

# Royal Commission into Family Violence

Submission from the

Goulburn Ovens Murray

Integrated Family Violence Services



**INTEGRATED FAMILY VIOLENCE SERVICES**

*Women, men and children*

**GOULBURN OVENS MURRAY**

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## Executive summary

Ovens Murray Goulburn Integrated Family Violence Services (OMGIFVS) offer the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence a submission based on the combined experience of more than 30 service delivery organisations based in rural and regional Victoria (Appendix 1 details our membership). Our submission is based around the four objectives of the OMGIFVS:

- Consistent risk assessment of women and children regardless of where they live or where they enter the system
- Effective and timely referral to the most appropriate services and/or programs to meet their needs
- Flawless system for perpetrator accountability
- Readily available avenues for recovery.

We outline the multiple challenges faced in meeting these objectives in a rural/regional area as well as providing a series of recommendations to assist in addressing these challenges. We also provide examples of pilot and continuing programs that address family violence victim's needs.

Fundamental to responding effectively with service response in rural and regional Victoria is recognition that the needs and demands of family violence victims in rural and regional areas differ in a number of ways to those of women and children in metropolitan areas. Distance from services and programs is an obvious criterion that needs to be addressed in terms of funding as is location and format of service and associated timely program delivery. Innovative approaches to service and program delivery for rural communities need to be developed, piloted and evaluated. While current services are delivering the programs they are funded to provide, demand continually outstrips supply despite limited uptake of referrals. Major issues to be addressed include:

- Validation of existing programs for victims and perpetrators to ensure they achieve reduced incidence of family violence.
- Review of engagement methods of all services that receive referrals directly and indirectly to ensure they meet a minimum standard.
- Continued and enhanced focus on the behaviours of perpetrators including the removal of anomalies in legislation enabling them to escape accountability.
- Enhanced collaboration between services to enable victim to attend a one-stop shop also enabling funds to be directed more effectively.
- Development of a continuum of consistent language and community awareness programs to ensure a shared understanding of the root causes of family violence and how to support family members and friends experiencing family violence.

Whilst we recognise that men experience family violence, in our submission and in line with our vision, we welcome the opportunity to provide information and recommendations to the Royal Commission and look forward to ongoing improvement in service delivery to women and children experiencing family violence.

## **Objective: Consistent risk assessment of women and children regardless of where they live or where they enter the system**

### **What are the challenges to achieving this objective?**

Consistent risk assessment requires a shared understanding of what family violence is, its indicators as well as the availability of relevant services in convenient locations to support the victims of family violence. A visionary, long-term approach to changing the attitudes and responses of individuals, the community, services and organisations is the way to an embedded and responsive risk assessment that will reduce the incidence of family violence.

The challenges to achieving this are founded in:

- Limited broad community understanding of the continuum from sexist behaviour to violence and murder.
- Limited funding and resources in rural and remote areas can result in waiting lists for women and children to access ongoing services.
- Insufficient funding and flexibility for services to respond in a responsive and coordinated manner to victims living in rural and regional locations.
- A perceived focus by the Federal and State courts on the retention of familial relationship rather than a focus on the safety of victims and the behaviour of the perpetrator.
- Insufficient numbers of Police rostered in rural locations to respond to family violence.
- Inconsistencies in boundaries between Department of Health and Human Service Regions, Local Government Areas and Police Service Areas.
- Cross border anomalies.

### **How can the challenges be addressed?**

#### **Develop and use a common language**

[Create, clarify and disseminate a common language for the continuum of violence that reflects the complexity of family violence.](#)

For example, a victim stating, 'I was in violent relationship' doesn't recognise the mutuality of the word 'relationship'. A more descriptive and appropriate statement would be 'I was with a violent partner'.

For example, terminology differs between NSW Apprehended Violence Orders (AVOs) and Victorian Family Violence Intervention Orders. There are also different standard clauses and different sets of legislation.

[Ensure a consistent use of language related to family violence across all aspects of the justice system.](#)

For example, a Police report stating '(Perpetrator) kissed her', rather than '(Perpetrator) forced his mouth onto her'.

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Review the Common Risk Assessment Framework (CRAF) used by Police.

Currently the CRAF does not assess non-intimate partner violence, males as victims of violence or adolescent/child violence against family members nor does it enable Police to assess the level of risk of the perpetrator returning to the home after exclusion on a Family Violence Intervention Order.

Develop a Code of Practice to ensure shared values across all sectors who come into contact with Family Violence.

Embed common language and service direction through the development of a Code of Practice for all people working in a sector that intersects with family violence issues.

**Educate the community and services**

Continue to develop and deliver a multi-faceted primary prevention approach that begins in early year's education that challenges the determinants of stereotyping and extends a deep understanding of gender across the community.

For example, the Department of Education and Training has developed and disseminated *Building Respectful Relationships: stepping out against gender stereotyping based violence* resource providing teaching and learning activities planned around key themes of gender, power, violence and respect as well as advice around a whole-school approach to violence prevention.

Build into future school curriculum opportunities for learnings about family violence and related issues

For example, weave into Biology curriculum information about the impact of family violence on young children's brain development, in English classes, critique relationships between characters in novels in terms of whether they are respectful relationships.

Provide messages about family violence prevention and identification in formats and locations that ensure their access by specific groups.

For example, consider using packaging such as milk cartons and soft drink containers to share information about family violence issues and services.

Empower victims through education about the family law system and how family law orders can also work to protect women and children according to the current legislation that puts the safety of children before the need for them to have a meaningful relationship with both parents.

Continue and reinforce the training of police in the impact of family violence including the impact of family violence on children.

Police recognise the need for all officers to be aware of the impact of family violence and are undertaking (un-funded) localised training in family violence. They have developed strong relationships with support services and are beginning to see success in terms of an environment of increased reporting of family violence. Breaches of orders are taken seriously.

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There is an ongoing need for all officers to be aware of the impact of family violence and able to make sound risk assessments for children (which could incorporate secondary consultation at the time of referral) , recognising that because a child was not physically injured or not in the room where the violence occurred, there has been an impact.

[Continue to reinforce the inclusion of children and young people's narratives in Police reports.](#)

The Police reporting system enables tracking of children and young people's exposure to family violence and referral to appropriate services. Previously inclusion (i.e. until 5 years ago) in the narratives was ad hoc.

[Continue to train, extend and reinforce the value of the Family Violence Registrars positions in the Magistrates Courts.](#)

The benefits from creation of the Family Violence Registrar position in the Ovens Murray Goulburn region is recognised; however, the value of this position will only be maintained by delivery of a program of ongoing family violence awareness training of other Court based staff. Rurality means there must be acknowledgement that combatting FV in rural areas will cost more than metro per capita and that there needs to be more people in more positions. The Family Violence Registrar position is based in Shepparton and the expectation is that they will provide a consistent level of support across the Goulburn and Ovens Murray areas.

Induction programs for all Court staff should include a family violence awareness component to ensure a basic understanding of the issues facing victims. Locally, we offer a comprehensive training program to assist professionals in understanding the causes and impact of family violence and how to respond. However this training may not be able to continue without funding.

**Consider rural issues when funding services**

[Develop and fund a rural model of safety and protection that takes a longitudinal approach to ensure that the input and activities from support services at crisis point is built on and that perpetration through generations is addressed.](#)

While welcoming the funding provided for early intervention services there is some concern that focus on this, to the detriment of ongoing services will fail to break a cycle of violence in a family. Long-term coordinated changes, support and conversations are required to prevent the pattern of violence in a family recurring. The lack of recurrent funding results in a piecemeal approach and lack of coordination. At present different sources of funding, different timeframes and different funding conditions result in a high turnover of staff. A minimum of a 5 year funding cycle would enable services to plan and to retain staff.

Funding needs to be to a responsible level that enables responsive timely service delivery of programs, assessment and ongoing support with minimum resources made available on a recurrent basis, regardless of whether the location is metropolitan, regional or rural.

[Develop and fund a rural model of safety and protection that takes into account the accessibility and relocation issues faced by women and children in rural areas.](#)

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For example, the geographical distances for victims to travel to services and for services to provide outreach is so great that many victims do not take up services or referrals.

Services have limited or no funds to offer a taxi from farm to a safe location, fuel cards, car maintenance to enable a woman to leave or battery operated safety cameras on a farm to enable a woman to stay on her farm.

[Review the delegations of Police in rural locations to enable the timely sign-off of Safety Orders.](#)

Where there are few officers rostered, an officer with the delegation to sign-off on Safety Orders may not be available. Legislation does allow remote applications however time delays can be evident.

[Review the availability of Police in rural areas to respond to calls about family violence.](#)

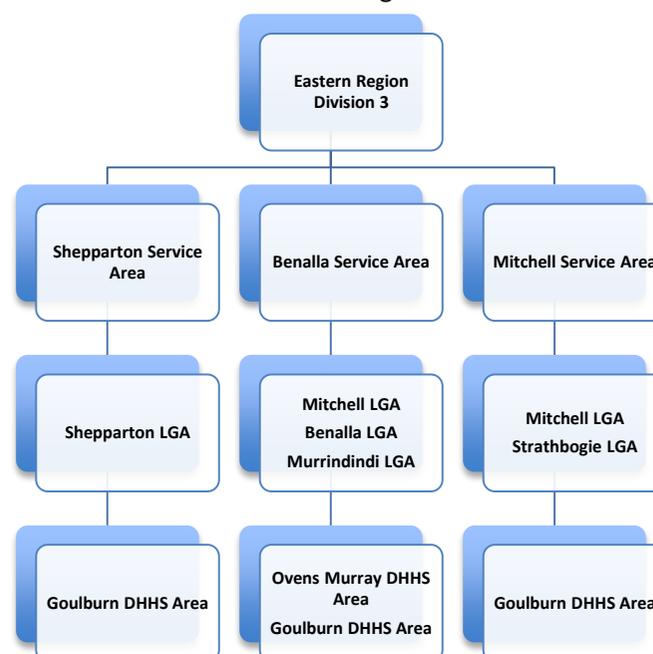
Anecdotal evidence suggests that there are insufficient police rostered in small rural locations to respond to family violence calls. This is apparent despite our central town of Benalla recording the eighth highest number of family violence reports per capita to Police in the State.

**Review service boundaries**

[Review current boundaries for Department of Health and Human Service Regions, Police Service Areas and Local Government Areas to ensure they enable smooth, timely and consistent responses to family violence.](#)

Clear and consistent aligned boundaries are required to reduce the levels of frustrations for victims and for support and referral services to respond effectively to L17 Family Violence Reports.

The variations in boundaries are shown in Diagram 1 using the Eastern Region Division 3 as an example. Diagram 1: Victoria Police Eastern Region Division 3



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**An example of what is working well**

The *Courageous Conversations* campaign, rolled out in 2014 is a social media campaign that aims to inspire individuals and organisations to commit to actions that promote gender equity and respectful relationships. Courageous Conversations encourages individuals and organisations to have conversations that challenge sexist comments, discrimination and disrespectful behaviour. Through these discussions and actions, we can create a culture that is free from rigid gender stereotypes, and an environment, where all women and men, and girls and boys, feel safe, included and respected.

As part of the campaign workers visit community and sports based organisations across the 12 LGAs in our region to discuss questions such as why are there so few women on the executive and sexist talk in the dressing rooms of sporting clubs. There is a website with resources for individuals and organisations. Unfortunately the funding for this program ceases at the end of January 2016. Without ongoing resources for Courageous Conversations, the goal to address the causes of family violence will start to diminish. More information is available at Appendix 2.

## **Objective: Effective and timely referral to the most appropriate services and/or programs to meet their needs**

### **What are the challenges to achieving this objective?**

Availability of appropriate services and their accessibility are two of the most significant issues facing victims living in rural and regional communities. Services in the Ovens Murray Goulburn areas have worked hard to provide accessible and integrated services; however, there are shortfalls in availability of services that can only be addressed by continuing to build the collaborative approach and being funded recurrently to develop and offer validated programs.

In relation to accessibility the issues are two-fold. Firstly there are the issues of rural women being able to attend a service and secondly the demand for services outstrips supply resulting in unreasonable waiting times. The impact of these delays in service provision means that women are likely to reunite with the perpetrator and to continue to experience family violence.

### **How can the challenges be addressed?**

**Develop and fund a rural model of safety and protection that takes into account the availability and accessibility of services and programs for women and children in rural areas.**

#### **Establish a one-stop-shop model**

Victims would have access to a 'one stop shop' or hub where they could relate their experiences to qualified specialist family violence personnel with a strong knowledge of the services available locally, in Victoria and in other states. Following risk assessment with the use of CRAF, they would then be offered a referral plan, prioritising the services and programs they could access. They would also be offered support to attend these services and programs.

A one stop shop needs to be resourced by local people in each regional community, not by a city based metropolitan service with no understanding of the individual community or rural needs/risks. Also to state that Skype/phone help is ok as a second best option, but face to face help is still best.

Access to the 'one stop shop'/hub in the first instance is face-to-face, other options are Skype and phone (including prepaid phone). The emphasis would be on women receiving coordinated information and responses.

The hub model should be extended to courts to connect women with services and to act as a central advocacy point for women. For example, a roster of service providers who can engage immediately with clients, gather preliminary details and make bookings to attend services. These personnel would act as a conduit and support women to make the initial contact with the services they require. This would increase the likelihood that women would

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take the steps to address the issues they are facing. For example, the Service Engagement Officer could provide information about services suggested by the Magistrate for both victims of family violence and perpetrators.

Courts should be more responsible for poor sentencing records and be more involved in driving change. Sentencing must ensure perpetrators are made accountable for their actions and at the same time protect victim. Sentencing should also give a strong message about the serious nature of family violence to the perpetrator, victim and community.

#### Factor support for victims with transport arrangements into funding.

Transport for rural women to attend support services and programs is a significant issue. Funding is required to enable women from rural areas to attend appointments in the town or city where services and programs are delivered.

#### Recognise and address the needs of women of non-English speaking background.

Women from non-English speaking backgrounds who are unfamiliar with, or have a misunderstanding of the purpose of the court system are less likely to report family violence. Developing standardised plain English information explaining the purpose and processes of the court system that can be translated into community languages would assist in addressing this issue. Interpreter services are required for the regional and rural areas of Victoria, as often this service is limited to or preference for metropolitan areas.

#### Adequately address the needs of children and young people who are victims of family violence.

Provide validated early intervention programs for children and young people who are the victims of family violence. These programs will assist to reduce intergenerational violence. They must:

- Recognise and address ages and stages of development
- Be communicated in formats that engage, and continue to engage, children through to adulthood.

#### Duplication of services

State funding leads services to operate in a silo manner, rather than the whole of Government approach towards integration. State funding also leads to a limitation of continuous service provision for people who move interstate. Further to this, limited or poor understanding of the legal systems in various states can lead to a lack of safety and protection for victims of family violence.

### Examples of what is working well

**Building Respectful Relationships: Stepping Out Against Gender-Based Violence** is a teaching resource is aimed at students in years 8 and 9 and specifically explores key concepts around gender, power and violence. It also provides best practice guidelines<sup>i</sup> for whole school approaches to violence prevention where respectful, equal relationships are developed, modelled and practised by all members of the school community (staff, students,

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parents, others) supported by clear policy and protocols based on building an inclusive, respectful school culture.

**Women's Health Goulburn North East programs for young people**

Working with regional Department of Education and Training officers and regional stakeholders, Women's Health Goulburn North East is leading a range of capacity building and workforce development strategies to improve young people's access to effective and sustainable sexuality and relationships education:

- Regional Forum (April 2015) showcasing evidence based State programs and promising practice in Hume region for professionals working with young people in school and community settings.
- Documentation and dissemination of regional best practice tools and resources and sharing of evidence based programs with regional stakeholders in school and community settings.
- Leading the development of collaborative partnerships with DET regional officers and school based staff to assist the planning and resourcing of whole school approaches to violence prevention and respectful relationships.

**Baby Makes 3** is a program for new parents that promotes equality in relationships. Whitehorse Community Health Service, with VicHealth funding, developed *Baby Makes 3*, a primary prevention program that aims to promote equal and respectful relationships between men and women during the transition to parenthood. The centrepiece of *Baby Makes 3* is a three-week group program for first-time parents. It is designed to be incorporated into the group program for new parents run by Maternal and Child Health (MCH) services across Victoria. Supporting the group program are strategies such as 'fathers nights', workforce professional development, policy development, and partnerships with local services.

An extensive evaluation of *Baby Makes 3* demonstrated strong evidence the program was having the desired impacts. In 2011, the program received a VicHealth award for Outstanding Achievement in Health Promotion.

## Objective: Flawless system for perpetrator accountability

### What are the challenges to achieving this objective?

The challenges to achieving a flawless system for perpetrator accountability revolve around:

- Failures inherent in the current state legal system, which result in women and children not being protected from further violence.
- Resolving cross-border anomalies in the justice system.
- Having a range of coordinated, validated and available support programs for perpetrators including intimate partners and young people.
- Having coordinated, validated and available programs for men who are highly likely to respond in a volatile manner from being excluded.
- Availability of emergency housing for perpetrators.

### How can the challenges be addressed?

#### **Ensure the safety of women during court appearances in rural areas**

##### [Provide facilities to ensure safety during court appearances](#)

Access to videoconferencing systems is not widely available in rural areas or if they are available are not used or not used well enough. This may be due to insufficient technical skills or that the availability of the facilities is not known. The facilities are not available in smaller courts. (Corryong, Myrtleford, etc).

Attitude/training required to encourage and promote the use of videoconferencing in a safe and secure location where women can speak confidentially, the parties are separated, protected from the gaze and potential abuse and intimidation from the perpetrator.

Other facilities should include:

- Access to space for private consultations with solicitors.
- Access to private waiting space before a court appearance.
- Access to split courtrooms
- Separate entries to court facilities.

Consultation with family violence service providers regarding the design of court house facilities both during new building development and during refurbishment processes will assist in the design of facilities that enhance safety for women during court appearances. For example, the consultation process being undertaken for the design of the new Shepparton Court House.

##### [Review the capacity of Court systems to adequately service the rural areas they are responsible for](#)

There are unrealistic expectations about the capacity of rural court systems to service large areas. In the Ovens Murray Goulburn region services are centralised in Shepparton where the Headquarter Court is located. This Court is more than a two hour drive from Wodonga, which is located on the Border of Victoria and new South Wales.

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**Identify and address cross-border anomalies that enable perpetrators to avoid accountability for their actions.**

**Intervention Orders - breaches and enforcement**

Intervention Orders need to be recognised across Australia. At present perpetrators are enabled by the differences in states and territories to continue their violent behaviour in other states and be unaccountable for their behaviour. Victims are more vulnerable. For example, a Victorian Intervention Order is not automatically recognised in NSW. This is a significant issue for border residents. In Albury Wodonga, many essential services in the community are in Albury, NSW and Victorian people cross between the communities frequently for work, leisure, education and training.

To gain protection the onus is on the victim to get interstate protection. Many victims don't do this because they are either unaware that they have to, or they simply lack the energy to take yet another legal step to get their protection.

Further to this, if a woman with a Victorian order failed to get her order registered in Albury, and the perpetrator committed acts of violence in NSW, evidence of the breaches occurring in NSW may not be able to be considered by the Victorian Magistrate as technically there was no order in NSW that the perpetrator was breaching, even though such incidents may have breached the order had they occurred in Victoria. A possible solution for this issue is consistent legislation in all states and territories.

**Apprehended Violence Orders (AVO) - breaches and enforcement.**

Apprehended Violence Orders need to be recognised across Australia. For example, if a woman has an AVO in place NSW and moves to Victoria, the AVO won't be automatically be recognised. The Police or the Court won't take any subsequent breaches that occur in Victoria into account until she registers the AVO in Victoria and then only subsequent actions can be taken into account as breaches of the order.

**Increase the referrals of perpetrators to validated programs and services and increase the availability of validated programs.**

**Evaluate all men's behaviour change programs (MBCP) to determine their validity in terms of changing perpetrator's behaviour.**

Overall, there is a very limited amount of funding for men's services and support to be able to challenge the many nuances of family violence and allow men a safety net to discuss, be educated and make changes to their behaviour. The funding that is provided needs to be directed to programs and services that have a proven track record for facilitating changed behaviours. The expectation that men, if they attend a Program, will make significant changes to their behaviour following attendance at a 14-20 week program is ill-informed. For behaviour change to occur there is a need for early intervention, ongoing support and ongoing accountability. At present the take-up of referrals is minute with some services providing examples of take-up of <10% of referrals.

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A requirement for all behaviour change intervention programs for perpetrators to be provided at No To Violence Standards; funding needs to be available to review these standards. Validated, customisable MBCP that meet different demographic needs would be valuable; however, their provision needs to be supported by:

- A model for delivery in rural and regional areas that ensures ongoing availability to ensure timely entry to programs following an Intervention Order or voluntary engagement. At present some programs can be delivered twice/year meaning some men may have to wait up to six-months to access a program. Alternative programs offering entry points 4-5 times/year are available but these do not meet the demand or the need for immediate and ongoing access.
- Realistic funding to meet demand. For example, one service reports that last financial year it was funded for 18 men to complete, had 35 men complete in three groups. Currently the service has 20 men on the waiting list but next program is already full. A research piece by NTV earlier this year revealed the cost of one man being processed through a MBC program is \$2,500.00. A far cry from what is currently funded.
- An accountability mechanism to ensure behaviour change feedback is provided to and used by the Courts and Corrections Services.
- Where applicable, Magistrates should mandate actions for perpetrators to attend follow-up services such as Men's Behaviour Change and Drug and Alcohol Services making FVIO's. The focus of Courts needs to be on the perpetrator's accountability for violent behaviour rather than family relationships.

[Reduce the 'red tape' around sharing relevant information from men's behaviour change programs with the Courts.](#)

Information regarding a perpetrators response to MBCP should be made available to Courts. For example, a perpetrator with 23 breaches of an Intervention Order and who had completed an MBCP program five times was ordered by a Magistrate to attend a further MBCP.

[Incorporate a consistent message regarding family violence into all programs for men.](#)

All programs for men should have a consistent message regarding family violence. For example, programs for new parents, father's programs.

[Establish coordinated, validated and accessible services for the increasing numbers of children and young people who are perpetrating violence against family members.](#)

Family violence referral pathways in rural and regional areas are currently not available for adolescent perpetrators under 18 years old. A significant focus and training is required to ensure appropriate services and programs are available.

[Investigate and implement a range of housing options for perpetrators who are excluded from the home on FVOs.](#)

Traditionally the rural challenges of availability of housing and structure for temporary housing has been built around women leaving. Now men are excluded from their homes on Family Violence Intervention Orders and Safety Notices and the structure is not in place to support this legislation change and progression.

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Housing options would include:

- Accommodating perpetrators away from the family home.
- Establishing Men's refuge based model for emergency housing of perpetrators.
- Establishing a stock of one-bedroom facilities for perpetrators. At present housing options for perpetrators are the same as those offered to the general community at the time of assessment and they are generally not looked at in terms of having a high need for accommodation. They may be offered a motel room for a period between one night and one week, depending on circumstances. They are not allocated transitional housing as they are usually looking for one bedrooms and don't have custody of their children.

**Provide services and programs to address the increase in numbers of perpetrators under 18 years old.**

Adolescent support programs are required as more young people aged 14-17 years are being identified as perpetrators of family violence. In Wodonga, a significant rise in adolescent violence in the home has sparked concerns regarding the lack of services available to address this epidemic. When young people enter the Out of Home Care system through child protection intervention, their access to case management to support their individual needs is limited. An increase in funding is required for therapeutic support for young people regardless of their assessment of being victims or perpetrators of family violence or both.

In order to support the family who experience adolescent violence in the home, a holistic approach needs to be adapted to ensure the safety of victims and accountability of perpetrators, whilst supporting the young people to work through the issues that cause their behaviour in an age-appropriate way.

Behaviour change programs for young people need to address their current development capacity in terms of dealing with emotions and how to live in respectful relationships.

**What is working well?**

BSafe is an evidenced based program that allows women who are at high risk of serious or lethal harm to access immediate emergency service in a discreet manner. The pilot commenced in 2009 with Federal funding.

This is a two-pronged success story: allowing women and children to feel safe in their own environment knowing they can get Police attendance at the click of a button; and increasing the opportunity for perpetrators to be caught breaching an Intervention order by Police.

This program has resulted in a decline of breaches by physical violence as some women have told the perpetrator of the access to the device.

## Objective: Readily available avenues for recovery

### What are the challenges to achieving this objective?

Currently there are insufficient coordinated supports located where women live for them to rebuild, refocus and redevelop their lives with their children.

The funding for Hume Riverina Community Legal Service is inadequate to meet the demand, and the funding for the Service is also constantly under threat like other community legal centres. This is despite being the only free legal service to cover the North East Victoria catchment area (apart from state-wide services who provide limited phone or Skype assistance only). Guaranteeing the funding for Community Legal Centres regionally, and increasing the funding for services where there are regional gaps, would ensure that women are able to access the free help needed in a timely way, in order to get the protection orders that they need, and also get help with the other legal issues arising from the violence, such as homelessness, family law concerns such as child contact, child support and property settlements, and debts.

The challenges to having readily available avenues for recovery include:

- Having readily accessible 'one stop-shop' information and referrals available. Where supports exist there is frequently a need for women to 'plough through a myriad of professionals', 'telling their story again and again' in order to find the service or support that best meets their needs.
- Providing supports for children to tell their experience of family violence without being re-traumatised.
- Ensuring access to free legal services for victims of family violence
- Change of attitudes towards women leaving relationships and towards single mothers
- Perpetrators accessing several available legal services which then create a conflict of interest for the woman to access these services.

### How can the challenges be addressed?

[Undertake a state-wide audit of current family violence related services, map service availability against each location and develop coordinated, creative ways to fill the gaps based on community input.](#)

A cohesive and coordinated response requires the evaluation and mapping of existing services and structures to ensure seamless access to recovery measures. This would involve establishing the range of basic service requirements per location for victims and identifying creative, community based ways to fill gaps.

For example, developing resources for state-wide/Australia wide access via an online service directory with standardised naming/glossary to enable victims to find and access services regardless of where they are located or move to.

[Review the engagement methods of all services that receive referrals directly and indirectly to ensure they meet a minimum standard](#)

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Establish a minimum standard of meeting 80% of referrals to ensure a focus on proven methods. A wide range of avenues should be explored could including joint service visits and Centrelink accessibility as incentives, especially when children are involved.

Develop and fund a rural model of safety and protection that takes into account the detrimental impact of retelling of family violence experiences by women and children in rural areas by ensuring the Courts hear children's experiences in an appropriate and timely manner.

Children should not have to attend court. It is entirely unsuitable for them to be cross-examined unless their best interests are at heart. A solution is for the Court system to go to the child, employing a non-legal specialist with qualifications/experience in the ages and stages of children's development to conduct interview/s in a child friendly environment. The prosecutor and other services would brief the specialist about the interview content requirements – there would be no need for the child to retell their story numerous times. The child witness service in Melbourne provides an example of the type of service that could be made available in rural and regional areas.

Review the funding for community legal services to ensure ongoing access to legal services for victims of family violence

Consistent availability of free legal services for women in rural areas is an essential component of recovery. Currently the Wangaratta and Wodonga family violence lists are on the same day and there is one community legal service for both courts whereas two services are available for victims attending the Shepparton and Seymour courts. Scheduling of lists on different days may assist; however, there are still limited resources for both days. Victims attending Melbourne courts have two free legal services available - Victorian Legal Aid and Victorian Community Centre.

Regionally, private solicitors are available to provide free legal advice; however, they may not have specialised family violence training and numbers are dwindling, as funding is insufficient to ensure clients can make informed decisions about conditions on an order and considerations for future avenues of support. Following assistance from a solicitor at Magistrates Court for FVIO's, the solicitor will then encourage the client to access community legal services for family law matters.

## **What works well**

### **Holistic Assistance and Legal Outreach**

The Hume Riverina Community Legal Service has strong links to other services such as housing and other non-legal services and recognises the importance of working in an integrated manner with other non-legal supports to ensure a holistic outcome for the client.

An example is HALO (Holistic Assistance and Legal Outreach), an unfunded pilot project providing a fortnightly clinic for free legal service in partnership with Gateway Health, Wodonga on Fridays. Whilst this service is not directly related to family violence, it allows clients to access legal support, family violence specialist agencies and other supports in the one building/location. This model is unfunded.

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**Integrated court response project**

Victoria Police attend in excess of 65,000 reports of family violence per year in Victoria. Following an attendance, they are mandated to make referrals for the parties involved. In the Ovens Murray area, these referrals go to Centre Against Violence (CAV). This Family Violence Specialist organisation has determined that over the past 12 months, the uptake from these referrals is less than 20%, for women contacted via telephone.

Local Magistrates Court data from Benalla, Wangaratta and Wodonga for period January 2014 to June 2014 currently reflects that clients making a private application for a Family Violence Intervention Order make up about 50% of applications. This would lead us to think that a large number of clients (predominantly women) are accessing the Court system with no specialised family violence support.

Although on FVIO day in Wodonga, Wednesday, services are attending at the Court, there is no formal coordinated or consistent response to family violence clients.

CAV has noted that when its crisis care worker physically attends court, she is experiencing a higher uptake of requests for service than when making phone contact. Many of the women up taking the support at court are women that it has been unable to contact via phone for a variety of reasons (safety, timing etc.) It is also engaging women who have made private applications with no prior police or specialist service contact.

The Ovens Murray Integrated Family Violence Operational Group is currently piloting a coordinated, frontline service response to the Wodonga Courthouse on FVIO day, with the possibility of the model being rolled out across Ovens Murray Goulburn areas. The purpose is to create a consistent response to both victims and perpetrators of family violence. This model is un-funded.

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## **Appendix 1: Integrated Family Violence Network Ovens Murray Goulburn**

### **What is our vision?**

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This vision is underpinned by a number of guiding principles identified in our Strategic Planning document.

### **Why are we an Integrated Service System?**

Since 2006, specialist family violence services have worked in partnership with a range of community services and the justice system to achieve service integration that improves the safety of women and children and holds men accountable for their use of violence. The program of system reforms that has taken place in recent years in Victoria has consistently recognised that effectively responding to family violence requires coordinated strategy, effort and integration across the Victorian Government and non-government agencies at state-wide, regional and local levels, and in partnership with communities. These reforms have been supported by a number of state-wide strategies, including *Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families: Towards a safer future for Indigenous families and communities* (2008), a ten-year plan to address family violence in Indigenous communities. Since system reform commenced in 2006, there has been a consolidation and embedding of the integrated family violence system across the state, with regional integrated family violence committees responsible for the development and implementation of sub/regional strategic plans. Regional Integration Coordinators have also been funded across the state to support the work of regional family violence committees in promoting service integration, system development and broader strategic planning processes.

### **What will 'making a difference' look like to us?**

An integrated service system with consistent risk assessment of women and children regardless of where they enter the system; effective and timely referral to the most appropriate services/programs to meet their needs; flawless system for perpetrator accountability; and available avenues for recovery.

### **Who are our members?**

Executive

- Department of Health & Human Services – Agency Connections Managers – Ovens Murray and Goulburn
- Chairperson of Ovens Murray Strategic Committee
- Chairperson of Goulburn Strategic Committee
- Auspice of Regional Integration Coordination position
- Regional Integration Coordinator (RIC)

Ovens Murray Strategic

- Centre Against Violence
- Child & Family Services Alliance
- Department of Health & Human Services –Local Connections

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- Department of Health & Human Services – Child Protection
- Gateway Health
- Rural Housing Network Ltd
- Indigenous Family Violence Regional Action Group
- Mungabareena Aboriginal Corporation
- Victoria Police – Family Violence Advisors
- Women’s Health Goulburn North East
- Junction Support Services
- Albury Wodonga Women’s Centre for Health & Well being
- Department of Justice
- Hume Riverina Community Legal Service
- Magistrates Court of Victoria
- Victims Assistance Program.

Goulburn Strategic

- Marian Community Vincent Care
- Child & Family Services Alliance
- Department of Health & Human Services –Local Connections
- Department of Health & Human Services – Child Protection
- Rural Housing Network Ltd
- Indigenous Family Violence Regional Action Group
- Rumbalara Aboriginal Cooperative
- Victoria Police – Family Violence Advisors
- Women’s Health Goulburn North East
- Department of Justice
- Magistrates Court of Victoria
- Goulburn Valley Centre Against Sexual Assault
- Primary Care Connect
- Nexus Primary Health
- Relationships Australia Victoria
- Goulburn Valley Community Legal Service
- Victims Assistance & Counselling Program.

**Regional Integrated Family Violence Governance Model (2013 – DHS)**

Family Violence Regional Integration Committees provide regional leadership on service integration and planning. This governance model is intended to improve clarity about the roles and responsibilities of Family Violence Integration Committees, committee members (including chairs), Regional Integration Coordinators and auspice agencies.

The governance model aims to describe the key elements of each of the roles and responsibilities in sufficient detail so that these functions can be carried out in a consistent way across the integrated family violence system. Seeking the right balance between consistency overall and maintaining sufficient flexibility to accommodate different circumstances, such as those of rural and metropolitan regions, has been a key consideration in the development of the governance model.

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For this submission, we have had feed-in from the following committees:

**Hume Indigenous Family Violence Regional Action Group**

Indigenous Family Violence Regional Action Groups have a pivotal role in implanting community led responses that educate, prevent, respond to and reduce family violence in Aboriginal communities. The IFVRAGs are an inclusive mechanism for the Victorian Aboriginal community to develop local responses to family violence matters, ensuring they are responsive and culturally relevant to Aboriginal individuals, families and communities in Victoria.

<http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/about-the-department/documents-and-resources/reports-publications/victorian-indigenous-family-violence-strategy-regional-action-gro>

**Child FIRST and Family Services**

To support the effective operation of Child FIRST, a Child and Family Services Alliance is established in each Child FIRST catchment. The Child and Family Services Alliances include partners from Child FIRST, all funded family services (including Aboriginal family services), Child Protection and the Department of Human Services Family Services Partnerships. In catchments where an Aboriginal family service does not exist or does not have capacity to be actively involved in the Alliance, the Alliance will demonstrate how it is consulting with the Aboriginal community on Alliance activities.

[http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0016/590110/child\\_FIRST\\_fact\\_sheet\\_PR\\_INT.pdf](http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0016/590110/child_FIRST_fact_sheet_PR_INT.pdf)

**Hume Region Homelessness Network**

The Hume Regional Homelessness Network Coordinator provides coordination, facilitation and communication between the Department and the Sector both centrally and regionally. The Homelessness Network Coordinator positions are funded by the DHHS and auspiced by not for profit community organisations in each region. The Networks have expanded beyond Specialist Homelessness Support Services agencies only to include Transitional Housing Management and other DHHS funded Allied and other Support Services, including Health, Mental Health and other Emergency Relief and other support services.

**Services Connect**

Services Connect focuses on streamlining and simplifying access to human services to ensure that people are connected with appropriate services and supports.

<http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/for-service-providers/for-funded-agencies/services-connect>

**Child and Youth Area Partnership**

Children and Youth Area Partnerships is a new approach, bringing together Victorian Government departments including the Departments of Education and Early Childhood; Health; Human Services; Justice; and Victoria Police to work with local government and the community sector to improve outcomes for vulnerable children and young people.

This approach is important because it recognises that improving outcomes for vulnerable children and young people is a shared responsibility which requires better coordination across a range of partners and a focus on improving services and practice.

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<http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/about-the-department/plans,-programs-and-projects/projects-and-initiatives/children,-youth-and-family-services/children-and-youth-area-partnerships>

#### **Men's Behaviour Change Consortium**

This group meets on a quarterly basis and provides the opportunity for MBC facilitators, Partner Contact workers, Managers and children's workers to discuss practice, training, frameworks and provides an element of professional development, kindly offered by No To Violence. For more information, please contact the RIC on [REDACTED]

#### **Children's Resource Coordinator**

The State-wide Children's Resource Program positions grew out of recognition within government that children were a significant presence in adult focused services within the specialist homelessness and family violence sectors. The Children's Resource Program is primarily to encourage capacity building and develop best practice in responses to children. This aims to ensure that children receive the support and care they need for their safety and wellbeing. The Children's Resource Coordinator supports all Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) and Family Violence (FV) agencies across divisions and is auspiced through one agency on behalf of each area. The Children's Resource coordinator works to build the capacity of practitioners within the sector in recognising the impacts of trauma on children, assessment and engagement strategies and ongoing case management contributing to a sustainable skilled workforce.

#### **Family Law Pathways Network**

The Australian Government funds Family Law Pathways Networks around Australia. Each Network comprises of professionals operating within the family law system who focus on information-sharing and networking opportunities in a local area; and develop and maintain cross-sector training to help build stronger working relationships across the family law system.

<http://www.familyrelationships.gov.au/ProfessionalResources/FPN/Pages/default.aspx>

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## Appendix 2: Courageous Conversations



**courageous conversations**  
Let's talk about respect and equity

Home About Charter Get started Social Media Contact

### About Courageous Conversations



*Everyone has the right to live free from violence, fear and intimidation*

#### Let's talk about respect and equity

The *Courageous Conversations* campaign aims to inspire individuals and organisations to commit to actions that promote gender equity and respectful relationships. Courageous Conversations encourages individuals and organisations to have conversations that challenge sexist comments, discrimination and disrespectful behaviour. Through these discussions and actions, we can create a culture that is free from rigid gender stereotypes, and an environment, where all men and women, and boys and girls, feel safe, included and respected.

#### Courageous Conversations Charter

The [courageous conversations charter](#) provides an overarching framework and policy, organizations can adopt to display their commitment to gender equity and respect relationships. It provides a platform to engage with organisations and offers a tangible avenue to implement actions.

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## Appendix 3: Bsafe



Bsafe offers an intervention to **prevent** further violence and enables women and children to remain in their **own homes** and **communities**.

### What is Bsafe?

Bsafe is a personal alarm system and risk management option primarily for people escaping family violence and sexualised assault perpetrated by intimate partners.

Bsafe uses the same concepts and technology used to enable elderly people to remain safe and independent in their own homes. The only difference is that the system is set up for the response centre to alert the police, not the ambulance.

### How does it work?

Bsafe utilises a mobile unit with GPS tracking supplied by VitalCall, Australia's pioneer in personal emergency response systems.

**How Bsafe works in 3 steps:**

1. The user presses the SOS button on the device, which discreetly sends an alarm to the 24 – hour VitalCall response centre
2. The response centre calls the user's mobile phone to check on their safety and verify the activation
3. If there is no answer or the client does not indicate their correct password, VitalCall immediately alert 000 (Triple Zero) for a police response while continuing to monitor and record the call\*

\*Such recordings can later be used as evidence for court proceedings.

### Australian Crime and Violence Prevention Awards 2010 National Winner

### Bsafe features

- Easy to use
- Discreet
- Small, lightweight and portable
- Accurate GPS position (within 2-4 metres)
- Alarms actioned by VitalCall's professional response centre
- Instantaneous transmission
- Alert notification via SMS and e-mail to close contacts

*Have a Blackberry? The Bsafe app for Blackberry is the right choice!*

- Easy to use (4 rapid pushes of the alarm key)
- Discreet
- Alarms actioned by VitalCall in the Response Centre
- All-in-one device with GPS mobile phone
- Instantaneous transmission via GPRS/3G

### Bsafe – a tool for keeping women and children safe

Bsafe provides an effective, integrated, multi-agency response to victims of family violence. It increases the detection and accountability of perpetrators and strengthens the relationship between the police, family violence, health and community sectors and the community.

### Bsafe:

- Improves safety and security for victims of family violence and sexualised assault
- Reduces fear of crime
- Improves response and risk assessment
- Reduces the incidence of family violence within the community
- Leads to early intervention and arrest of repeat offenders
- Supports victims testimonies within the judicial system
- Increases levels of security within the home and the community



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**Endnotes**

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- <sup>i</sup> Ibid, 6-12
- <https://fuse.education.vic.gov.au/content/29a93fbb-0553-4f9c-a382c30f29afb120/BRR%20full%20document%20110614.pdf>