



**MacKillop
Family Services**



ELIZABETH
MORGAN HOUSE
ABORIGINAL
WOMEN'S
SERVICE INC



McAuley Community
Services for Women
a ministry of the Sisters of Mercy

Royal Commission into Family Violence (Victoria)

29 May 2015

Commissioner the Honourable Marcia Neave AO (Chair)
Deputy Commissioner Patricia Faulkner AO
Deputy Commissioner Tony Nicholson

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Western Integrated Family Violence Partnership (Women and Children)

The Western Integrated Family Violence Partnership (Women and Children) endeavours to improve service delivery for women and children experiencing family violence, among the five partner agencies involved: Women's Health West, cohealth Community Health Centre, McAuley Community Services for Women, MacKillop Family Services, Elizabeth Morgan House and, in the coming year, inTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence will join the partnership.

The Partnership also aims to enhance integration and innovation at a regional level to ensure safety for women and children.

In this submission we wish to focus on the regional and statewide structures that will support integration and thus an improvement of the family violence response system. However, first and foremost we wish to emphasise that family violence is caused by gender inequality and this must guide any work in Victoria to prevent family violence. And we strongly recommend that it be recognised that freedom from violence is a basic human right; women and children have a right to live self-determined lives and reach their full potential.

Summary of Recommendations

Recommendation 1. That an understanding that family violence is caused by gender inequality be used as a fundamental premise to guide all prevention work around family violence.

Recommendation 2. That regional governance models be supported and resourced adequately to embed the integration of the service system in response to family violence.

Recommendation 3. That state government structures must be organised and coordinated to ensure an integrated service system. This must be across sectors including justice, housing, health, human services and income support systems. High level policy must be enacted to guide integration and coordination.

Prevention - action on gender inequality

Recommendation 1. That an understanding that family violence is caused by gender inequality be used as a fundamental premise to guide all prevention work around family violence.

The root cause of family violence is gender inequality. In order to prevent family violence all levels of community and government need to work together to remedy gender inequality.

The Vic Health Framework (2007) is an excellent evidence-based model that should form the basis of all prevention of family violence work. This clearly outlines that gender inequality is the fundamental cause of family violence.

Prevention work requires strong leadership at every level of government and community to enable change to take place that alters 'the unequal distribution of power and resources between men and women and adherence to rigidly defined gender roles.' (VicHealth, 2007)

What is required is long term, comprehensive primary prevention work across the community that is evidence-based and appropriately resourced, complemented by whole-of-government policies to redress structural gender inequality.

Improving the response systems

Recommendation 2. That regional governance models be supported and resourced adequately to embed the integration of the service system in response to family violence.

The Western Integrated Family Violence Partnership (Women and Children) represents a cross-sector alliance that includes family violence, health, homelessness, family services, women's services, aboriginal services and more recently multi-cultural responses to family violence with inTouch recently agreeing to join the partnership. The work of the partnership enhances service delivery of those services involved in the partnership as well as contributing to the integration and direction of the broader service system in relation to family violence response in the western metropolitan region.

There are current examples of excellent responses and integration across the sector such as this partnership and the Western Integrated Family Violence Committee. The groups have been working diligently over the past decade to enhance the system and coordination of the system in the western metropolitan region. The Western Integrated Family Violence Committee includes members of the women's and men's funded agencies across the west plus a wide number of other sectors including homelessness, Victoria Police, Child Protection Services, Department of Justice and Regulation, the

Western Centre Against Sexual Assault, and local councils. While the primary focus is on enhancing the integration of the system, and includes an annual plan and key support from the regional integration coordinator, there are also key links to primary prevention work in the region, with project staff from Preventing Violence Together: the western region action plan to prevent violence against women, sitting on each other's governance committees.

Over the last ten years, the integration process has led to system-wide improvements to the way family violence is responded to in Melbourne's west. The collaboration between Victoria Police and the family violence sector is particularly noteworthy.

Regional family violence integration committees and subsets of these, eg the women's and children's partnership in the west, must be fully resourced and supported by government. These governance structures must also continue to expand to include and encourage broader sector participation and incentives to ensure the service and response system is fully integrated across sectors.

This work needs to be recognised as an important investment in integration and this work needs to be included in any funding models.

Recommendation 3. That state government structures must be organised and coordinated to ensure an integrated service system. This must be across sectors including justice, housing, health, human services and income support systems. High level policy must be enacted to guide integration and coordination.

While significant reform has occurred over the past ten years in Victoria in relation to family violence, governance structures and a commitment to whole-of-government approaches have varied. As a result, the system remains disjointed, primarily as a result of a lack of overarching coordination from a state government level.

State government structures must be organised and coordinated across sectors including justice, housing, health, human services and income support systems to ensure an integrated service system.

Statewide and regional governance structures and processes must be based on collaboration, evidence, sustainability and longevity.

Effective integration and coordination 'on the ground' requires sound and consistent high-level policy to guide it. A stand-alone long-term policy to continue to enhance and embed Victoria's family violence reform and integration efforts, will make a difference to integration and coordination in our region. This policy must be able to withstand successive governments, and therefore requires legislation that will hold all state governments accountable to a world's best practice family violence system in Victoria. Adequate long-term resourcing for the completion and embedding of reform and integration is also required.

References

VicHealth. (2007) *Preventing Violence before it Occurs*. Carlton. VicHealth, Victorian Health Promotion Foundation.