

**VICTORIA'S ROYAL COMMISSION INTO FAMILY
VIOLENCE**

**SUBMISSION FROM THE
UNION OF AUSTRALIAN WOMEN
(VICTORIAN SECTION)**

May 2015

UAW(VIC) SUBMISSION TO THE ROYAL COMMISSION INTO FAMILY VIOLENCE

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References.

LISTS OF RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE ROYAL COMMISSION:

Recommendation 1

The UAW Victoria recommends that - as gender inequity is the key causal factor in family violence - the Victorian Government reviews the policies and practices of all State Government Departments and Agencies with the aim of improving the status of women in Victoria.

Recommendation 2

The UAW Victoria recommends that the Victorian Government introduce a specialist family violence court with specialist magistrates and a one judge, one family scheme.

Recommendation 3

The UAW Victoria recommends that the Victorian Government implements RMIT's Centre for Innovation Justice's recommendation for "on the spot incarceration for family violence offenders who do not stick to court orders."

Recommendation 4

The UAW Victoria recommends that the Victorian Government provide additional community services –particularly in outer suburban and rural areas – where women can receive support when dealing with family violence.

Recommendation 5

The UAW Victoria recommends that the Victorian Government ensures that police response times to calls from family violence victims are treated as an emergency so as to prevent injury and death, that DVO's are enforceable and that violent men are made accountable for their actions.

Recommendation 6

The UAW recommends that the Victorian Government develop effective integration of all areas of support for family violence victims.

Recommendation 7

The UAW Victoria recommends that the Victorian Government use its influence to encourage employers to give family violence leave to their workers.

Recommendation 8

The UAW Victoria recommends that the Victorian Government provides specialised family violence services for women with special needs – the disabled, indigenous, women from non- English speaking backgrounds, lesbians, older women and women in prison.

Recommendation 9

The UAW Victoria recommends that the Victorian Government establish additional crisis lines so that all women have the opportunity to access 24 hour 7 day week expert advice.

LISTS OF RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE ROYAL COMMISSION: Continued:**Recommendation 10**

The UAW Victoria recommends that the Victorian Government provides the extra funding for legal aid required to meet the demand of women fleeing family violence and that all Victorian magistrates' courts are immediately provided with up to date video conferencing both essential for women fleeing from family violence and both currently underfunded.

Recommendation 11

The UAW Victoria recommends that the Victorian Government provides urgently needed additional funding for refuges, public housing, affordable housing, emergency housing services and homelessness prevention programmes.

Recommendation 12

The UAW Victoria recommends that the Victorian Government must ensure that women can stay safely in their homes after the perpetrator of domestic violence has been removed.

Recommendation 13

The UAW Victoria recommends that the Victorian Government conduct a "SAY NO TO FAMILY VIOLENCE" Campaign to make all Victorians aware that family violence is totally unacceptable.

Recommendation 14

The UAW Victoria recommends that it should be mandatory for all government schools to conduct programmes to raise awareness of the need to treat others with respect at all times.

Recommendation 15

The UAW recommends that the Victorian Government ensures ongoing detailed data collection and analysis of all aspects of family violence to ensure appropriate provision of services.

Recommendation 16

The UAW Victoria recommends that the Victorian Government carry out research into the impact of alcohol and other forms of substance abuse on the incidence of family violence in Victoria.

Recommendation 17

The UAW Victoria recommends that the Victorian Government provides both the additional funding necessary and the long term strategic planning to ensure that family violence services are effective in supporting victims and controlling the perpetrators of violence.

Recommendation 18

The UAW Victoria recommends that the Victorian Government ensures that all the recommendations of the Royal Commission are adopted.

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UAW SUBMISSION TO THE ROYAL COMMISSION INTO FAMILY VIOLENCE IN VICTORIA

The Union of Australian Women (UAW) is a national organisation formed in 1950 to work for the status and wellbeing of women in a peaceful and environmentally safe world. We have been leaders in a wide variety of campaigns focusing on human rights and social justice. We support diversity and oppose all forms of discrimination. We urge Federal and State Governments to meet Australia's obligations under United Nations Conventions.

UAW Victoria was also established in 1950 and has the same aims and objectives as the national UAW.

FAMILY VIOLENCE A NATIONAL PROBLEM

The Union of Australian Women of Victoria (UAW Victoria) welcomes the Royal Commission into Family Violence in Victoria and congratulates the Victorian Government for providing much needed national leadership in this area. Family violence is not unique to Victoria. It is hoped, therefore, that a Royal Commission in Victoria will provide further up to date information for discussion and action and that this will lead to better responses for tackling the scourge of family violence not only in Victoria but in all Australian jurisdictions.

There has been already been considerable Australian wide Government discussion and reporting on family violence. For example, in March 2015 the Premier of Queensland received a Special Taskforce on Domestic and Family Violence Report from the Hon Quentin Bryce. This report was called "Not now, Not ever" and made 140 recommendations to protect victims and hold abusers to account. Most notably, it recommended a specialist domestic and family violence court with specialist magistrates.

<http://www.qld.gov.au/community/getting-support-health-social-issue/dfv-read-report-recommendation/index.html>

Recognising that family violence is a national problem, we have also read the Interim report of the recent Senate Inquiry into Domestic Violence.

http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Finance_and_Public_Administration/Domestic_Violence/Interim_Report The first recommendation of the report was that "The Committee recommends the Commonwealth restore funding cuts from legal services, housing and homelessness services and the department of Social Services grants program and guarantee funding under the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness for at least four years." A week or so later, following a public outcry the Federal Government announced it would provide an extra \$230 million in homelessness funding and the cuts to community legal services will not now proceed. **Even with the restoration of this funding, this area is still woefully underfunded and we are hopeful that the Royal Commission will recommend additional State funding to these areas.**

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We are aware that the Australian Prime Minister and his state and territory counterparts at the March 2015 Council of Australian Governments meeting (COAG) put “Reducing Violence against women” as the top item in the communique at the end of the meeting. This is not the first time that COAG has raised the need for urgent action in this area. When the Gillard Government was in power, COAG endorsed Australia’s first National Action Plan to reduce Violence against women and children. However, disappointingly much of what was then promised as “urgent” action was not delivered.

We note that the recent COAG meeting decided to spend \$30 million on a national awareness raising campaign to combat family violence. Given that this is likely to lead to increased demand on already inadequate domestic violence services we are aware that these services will not cope without considerable additional funding for the anticipated increased demand from women suffering from family violence.

UAW VICTORIA FOCUS ON FAMILY VIOLENCE FROM THE 1980s

The UAW Victoria has been concerned about the issue of family violence since the 1980s when it was estimated that one in four homicides was committed by men unable to accept that their wives were leaving them.(1) At that time domestic violence was seen as a private matter to be negotiated by individuals on their own and women who, finding their situation impossible to negotiate, walked away from abusive relationships were often severely ostracised by fellow citizens and institutions.(2) Moreover, the defence of provocation meant that a woman who left an unhappy relationship could be judged as having incited her husband to violence by the very act of leaving, therefore contributing to her own denigration, beating or death (3). By 2003 a Federal Government survey found that 36% of women who had married or been in a de facto relationship had experienced violence (4).

The UAW Victoria was among the increasing number of women’s organisations who met to discuss how best to support the women and children who suffered from family violence and how to combat this growing scourge. Many of our older members were also involved in setting up refuges for women in the 1970s.

Some of our members have experienced family violence in their own families and spoken openly of the long term suffering that it causes. Others are still unable to speak about the impact it had on them.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF PUBLIC OPINION AROUND FAMILY VIOLENCE

From the beginning of the twenty first century certain events and actions contributed to changes in attitudes which have, in 2015, led to the establishment of a Royal Commission in Victoria.

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In 2004 Vic Health reported that intimate partner violence was the greatest contributor to ill-health and death in females aged 15 to 44. UAW advocated systematic education campaigns (like the Quit campaign for smoking) safe housing for women and children and increased prosecution of offenders (5).

In 2005, Victoria's Attorney General Rob Hulls abolished the defence of provocation. In 2007 Christine Nixon, Chief Commissioner of Police declared that family violence was a crime, drew up a code of practice for police who would be dealing with it and trained Family Violence Advisors. In 2008 police were issuing intervention orders and could remove offenders from the family home.

Simon Overland and Ken Lay, who succeeded Christine Nixon as Chief Commissioner, carried on in the spirit of change she had initiated (6). For them family violence was no longer a private matter, left for women's groups to act on. Some key figures in government and legal institutions, including powerful men, saw it as an issue affecting all of society. They were also more able to tell how widespread it was. It comprised most of the police work in some areas for instance, with 65,000 police attendances at incidents in Victoria in 2014 and one woman per week in Australia murdered by her partner (7). Along with incalculable human distress, domestic violence was costing the Victorian economy \$3.5 billion each year.

WHAT CAUSES FAMILY VIOLENCE?

GENDER INEQUITY – WE NEED TO REMOVE IT

The UAW Victoria accepts the opinion of Domestic Violence Victoria that gender inequity is the key factor in determining domestic violence. <http://www.dvvic.org.au/index.php/about-us/our-mission.html>

Countries which have least family violence are those where gender equity is greatest – the Nordic countries of Denmark, Sweden and Norway. There women hold leadership positions throughout society and state instrumentalities and industries offer facilities that enable them to do this.(8) Thus, in the 1960s, when the Swedish firm Ericssons built a factory in Broadmeadows, it automatically included an architect designed nursery and kindergarten so that parents, fathers as well as mothers, could work close to their children. Has any other industrial enterprise ever offered such a facility here? (9)

Australians still cling to stereotypes of male/female relations which place women in a secondary role. We believe that it's the main reason why so many Australian women are absent from positions of power.

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- **TREATMENT OF POWERFUL WOMEN.**

A very vivid example of this was the unprecedented hatred and verbal violence directed at Julia Gillard when she was Prime Minister, our leading politician and a world figure. She was described as 'a non-productive old cow' who had 'a target spot marked on her forehead.' It was suggested that 'they should be kicking her to death.' (10) Women activists were her staunchest defenders. Many women and men, however, including fellow parliamentarians accepted such misogyny as part of the 'cut and thrust' of working in government. Men are seen to be the leaders; women are to serve. When women reject such assumptions, violence often occurs, verbal, psychological and physical and this violence is intended to control and punish women for not accepting the stereotype (11).

Glaring examples of sexism and bullying of women in Parliament were seen again during the Senate Hearings into the Australian Human Rights Commission's report into the treatment of children in detention. The comments of Senator Barry O'Sullivan, Attorney- General George Brandis and Senator Ian Macdonald and the way in which they treated Gillian Triggs, the President of the Human Rights Commission, and Senator Penny Wong was absolutely appalling and regarded by many as a national disgrace. (12)

- **WOMEN IN SPORT AND THE MEDIA**

An ABS survey of 2006 showed that in Australia more women (2.6 million) played sport than males (2.1 million) and more citizens played netball (387, 500) than Australian Rules (249,800). The most popular sports for males and females were, in order, aerobics, netball, tennis and soccer. Netball is fast, exciting to watch and requires high levels of fitness. Soccer is played by both males and females (13). This is not reflected in media coverage of sport, where women's sport rarely features. **We recommend that Victorian Government funded radio and TV could play a pioneering role in covering more women's sport.**

Australia's Sex Discrimination Commissioner, Elizabeth Broderick has become focused on the male domination of sport and is working effectively to change this by setting up a "male champions of change group".(14) The original male champions of change group' was assembled in 2011 to talk about deeply ingrained gender inequity. The group included some of Australia's most powerful CEOs. This model is now being used to tackle sport and its aim is to get more women into leadership positions in sport. **This model can be used to effectively tackle gender inequity in other areas and is recommended for consideration by the Royal Commission.**

- **WOMEN IN ADVERTISING**

In advertising too the Victorian Government could note the action of the French government, which is considering legislating to ensure that models must be healthy. Male models invariably look healthy and fit; women too often are unnaturally thin and are frequently made to pose standing pigeon toed and/or open mouthed, suggesting simple-mindedness.

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- **WOMEN ON BOARDS**

The UAW Victoria warmly supports the Victorian government's announcement, made at the end of March, that half of all future appointments to paid government boards and the courts must now be women (15). This is a welcome step towards gender equity and has the added advantage of not taking anything from the budget. **We hope it can be extended to other institutions and instrumentalities.**

- **WOMEN AT WORK**

The United Nations organisation dedicated to gender equality, UN Women, reported recently on the progress of the world's women in their struggle for equality. Its headline findings included that women earn three quarters what men do and do almost 2 and a half times the domestic work. In Australia 59 % of women are in paid employment compared with 72 % of men. Australian women did 5 hours of unpaid work each day. <http://www.unwomen.org.au/>

While more women are working than previously they are still expected –even when they work full time- to be primarily responsible for looking after “the home” and the children. If we are really serious as a society about empowering women we need to encourage men to do their fair share of this unpaid work so that more women can participate in the paid work force

The wages of female workers in Australia still lag behind men's. In its submission to a national inquiry, the Victorian Government urged the Productivity Commission to consider gender inequality and stated that the gender pay gap had swelled to a 20 year high –an 18.8% or \$298 a week pay gap between men and women. If women are to have the ability to escape domestic violence they must have economic independence. The Victorian Government's submission highlights the fact that most vulnerable and low paid workers are women. (16)

The latest Price Waterhouse Cooper (PwC) *Women in Work Index* ranking female economic empowerment - www.pwc.au/media-centre/2015/ - shows that Australia fell 6 places to 15 out of the 27 OECD countries surveyed. This was on measures such as equality of earnings with men, proportion of women in work and the gap between female and male labour force participation. Female labour force participation among OECD countries is highest in Iceland at 80% compared to 64% in Australia. The reasons why Iceland has the best female participation rate are 9 months parental leave (shared between father and mother) and high quality easily available child care. The comparison with Australia is obvious - a less effective parental leave scheme rarely taken by men and inadequate child care which is too often not flexible or affordable particularly for low paid women.

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From the point of view of gender equity the ability for women to work and care for their families is crucial. It also empowers women to work to support themselves and their children so that they are not forced, through financial dependency, to stay in violent relationships.

Even in the paid workforce women are not protected from sexual harassment or assault. In March this year there were widespread media reports about female doctors/ trainee surgeons being sexually harassed by senior surgeons at work. Apparently some women doctors now believe that in a situation where female doctors training as surgeons are the subject of unwanted sexual advances from senior surgeons they should just accept these advances rather than risk ruining their careers. (17)

The situation of these trainee women surgeons highlights the misogynist attitudes that still exist in far too many workplaces. The former head of the Australian Army, David Morrison has highlighted the problems of harassment in the army and Former Commission Ken Lay has also written about unacceptable practices in the Victorian police force. Ken Lay said that in "any strongly patriarchal organisation leaders need to be attuned to some very real risks" and "that we all have a responsibility to make our community and our workplace safer...and to create a culture that encourages gender equality, a culture that ultimately makes all of us safer..." (18). These two inspiring leaders -David Morrison and Ken Lay- show how effective strong leadership can be in challenging patriarchal attitudes in workplaces.

In summary, while women in parliament still face sexist bullying and those in paid employment face bullying and sexual harassment in all professions and workplaces, the extent of violence against women in the home is hardly surprising.

Improving the status of women in society generally is crucial to any attempt to reduce or eliminate family violence. The link between gender inequality and family violence is now well established. If society undervalues and disempowers women in so many ways, it is not surprising that male perpetrators of family violence believe that that they have the right to control their partners by any means necessary, including violence.

In the view of the UAW Victoria, we will not see any significant reduction in family violence until we address the gender inequality that is such a deeply entrenched part of Australian society. The causes of domestic violence are not just too many men who don't know how to control their tempers but lie in deeply entrenched and persuasive beliefs and stereotypes about gender and acceptability of violence.

We urge the Victorian Government to work towards creating a non-violent society where true equality exists between men and women in the home, in the work place and in the provision of all government services and hope that this Royal Commission will prove to be the first step in achieving this goal.

HOW CAN WE SUPPORT THE WOMEN AND CHILDREN WHO SUFFER FROM FAMILY VIOLENCE?

CONTAINING VIOLENT MEN; KEEPING THEM ACCOUNTABLE FOR THEIR ACTIONS

The UAW Victoria supports the pilot programs that have been trialled in Geelong and Hume based on a model developed in Massachusetts. Lives have been saved when violent men have been monitored and punished for threatening their wives and children. A similar model from Glasgow, Scotland, where police maintain a close watch on perpetrators and keep them 'in the spotlight' could be useful in preventing attacks. (19)

The UAW hopes that the government will support the development of such initiatives which aim to keep women and children safe by holding violent men to account

In decisions about family violence the safety of women and children must be put above the rights of men to have access to their children. Violent men must feel the consequences of their behaviour –for example, it is appropriate that choking has now been upgraded to a felony not a misdemeanour. A legal report from RMIT's Centre for Innovative Justice which is headed by former Attorney General, Rob Hulls has recommended **"On the spot incarceration for family violence offenders who do not stick to court orders and a one judge, one family scheme."** This was among a range of significant recommendations. (<https://www.rmit.edu.au/about/our.../centre-for-innovative-justice/>).

We commend the very positive changes initiated in the Victorian Police Force's policing of family violence by former Commissioner Christine Nixon and continued by Commissioners Overland and Lay. In March 2015, an Assistant Commissioner was appointed as the country's' first leader of a family violence command unit. There has been a significant cultural shift at Victoria Police so that many victims of family violence- although still not a majority- are now more confident that they will be believed. The change in culture at Victoria Police has helped to raise awareness of this issue in the community and encouraged women to seek assistance when threatened by violent partners.

Much family violence is still not reported to the police and according to the AGE editorial "A nation shamed by violence against women" (April 11, 2015) four in five women who are being abused have never contacted the police. The State Government must provide other community services –particularly on outer suburban and rural areas- where women can receive advice and support when facing family violence.

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Despite the advances made recently in family violence services, far too many women are still too frightened to leave their violent husbands. They fear that he will once again assault either them or people they love if they attempt to leave. Police response times are still not quick enough to make women think that help can come in time and intervention orders are still broken far too often

More work needs to be done in ensuring that domestic violence orders (DVOs) work to protect women and children and that they are enforceable. Breaches found by a court must be treated more seriously. Making DVO's work across Australia (COAG April 2015) will also help women and children escaping violence who move to another state. Currently women have to apply to register their DVO in the new state if they still want protection. The application then needs to be listed before the court to make sure that it can be enforced in the new location.⁽²⁰⁾ **Hopefully COAG's recent pledge to have Australian wide DVOs will be given priority.**

SUPPORT SERVICES FOR THE WOMEN & CHILDREN EXPERIENCING FAMILY VIOLENCE

For the support to victims of family violence to be effective it must be long term, well-coordinated and include crisis lines; refuges; legal aid; accessible, affordable housing; family counselling services; assistance with finding employment and well-funded community services that can connect women to these crucial services. The Victorian Government must develop more integrated service responses to better support the women and children affected and overcome current barriers to information sharing.

Support organisations are so busy that women are not always able to make appointments when they need them. Faced with these difficulties women are often unable to go to work, may lose their job and become financially dependent on the violent men they are trying to leave. Encouragingly, several of Australia's largest companies are now providing domestic violence leave and the ACTU is campaigning to have the policy written into all awards. This important campaign for workers suffering from domestic violence should be supported. <http://www.asu.asn.au/news/categories/securejobsbetterfuture/141028-domestic-violence-leave-claim>

The less powerful the position of the women the more likely she is to experience violence. So it is important that particular attention must be given by the Royal Commission to examining the situation of women with fewer options- women with a disability, indigenous women who may suffer the loss of their children, women of non-English speaking backgrounds, lesbians, older women, women in prison and women with few work skills.

- **CRISIS LINES INCREASED**

Crisis Lines can also play a role in providing support to victims. A new multicultural crisis line and drop in centre in south-eastern Victoria was launched in April a significant milestone in efforts to end violence against women in multicultural societies. These women are also lobbying for funding to open Australia's first culturally specific refuge. Many women from multicultural backgrounds prefer not to speak to mainstream family violence services because of language and cultural barriers. **This crisis line and drop in centre is a very significant initiative which-if successful- should be replicated in other areas The Victorian Government must be prepared to provide the additional funding to meet the growing demand from women experiencing family violence.**

<http://www.smh.com.au/national/new-family-violence-crisis-line-to-shine-a-light-in-multicultural-communities-20150408-1mgmcr.html>

- **LEGAL AID - GREATER AVAILABILITY**

The demand for government funded legal services is already large and growing significantly each year. Most Victorian women experiencing domestic violence find the private legal system unaffordable and therefore are totally reliant on this Government funded legal aid. Adequate funding for legal aid is crucial – availability of free legal aid is essential in enabling women to flee from violence. Without adequate legal aid women have to represent themselves in court and face their abuser a situation that for many women in this situation is too terrifying.

Given the growing demand for legal aid services the Victorian Government must be prepared to provide the additional funding necessary to meet the present as well as the growing demand from women experiencing family violence. (21)

The Victorian Government is to be congratulated for providing \$8.1 million in the 2015 State Budget to provide magistrates courts with additional mobile conferencing units. There are 53 magistrate courts in the state and only 24 have video conferencing and only one has an up to date system. The remaining courts have either obsolete or soon to expire systems. (22)

As a matter of urgency the Royal Commission must urge the State Government to ensure that all 53 magistrates' courts have video conferencing using the most up to date systems.

- **AFFORDABLE & SUITABLE HOUSING**

Women are far too often forced out of their homes by their violent partners. Access to affordable and suitable housing is crucial for women and children escaping from family violence. A report on the ABC (May 1, 2015) highlighted the situation that women living in refuges face because of the shortage of affordable housing. Women and their children are forced to stay in refuges for longer than desirable.

The high cost of living particularly housing rentals and the appalling scarcity of public housing has meant that many women and their children face the choice either to go back into an abusive situation or face homelessness. 44% of homelessness in Australia is caused by family violence (23). News that the Federal Government has decided not to go ahead with its funding cuts to the National Partnership on Homelessness is welcomed by everyone concerned with this issue. **Victoria however will still need additional state government funding to be provided to eliminate the situation where women experiencing family violence have nowhere safe to go.**

The Council to Homeless Persons (chp.org.au) has reported, April 2015, just how incredibly difficult it is for women fleeing domestic violence to find affordable housing in Melbourne. They estimate that only one suburb in Melbourne was affordable - Melton 35 kms from the CBD. Hardly surprising when for decades the number of public housing properties has been in decline and affordable private rental is almost non-existent. When people question why women don't just leave violent partners, the answer is obvious: there is nowhere to go.

The effects on children who are homeless and traumatised by family violence are enormous. For such children there is a life time of disadvantage through lack of education, higher unemployment and significantly lower wage earnings. (24)

While Victoria has laws providing for exclusion orders (as a condition of domestic violence orders) which require the perpetrator to leave the home the home, there is little evidence to suggest this is widely used (25). This is primarily because the woman and her children for a variety of reasons no longer feel safe in the house where she has experienced violence.

The Royal Commission must investigate ways in which women experiencing domestic violence can stay in their homes safely when the perpetrator of the violence is removed. This enables children to stay in their schools and retains the woman's connection with her local community. This is one of the most important ways in which the Victorian Government can support the victims of domestic violence.

Family Violence prevention urgently requires increased State Government funding for access to refuges, affordable housing, emergency housing services and homelessness prevention programs.

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- **CHANGE COMMUNITY ATTITUDES: PROMOTE RESPECTFUL & EQUAL RELATIONSHIPS**

Currently underfunded services such as legal aid, affordable housing and police resources cannot cope with existing family violence demand. Any awareness raising campaign would be expected to increase current demand and therefore increased funding for these essential services must be part of any overall strategy to tackle family violence.

We believe a family violence awareness raising campaign (similar to the anti-smoking campaign) is necessary because far too many Victorians still hold deeply ingrained cultural beliefs which blame the victim and excuse the perpetrators of family violence.

This campaign should aim to promote respectful and equal relationships between men and women. The campaign should be supported by all levels of Government as well as all community organisations. It should draw the attention of all Victorians to the awful statistics underpinning the campaigns against family violence and show a different, respectful way of relating to each other.

The statistics in Clause 21 of the Royal Commission's Issues Paper showing that in a 2013 VicHealth Survey reported that "22% of respondents agreed with the proposition that domestic violence can be excused if people get so angry that they lose control" is totally alarming and highlights the necessity of a campaign saying no to violence of any kind.

A recent community survey conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics found that a majority of people believed that women used the Family Court to punish husbands. Surveys also show that many Australians still believe a woman should just leave a violent relationship and that, if she doesn't, they blame her for staying showing little empathy and understanding of women in these situations. <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf>

Rosie Batty has also urged Australians to stop blaming the victim and focus on this could be included in the national campaign. Ms Batty emphasised that we must always focus blame where it belongs on the perpetrator of the violence. (26) Rosie Batty has been a powerful voice for women and children affected by violence. Ms Batty has made sure that far more Australians are now aware of the magnitude of this problem and the need for a much improved government response. The fact that Rosie Batty has been made Australian of the Year shows just how successful she has been as a public voice on this issue and also that some Australians in positions of authority are finally aware of the need for improved Government action on this issue.

Victorian Government Schools are already playing a role in eradicating the attitudes that underpin domestic violence by making sure that from primary school onwards children are taught to respect others and reject prejudices based on gender. See: <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/respect>

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It should be mandatory for all government schools to conduct classes aimed at raising awareness of the need to treat all others with respect regardless of gender, sexuality, race or religion. We need a state wide awareness raising campaign similar to those used for eliminating road deaths and smoking focusing on making it totally unacceptable for men to use violence against others. **All aspects of media must be involved in the campaign –social media would play a big role in making all Australians realise that it is not appropriate for men to use any form of violence in particular against their partners or children.**

The people chosen to lead this campaign must be carefully selected so as to have greatest impact on public opinion. We must shape a respectful and safe culture that no longer tolerates any form of family violence either psychological or physical and all levels of society need to be involved in this cultural transformation.

WHAT INFORMATION DO WE NEED TO TARGET SERVICES EFFECTIVELY?

- **BETTER STATE WIDE/ NATIONWIDE STATISTICS**

Significant data collection and analysis by the State Government is needed on the incidence and prevalence of violence and its impact on women and children is needed.

In order to combat family violence effectively we need comprehensive state wide (and nationwide) statistics on family violence. Before you can overcome a situation you need to fully understand it. For example, we need to know the geographic areas where family violence is most prevalent and the situations that tend to exacerbate it. Is family violence worse in the outer suburbs of Melbourne where there are few community supports and virtually no public transport for often isolated women? Without this understanding our efforts at reducing and finally eliminating family violence cannot be totally effective.

We need more information on the long term effects of family violence on women and children. Are children who grow up with violence more likely as adults to have relationship difficulties or to perpetuate the violence they experienced as children? Without this understanding it is also impossible to accurately assess the true cost of family violence to society.

GREATER UNDERSTANDING OF THE LINKAGES BETWEEN ALCOHOL & OTHER SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND FAMILY VIOLENCE

<http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/svaw/domestic/link/alcohol.htm>

According to a recent article in the Conversation (27) alcohol is estimated to be involved in up to half of partner violence in Australia and 73% of partner physical assaults. While we don't believe that alcohol is the cause of the violence it certainly exacerbates it. Attention needs to be given to efforts for preventing alcohol/drug related intimate partner violence.

CONCLUSION

Family violence is a Victorian social and economic emergency.

There were 44 family violence related deaths in Victoria in 2013, the estimated cost of family violence to the Victorian economy was \$3.4 billion in 2009 and in 2013/14 there were 65,000 family violence incidents reported to Victoria police.

<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf>

While these figures are alarming, it is well known, that they underestimate the extent of family violence as so much is still hidden. Family violence shames all of us and it must stop.

Even from an economic rationalist perspective, to say nothing of human cost involved, family violence is having a huge impact on our society. Natasha Stott Despoja (Founding chairwoman of the Campaign to Prevent Violence against Women and their Children) argues that Australian governments would save the \$13.6 billion a year family violence costs, if there was no more family violence in Australia. (28) Taking the figure for Victoria from 2009 of \$3.4 billion into consideration, we can as a society afford to invest in the areas highlighted in this submission. These are aimed at reducing family violence by improving gender equity, supporting the women and children affected by family violence, making the perpetrators accountable and promoting respectful relationships between men and women.

The Union of Australian Women Victoria has campaigned for years to have family violence taken seriously by both our State and Federal Governments and we are delighted that this discussion is at last taking place at all levels of Australian society. It is particularly pleasing that the Victorian government is leading the way to address family violence with the Royal Commission. What is of great concern to the UAW is that the Commission's recommendations will be supported by ongoing additional and appropriate levels of funding for improving family violence services in a wide variety of portfolios in future Victorian Government budgets.

Increased funding and longer term strategic planning for the provision of services on an ongoing basis are crucial if we are to address this issue in a meaningful way. Providing the necessary funding will be the challenge for the Victorian Government following the Royal Commission.

We have never had a better opportunity to make lasting improvements to family violence support services and to make the fundamental societal changes necessary to end family violence in Victoria. Reform is certainly long overdue in this area.

UAW (Vic) Submission to the Royal Commission into Family Violence in Victoria

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