendix 2

## Case Studies

■■■■ has been a victim of violence from her partner and the father of her children, ■■■■, for several years. She had tried to leave a number of times before but never felt that she had options available that supported this decision. She would often leave with her children and couch surf with family until they could no longer accommodate her and then she would return home, hoping ■■■■ meant it when he said he was sorry. The children would always beg not to go home.

The recent episode was the most violent. ■■■■ daughter tried to physically intervene and stop her father from choking her mother after he repeatedly beat her with the kitchen chair. Neighbours had called the Police with noise complaints but ■■■■ and the children had already fled to stay with family. Both children were distraught and would not leave their mother's side to go to school. ■■■■ was also concerned that their father would go to the school and take them back to the house to force ■■■■ to again return. The following weekend the family apologetically asked ■■■■ and the kids to leave ASAP as the house was overcrowded.

■■■■ tried calling the Safe Steps but was told that, as the family violence incident happened more than a week ago she was no longer eligible for refuge: her matter was now about homelessness not family violence. They referred ■■■■ back to the local homelessness access point service which meant ■■■■ and the kids had to return to an area where ■■■■ or his friends/family may see her: her "unsafe area". ■■■■ was anxious and the children were distressed. ■■■■ was told to be waiting at the Access Point service at 9am the next morning to hopefully get an appointment, although an appointment was not guaranteed. When ■■■■ did get to meet with someone at the Access Point service they advised her that the options were bleak. They could only offer to pay for three nights for her and the children in a boarding house that was incredibly expensive, \$380 a week.

■■■■ was told that to get a worker allocated to her to assist her to get out of the boarding house and in to stable and affordable housing that she would need to be at the office on another day again at 9am again to hopefully get an appointment to have an assessment completed to then go on the wait list. ■■■■ was told she would need to call at the beginning of each month to say that she wanted to remain on the list to be allocated a worker. "At the beginning of each month! How long would it take to get a worker?" ■■■■ was told there was an unknown wait for a support worker allocation. ■■■■ was overwhelmed and heavily depressed.

When ■■■■ arrived at the boarding house with her children the property was overcrowded with three other families already living there. She and the children had the lounge room which was a converted bedroom. All members of the house shared one bathroom and one kitchen. One of the other household members told ■■■■ that she had recently been released from jail. There was no linen or blankets and the family slept on bare mattresses.

Over the following weeks ■■■■ spent all her money on take away food and clothing for the kids. She couldn't pay the rent. She tried calling other Homelessness Access Point services but all referred her back to the one that she had attended. She had attended the assessment appointment and continued to wait for a worker. She applied for private rental but every time was unsuccessful. She and ■■■■ had a debt with the Office of Housing so she couldn't get the bond loan back from the Department of Health and Human Services.

The children still weren't going to school. Household members violently fought, took drugs openly in front of the children and the police were often in attendance. Child Protection had become involved after they had received a notification after a recent Police attendance when another household member had deliberately set fire to his mattress. Child Protection told ■■■■ that if she didn't secure for her kids stable and appropriate accommodation that they would escalate the matter. They were concerned that she couldn't "protect her children".

On the third month ■■■■ didn't call to remain on the wait list for a worker. She had returned home to ■■■■



After experiencing an episode of family violence, [REDACTED], who was pregnant at the time, was referred to Safe Steps by the local Homelessness Access Point Service. Although the family violence incident happened on a Tuesday [REDACTED] had to wait three days for an appointment at the Access Point service, as it was not initially identified that she was homeless due to family violence and [REDACTED] was not prioritised after she said that she could stay at her Mum's house with her daughter for a night or two. [REDACTED] had no ID as her ex partner had taken her bag. The housing agency told her that she must go to Centrelink and get a temporary health care card before they would see her. [REDACTED] had no myki and no money. She was fined on the train for not having a myki and was not believed when she said that she had no ID.

During the three days [REDACTED] stayed at her mother's house her ex partner attended twice and yelled abuse from the side walk. [REDACTED] refused to leave the house. Although the Police were called to her Mother's house the ex partner had fled before the Police arrived. The Police advised that there would be a report (an L17 was submitted to the local family violence service) but as he wasn't there, there wasn't much the Police could do. As the ex partner had smashed [REDACTED] phone there was no way for the Family Violence service to contact her once they got the L17.

When [REDACTED] did make it to the homelessness access point service the staff quickly identified that she was able to be referred on to Safe Steps. The access point service reiterated to Safe Steps that [REDACTED] mother place was not appropriate and certainly not safe.

[REDACTED] then spent the next [REDACTED] days in a hotel room with her children. She was in an area that she was unfamiliar with and did not know where the local shops were or where she could find a park to take her daughter to, who needed respite from the dreary and confines of a hotel room. [REDACTED] pregnancy was also a high risk pregnancy and she did not have her blood pressure medications with her. [REDACTED] had no scripts and no medicare card. She didn't know where the local bulk billing doctor was. [REDACTED] rang the [REDACTED] Social Worker at the hospital that she was booked to give birth at and they advocated for [REDACTED] to be relocated to a hotel closer to the hospital, where they and the local [REDACTED] Family Violence Service could provide outreach support. Child Protection became involved and were concerned that [REDACTED] was living in a hotel room.

After giving birth to her baby [REDACTED] was accepted in to a refuge. [REDACTED] then stayed in this refuge for [REDACTED] weeks with her two daughters while she waited for a transitional property.

## Appendix 3:

### WHN Response to Royal Commission Issues Paper

The following responses are quotes, drawn from a survey of the WHN, following the themes of the Royal Commission into Family Violence Issues Paper.

#### 1. How do you think family violence impacts on clients you are supporting in the homelessness service system?

- Over 30% of people presenting at homelessness access points report family violence as the main cause of their housing crisis. We assist people who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness. Family violence is a major cause of homelessness and housing crisis, which our service aims to prevent.
- Families are either being housed in emergency crisis accommodation that is inappropriate for a mother and her children... there is limited Housing Establishment Funds available to purchase accommodation. Women and children are sharing cooking facilities...The shortage of temporary housing means some families are spending weeks in inappropriate accommodation.
- Often these clients do not have the support of family or friends and are also dealing with other issues such as substance abuse and mental health issues. The victims of violence will often stay with the perpetrator for financial reasons.
- Family violence is a major issue that impacts on young people. It affects their sense of wellbeing, their security, their understanding of how to behave, their ability to develop good relationships. Family violence impacts on young people for a long time, even after it appears that they are doing OK. As a broad generalization, young people experiencing family violence either become very passive or very aggressive.
- Children have a unique experience of family violence and this experience is very different from that of adults. Family violence has harmful, immediate and long term effects on children. Children who experience violence have significant trauma responses. The severity of the impact of family violence on children is similar regardless of whether they witness the violence or experience the violence directly.
- Family violence is one of the main contributing factors for clients who are homeless. The majority of victims of family violence are forced to leave their homes with children and are then faced with homelessness.
- There is more pressure on the service system in securing appropriate accommodation. There are more complex needs presented by services users such as safety issues in relation to violent partners.

#### 2. What impact does family violence have on your clients' access to housing?

- Relationship breakdown due to family violence leads to an overall loss of family income. Given the lack of appropriate affordable social housing options for women, private rental is the only option. Given the unaffordability of many private rental properties for women on low incomes, many of whom have children, this creates a risk that they either a) won't be able to access private rental (ie. No rental history, lack of resources) or b) will not be able to manage a tenancy, at least initially.
- Their access to affordable housing is diminished if they do not have access to significant resources and funnels them into outer areas such as Melton, Dandenong and Outer Wyndham.
- Affordability – single income families leaving violence in the West have to move further out into the growth corridors to be able to afford housing. This impacts on the children's schooling etc.

#### 3. Which of the reforms to the family violence service system introduced in the last 10 years do you consider effective? Why? How could they be improved?

- Amendments to the RTA (s 233A and 234) are a positive step. However, they could be improved by clarifying that women who are victims of family violence that has resulted in damage to a premise will categorically not be held liable for that damage. Further change is also required to ensure that a victim of family violence can apply for creation of new fixed term lease in a time frame shorter than the timeframe that a perpetrator has to end a fixed term lease.
- Greater enacting of police powers to remove the perpetrator from the family home has been positive.
- The changes in policing have made a huge difference for young people.
- Changes to the RTA in 2008 recognised that tenancy administrators need to take into consideration the consequence of family violence and its impact on tenancies.

- Early intervention to identify and protect those at risk of family violence and prevent the escalation of violence. Further cultural change is required from government bodies so that agencies and society prioritise children rather than adults.
- Removal of perpetrators – provision of more resources to ensure that perpetrators can be accommodated to ensure safety of victims.
- The Integrated Family Violence Committees have been a very productive mechanism for building knowledge, integration and understanding across sectors.

4. If your organisation has been involved in any programs, campaigns or initiatives about family violence for the general community, tell us what these have involved and how they have been evaluated.

- Homeless Law runs a legal outreach clinic called the Women's Homelessness Prevention Project. Through this clinic, women are able to receive legal advice and representation in relation to tenancy issues, credit and debt and infringements. The service model is holistic in that, at the initial appointment, women see lawyers and a social worker. The social worker can provide up to three months intensive case work assistance in relation to non legal problems. In the first ten months of the project 55 women with a combined total of 83 children in their care came through this clinic. Through the assistance provided, more than three quarters of these women have been able to maintain safe and stable housing. 90% of these women reported a history of family violence. The program will be more formally evaluated upon its conclusion in September 2015.
- SASHS runs the Support for Families at Risk of Homelessness (SFAR) program, Accommodation Options for Families Program (AOF) and the Social Housing Advocacy and Support Program (SHASP). All of these programs assist families with family violence issues either by providing appropriate housing and linking in to appropriate services. The programs are evaluated by the Department of Health and Human Services on a regular basis.
- Yarra Community Housing and SASHS Western operate the private rental brokerage program which assists mostly single women and their children rapidly access the private rental market where possible and when appropriate.
- The H3 Wyndham Group are a group of local agencies in Wyndham chaired by Yarra Community Housing and the City of Wyndham advocating for a short stay crisis facility to assist young people, single people and families who are homeless. Modelled on Hanover South Bank this facility would provide secure accommodation to different target groups, including people leaving family violence with support provided to access longer term stable and affordable accommodation. This advocacy has been continuing for over 5 years without any tangible assistance from Government.

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

- Clients (victims and/or perpetrators) finding quicker housing options can help reduce the repeated occurrence of family violence.
- When agencies such as Child FIRST become involved and work with the mother and her children to put safety measures in place.
- In relation to the victims of family violence: financial independence, appropriate legal and non legal support, intensive support at the time of leaving family violence. In relation to men/prevention: early education, more progressive justice system responses.
- Stable accommodation.
- Intervention from domestic violence services.

6. Tell us about any gaps or deficiencies in current responses to family violence.

- More crisis accommodation in the western region, particularly a facility servicing Wyndham, Melton and Brimbank. This would improve the 24 hour crisis response capacity in the West.
- Not enough resources to house homeless families. Not enough resources to assist with the basic needs of families when they have escaped violence.
- The current support systems focus on adults. More housing, support and material aide resources are required to respond to the needs of children affected by family violence.
- Police are not always acting on breaches of intervention orders.
- Lack of safe and secure housing for victims.
- Lack of family violence specific services to support young women under 18.
- Lack of services available to assist families in which young people are choosing to use violence.

- Lack of resources to remove perpetrators
7. Does insufficient integration and coordination between the various bodies that come into contact with people affected by family violence hinder the assessment of risk, or the effectiveness of support provided to people affected by family violence?
- The homelessness and family violence services attempt to work well together in the West (and have developed a protocol document to guide this work – see Attachment 1) but both systems are so overloaded that the protocols are not always enacted, to the detriment of women and children (see Case study 2).
8. What are some of the most promising and successful ways of supporting the ongoing safety and wellbeing of people affected by family violence? Are there gaps or deficiencies in our approach?
- We need longer term support available for women and children who have experienced family violence who have an ongoing need for support as they work to re-establish their lives. Many victims live precariously for a long period of time after the initial crisis as they, and their children, struggle to manage emotionally and financially. Access to safe and affordable long term accommodation in these circumstances is critical. Without access to this accommodation a victim of domestic violence potentially faces the choice between homelessness or returning to a violent partner.
  - Family violence and homelessness services are working beyond capacity and this creates barriers to access in a timely manner.
  - Counselling for all family members as soon as possible.
  - Services to assist families in which an adolescent is choosing violence are effective but there are very few services available.
  - Improved community awareness has increased the numbers of notifications of family violence. More training for workers on family violence would help. Crisis Risk Assessment Framework (CRAF) training is routinely booked out.
  - Coordinated safety plan responses (across a number of agencies) would be helpful. Safety plan tools and resources available for workers to assist them to support women and children.
9. To what extent do current processes encourage and support people to be accountable and change their behavior?
- I personally don't think offenders are held accountable at all. I haven't had any experience where I have heard of anyone who has been held accountable and then worked to rehabilitate and change behavior in a way that is long lasting.
  - Prison sentences occur for periods of time to make people accountable but need to include classes on anger management, parenting, information re ICE use and its affects, financial counseling around debt – anything that will assist to reduce and manage stress.
  - Lack of repercussions for perpetrators – we need more behavior change opportunities for perpetrators.
10. What barriers prevent people in particular groups and communities in Victoria from engaging with or benefitting from family violence services?
- People who are newly arrived in Australia are particularly vulnerable as their situation is exacerbated by language barriers, isolation, visa and mental health issues. We need greater community involvement, drawing on the expertise of those belonging to a particular cultural group.
  - New and emerging communities require facilities that meet their needs i.e women's only space, GLBTI friendly, located near transport and linked to other services.
  - Family violence services need to be expanded in order to target the needs of young people.
11. The Royal Commission will be considering both short term and longer term responses to family violence. Tell us about the changes you think could produce the greatest impact in the short and long term.
- Sufficient affordable housing stock to enable rapid rehousing.
  - 24 hour crisis response with accommodation and support so that people may receive the necessary assistance to maintain safe housing at a time of need, so that they do not drift back to unsafe situations.
  - Therapeutic counseling for all members of the family.
  - Sufficient resources to enable follow through on referrals made by police.
  - Financial assistance for women and children escaping family violence.

- Continuation of care on a longer term to effectively respond to and support children who have experienced/witnessed family violence.