



**North Central Victoria Family Services Alliance**  
**Submission to the Victoria Royal Commission into Family Violence**  
**May 2015**

## **Introduction**

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The North Central Victoria Family Services Alliance (NCVFSA) was established in 2008 in line with the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 reform aiming at better addressing the needs of vulnerable children and their families through the implementation of the Best Interest Principles, Best Interest Case Practice model, establishing of Child FIRST and coming together of Integrated Family Services agencies.

The NCVFSA is an alliance of nine Integrated Family Services providers and DHHS. The family services providers are **Bendigo Community Health Service; St Luke's** Anglicare; Catholic Care Sandhurst; Bendigo Aboriginal Cooperative; Kyabram Community Learning Centre; Echuca Regional Health; Njernda Aboriginal Corporation; Castlemaine District Community Health; Cobaw Community Health.

The NCVFSA works across the LGA areas of Campaspe; Loddon; Great Bendigo; Mt Alexander; Central Goldfields; Macedon Ranges which sit within the DHHS area of Loddon.

The vision and purpose of the alliance are:

### **NCVFSA Vision**

The NCVFSA will provide services to improve outcomes for vulnerable children and families. The alliance will partner with other stakeholders to build sustainable sector capacity.

### **NCVFSA Purpose**

The purpose of NCVFSA is to lead and oversee the collaborative development of Integrated Family Services (IFS) in the North Central Victorian Catchment in response to the needs of vulnerable children, youth and families.

This submission to the Royal Commission into Family Violence seeks to capture the practice knowledge of family services about the prevalence of family violence being experienced by women and children in the Central Victorian area. Within the NCVFSA our data consistently highlights that family violence is one of the top three issues at the time of referral and represents between 2% and 22% of total issues identified either at the time of referral and during the integrated family services involvement with a family for the period July – December 2014. Individual agency data indicates it is an issue identified for at least 50% of families engaged with our member agencies.

## **Issues and Actions**

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The key issues and areas for action that the Alliance wishes to highlight to the Commissioners are as follows:

### **Service Accessibility/Support**

For women: Increased accommodation options for women and children.

For children: **Increased children's specific support; counseling; play/art/music/creative therapy – healing opportunities.**

### **Aboriginal children & families**

- Importance of recognizing culture and country for Aboriginal women and children – the significance of leaving their **land to become 'safe'**.
- Increased funding and service options specific to Aboriginal children and families within Aboriginal organisations as well as mainstream services.

### **Perpetrators**

- Continued and increased focus on perpetrator accountability and allowing them to continue to reside in the home.
- **Increased support options such as improved resourcing for Men's behaviour change programs.**

### **Sector/Systemic Issues**

- Ongoing funding for Common Risk Assessment Framework (CRAF) training.
- Ongoing funding for **Assessing and Responding to Children and Young Person's Training.**



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- Increased funding and resourcing for co-location of services to allow improved service response and accessibility.
- Strengthened policies and procedures for Aboriginal and CALD families that ensure culturally sensitive, aware and safe practice.
- Worker safety and impact of perpetrators remaining in the home for family services and other home visiting programs.

**Judiciary/Legal System**

- Specialist Family Violence Court response located in key areas within the Loddon region – Bendigo, Kyneton and Echuca.
- Applicant and Respondent Support Workers at every court.
- Ongoing Magistrate Training about Family Violence and its impact on women and children and the importance of the impact of trauma and **the 'voice of the child'**.
- Training for barristers and solicitors regarding family violence, the impact of trauma and the **'voice of the child'**
- Improved resourcing for FVA and FVLO positions.
- Improved police responses including training.

**Earlier Intervention**

- Multiple access points across the universal system to seek support; MCH; School; Hospitals; Community Health; **GP's** allowing **'easier'**, less confronting opportunities for discussion/seeking support options.
- Continued investment in research programs within hospitals to identify, respond and collect data on patients presenting at hospital eg: Bendigo Health Strengthening Hospital Responses project.
- Ongoing Bystander Education in organisations; Solving the Jigsaw in Schools CNV program (primary schools); Respectful Relationships in secondary schools & Baby Makes 3 (hospitals).

**Privacy and Confidentiality**

- Professional development and implementation of key information sharing practices that prioritise the safety and wellbeing of women and their children.

**Community Education**

- Funding to continue community education and awareness raising activities to better understand violence and its impacts on the broader community.

**Rurality, diversity and family violence**

The NVCFSA works across a diverse geographic area and demographics. Some LGA areas have a high concentration of towns and population whilst other have several towns not closely located with sparser populations. There are a range of lived experiences that reflect cultural and gender diversity, socio economic and locational disadvantage as well as the specific cultural expectations of small rural communities related to gender that underpin many experiences of family violence. There can be a significant lack of services and support available, often compounded by a lack of police availability to respond in some communities. Understanding this, it is respectfully requested that the Commissioners appreciate a one size does not fit all approach to this is essential in developing policy, program or local responses.

Anne Somerville

**Alliance Chair**

**North Central Victoria Family Services Alliance**



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