

Dear Madam / Sir

Submission to Royal Commission into Family Violence

I am a nurse who has worked with disadvantaged and abused children. I live in a suburb that struggles with a range of social issues related to poverty, disadvantage and ethnic backgrounds. Recently our local Council responded to requests from concerned residents (including myself) with enough money to set up a Neighbourhood House. This is a most welcome initiative, as we hope to offer programs at the Neighbourhood House to give people new connections, interests and opportunities to divert them from negative, destructive behaviours that occur too often in this district.

I mention this example because disadvantage, abuse, violence and vandalism are all linked to a lack of opportunities and engagement. Sometimes there is also a lack of the basics - food, healthcare and housing. Those federal politicians who market themselves as 'good economic managers' like to 'save' money by cutting community support programs. But such policies are in denial about their long-term social cost.

When we label people as 'illegals' or 'losers' or 'leaners' rather than being 'lifters' or 'aspirational' then we are dividing society. Those who feel alienated and failures are more likely to behave in anti-social ways, possibly turning to drugs or alcohol, and venting their frustration and anger at those around them – including women and children. I believe that political statements about domestic violence will be mostly empty words unless politicians are prepared to put money where their mouths are: the more affluent must be asked to contribute more in tax revenue.

Governments of both persuasions have presided over homelessness; poverty; family abuse; under-resourced children's protection services; the list goes on. Put simply, social solutions cost money. We need political leaders who are honest about the appalling under-funding of all these areas, and who will market and defend a tax increase on those who can afford it, in order to give a fair go to the vulnerable in our society.

My other key area of concern is the 'mixed messages' that governments send to the community. Our state government is supporting cage fighting – public affirmation of violent blood-sport that uses hands to inflict serious damage on another human being. Further, our state government is subsidising shooters and hunters.

Last week, the Sun Herald featured four murdered women on the front page – all killed by their partners. One woman had been shot, two had been knifed and one had been bashed to death. So why does the state government promote the gun industry and the knife industry? This is not widely known, but the Victorian government publishes an annual 'Victorian Hunting Guide' that contains advertisements for companies that sell guns and knives. Many hunters may be responsible, but this material is available to ALL – including males with vulnerable mental states. The message is: the Victorian government promotes the use of knives and guns for recreational use.

When (as discussed above) social support services are so desperately short of funding, it beggars belief that we are subsidising those who find the use of guns and knives to be suitable recreation for men and boys.

Yours sincerely,

Elizabeth Langford