



**CATHOLIC SOCIAL SERVICES VICTORIA**

**SUBMISSION TO**

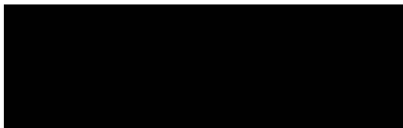
**VICTORIAN ROYAL COMMISSION INTO FAMILY VIOLENCE**

*June 2015*

Contact:

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## 1. Summary and Recommendations

### 1.1 Summary

Family violence presents as a crisis in our community – women are dying. A crisis response is therefore needed. But it is also a long-standing issue, affecting a large proportion of society, and all parts of the community. A response on a broad front, to address long term issues, is thus also needed.

Our goal is a society where people are safe in their families and their close relationships; where violence and abuse are not culturally acceptable; and where all relationships respect the dignity of each person. Education and cultural changes are needed to achieve this, and to build a culture of right relationships.

Our goal is a suite of responses to abuse and of support for victims which empowers people in danger to take protective steps, which provides them with protection, and helps rebuild lives; a system which ensures the safety of victims while enabling offenders to change attitudes and behaviours.

This submission was developed in consultation with our member organisations that provide support and other services for victims of family violence, and with other members with expertise across the social services spectrum. It builds on the principles of Catholic social teaching, which include that respect for the inherent dignity of each person is central to our understanding of community, and this identity gives each person rights and obligations, which must be respected by others.

### 1.2 Recommendations

1. We urge all levels of government to fully fund the 2009 National Plan to reduce violence against women and their children and to take a long-term, comprehensive and sustained approach to implementing its recommendations.

#### ***Abuse can take many forms***

2. It is important that cultural and social change strategies include challenges to all forms of abuse within the family, so that the varieties of abuse become more broadly recognised and victims of non-violent abuse are also supported by their communities.

#### ***Predominance of Women as victims***

3. Gender specific women's services are a crucial part of the family violence service system, and represent the core of the service and advocacy response, and funding should reflect this.
4. Because women are impacted by broader unequal social relationships it is particularly important to respect women's rights and capacities to make choices at all points within the legal and service systems.
5. Broader systemic/ social issues must also be addressed if the unequal situation of women and men is to be addressed, including:



- Actively working towards eliminating the gender wage gap
- Properly funding child care and maternity leave provisions
- Ensuring income security measures are adequate for a dignified standard of living and that recipients including women escaping family violence are not further scape-goated or stigmatized by the payments system
- All levels and arms of government as well as corporations review their policies and processes to eliminate family violence tools, for example, deliberate withholding of child support; use of debt.

***Prevention: education and cultural change***

6. Education systems be resourced to work with family violence specialists to deepen the understanding of young people of all aspects of violence, and of the skills and attributes needed to build a culture of shared responsibility and mutual respect
7. Awareness, education and linkages to response systems should be developed within all the major structures of our society, including Churches
8. There is an important role for community education, so that abuse that is not primarily physical is recognised by those affected and people and services around them, as per defined in the *Family Violence Protection Act* (2008).

***Early intervention***

9. We endorse the Auditor General's recent call for an urgent review of the approach to family support services. This review should ensure that these services retain the capacity to take referrals from and reach out to the community, rather than working solely in the child protection space.

***Responding to risk of imminent physical harm***

10. Initiatives for women and children at risk of imminent physical harm (such as RAMP) must be funded, maintained and developed
11. The rate of breaches of intervention orders and the response to them must be urgently addressed. There is some evidence that immediate action by the Courts can result in behavior change.

***Behavioural change***

12. There is a need for review and evaluation of programs and outcomes for men and their partners - it should not be assumed that all men's behavioural change programs are effective. It is important these programs are not funded at the expense of direct services to assist victims of family violence and promote safety.
13. All services and programs in contact with men, particularly those in high risk groups (such as those in the prison system) should be encouraged to build behavior change as an integral part into existing programs. The focus here should be to build behavioral change in ways that are evidence



based and that prioritize safety of women as a fundamental part of the program

14. Organisations will require resourcing to develop an appropriate level of expertise in behavioural change, and to ensure program effectiveness. Programs must also meet the needs of rural communities, and take into account culture and age/life stage.

### ***Children***

15. Support and services for children should be therapeutic and trauma informed.

### ***Indigenous communities***

16. Indigenous families must be supported and safe in their families and communities, and have the choice to receive culturally appropriate services.

### ***The justice system***

17. Courts must be resourced to enable all arrangements to be structured around the safety and the dignity of victims of family violence.
18. Strategies for dealing with offenders be developed that maintain the safety of women and children, but do not isolate and marginalize offenders from the community and services which will assist them..

### ***Affordable Housing***

19. The Victorian Government invest in an affordable housing strategy that would remove the lack of affordable housing as a factor exacerbating the negative effects of family violence.

### ***Economic abuse***

20. That education around family violence be addressed to all relevant sections of the community, including financial institutions and others who have contact with family violence that includes economic abuse; and that this education encompass all relevant aspects of family violence.

### ***Human trafficking***

21. That forced marriage be treated and recognized as a form of family violence; and that community education broadens the understanding of this reality.

## **2. Introduction**

### ***2.1 Catholic Social Services Victoria***

Catholic Social Services Victoria is a peak body for Catholic social service organisations in Victoria. We work with member organisations, as part of the Catholic Church in Victoria, to fulfil the gospel imperatives to stand with and serve those who are poor, disadvantaged and marginalised, and to work for a just, equitable and compassionate society. Further information about Catholic Social Services Victoria can be found on our website: [www.css.org.au](http://www.css.org.au)



## **2.2 *The expertise of our members***

Our members deliver a wide range of social services across the State. These services aim to support the dignity of people within our community, particularly those who are disadvantaged or marginalised. A list of our fifty-plus member organisations is attached to this submission.

The Catholic social services sector in Victoria delivers services valued at around \$350 million a year. This is equivalent to around 14% of the not-for-profit social services in the State. These services range across the community service sector, and cover all parts of the State.

A number of our member organisations provide specific services and support for women and children who have experienced family violence, and others work with disadvantaged groups and people in crisis, which include many people who have experienced family violence. A number of our member organisations provide crisis services to women and children escaping violent situations. Member organisations active in these areas include Good Shepherd Australia New Zealand, VincentCare, McAuley Community Services for Women, Good Samaritan Inn, MacKillop Family Services, Jesuit Social Services, and Wellsprings for Women.

This submission was developed in consultation with these and other member organisations, and draws on their experience in working to meet the needs of their communities.

## **2.3 *Catholic Social Teaching***

This response to family violence in our community builds on the principles of Catholic social teaching. These principles form part of the overall teaching of the Catholic Church. They are based on gospel values and reflection and experience over time of working with the poor and marginalised, and advocating for justice. Our members continue in this tradition in applying these traditions to contemporary issues.

Respect for the inherent dignity of each person is central to our understanding of community. This identity gives each person rights and obligations, which must be respected by others. Family violence in all its forms, physical, emotional, spiritual and economic strikes against the heart of human dignity. This was at the heart of the call by the Australian Catholic Bishops in 2014 for recognition that 'violence against women has no place in our society'.<sup>1</sup>

It is also important to our shared mission that no one can truly flourish if others in society are unable to achieve their human potential. Anything that diminishes the lives of individuals diminishes the wider community. Jesus said, "I have come that they might have life, and have it to the full." (Gospel of John 10:10)

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Catholic Bishop Conference, Media release of 20 November 2014, *Elimination of Violence against Women*, at <https://catholic.org.au/acbc-media/downloads/all-downloads/bishops-1/media-releases-1/1584-elimination-of-violence-against-women-statement>



### 3. Issues

#### 3.1 *Comments on the Royal Commission*

We welcome the Royal Commission. It will bring into the full light an issue that has been hidden, and allow scrutiny by all sections of the community. We anticipate that the Royal Commission will highlight the strategies for working toward the cultural changes we so urgently need to make. The decisive measure will be when women and children feel free and safe in their own homes and no one dies or is injured as a result of family violence.

We commend the broad Terms of Reference, and the invitation to the Commissioners to make wide-ranging recommendations. Family violence is an intransigent social issue, with deep seated and complex causes, and is one element of the broader set of violence in the community towards women.

We endorse the recognition that responding to family violence requires sustained and simultaneous investment in: prevention, early intervention, crisis and legal responses and longer term support. It also requires both a crisis, safety-focused response together with medium and longer-term support and services, as lives are healed and re-established.

We welcome the recognition of the need for cross-jurisdictional cooperation, across community and government, together with cultural and attitudinal change. We also recognise that much reform in community attitudes can result from leadership and harnessing civil society and community caring, without funding.

We recognise the resource demands of so many of these actions, and note that earlier recommendations to Governments have not yet been adequately funded.

#### **Recommendation.**

1. We urge all levels of government to fully fund the 2009 National Plan to reduce violence against women and their children and to take a long-term, comprehensive and sustained approach to implementing its recommendations.

#### 3.2 *Abuse can take many forms*

We recognise that abuse can take many forms – it can be physical, emotional, spiritual or economic – and is often interrelated. All seek to control the other person and deny them the opportunity to live a full life.

While physical violence is stark, and represents a crisis with current levels of death and injury, other kinds of violence, for example, emotional, spiritual and economic abuse, also have a significant impact on the wellbeing, health of its victims. Importantly, these factors can deny victims the opportunity to leave an increasingly abusive relationship.

#### **Recommendations:**

2. It is important that cultural and social change strategies include challenges to these forms of abuse, so that it is more broadly recognised and victims supported by their communities.



### **3.3 *Predominance of women as victims***

As described in the *Background* to the Royal Commission Terms of Reference<sup>2</sup>, the victims of family violence are predominately women and children. Women who are particularly vulnerable, such as those with disability, are even more exposed to the risk of abuse. We therefore approach family violence informed by a focus on unequal relationships between women and men, and acknowledge the wider issue of violence against women, and the way community and social institutions reinforce these inequalities.

This analysis does not ignore the situation of men who are victims of family violence or diminish their need for safety and support. However it does focus on the main causes of family violence and point to actions, and responses that are called for.

#### **Recommendations**

3. Gender specific women's services are a crucial part of the family violence service system, and represent the core of the service and advocacy response, and funding should reflect this.
4. Because women are impacted by broader unequal social relationships it is particularly important to respect women's rights and capacities to make choices at all points within the legal and service systems.
5. Broader systemic/ social issues must also be addressed if the unequal situation of women and men is to be addressed, including:
  - Actively working towards eliminating the gender wage gap
  - Properly funding child care and maternity leave provisions
  - Ensuring income security measures are adequate to a dignified standard of living and that recipients including women escaping family violence are not further scape-goated or stigmatized by the payments system
  - All levels and arms of government as well as corporations review their policies and processes to eliminate family violence tools, for example, deliberate withholding of child support; use of debt.

### **3.4 *Prevention: education and cultural change***

Education as a means and cultural change as an objective featured in many parts of our consultations around elimination of family violence.

Secondary schools are formative environments, and there are well-received education programs in place, such as those conducted by Good Samaritan Inn in the Northern suburbs of Melbourne. These need further funding, to extend their reach.

Education has a place in strengthening the roles of fathers, and in promoting the

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<sup>2</sup> Victorian Government 2015 *Royal Commission letters patent* at <http://www.rcfv.com.au/MediaLibraries/RCFamilyViolence/UploadedDocs/Terms-of-Reference.pdf>





relationship and other skills that effective fatherhood depends on. A culture of shared family responsibility and mutual respect is needed to displace one in which violence is an acceptable element.

Broad-based education is also an element in enabling the community to adequately support victims. Within the Church, for example, greater awareness of available services could empower parish leaders and others to refer women to appropriate services. The same would apply to other institutions.

Similarly, greater confidence in their understanding of the nature of family violence can help parishes and schools to identify the need for support, and to inform others of these options - staff, parents, parishioners, etc. And greater awareness of the causes - including gender inequality and attitudes towards women - can also help us at a structural level, to reflect and take appropriate action.

In relation to the Catholic Church, the 2014 statement by the Australian Bishops<sup>3</sup> noted that there is much more that can be done. Catholic Social Services Victoria is working to respond to this challenge.

#### **Recommendations:**

6. Education systems be resourced to work with family violence specialists to deepen the understanding of young people of all aspects of violence, and of the skills and attributes needed to build a culture of shared responsibility and mutual respect.
7. Awareness, education and linkages to response systems should be developed within all the major structures of our society, including Churches.
8. There is an important role for community education, so that abuse that is not primarily physical is recognised by those affected and people and services around them, as per the definition contained in the *Family Violence Protection Act (2008)*.

### **3.5 Early intervention**

Universal services such as preschool, childcare, maternal and child health and schools are primary points of prevention and early intervention for the community in a range of issues, including family violence. These and other services need to be strengthened to promote safety and intervene early when families need support.

While it is not clear to what extent early intervention is effective in preventing family violence, early intensive family support can provide linkages to mental health and alcohol/ other drug services, promote safety and protection of children, which may contribute to preventing family violence.

Some of the findings of the recent Victorian Auditor General Office report<sup>4</sup> into

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<sup>3</sup> Australian Catholic Bishop Conference, Media release of 20 November 2014, *Elimination of Violence against Women*, at <https://catholic.org.au/acbc-media/downloads/all-downloads/bishops-1/media-releases-1/1584-elimination-of-violence-against-women-statement>





early intervention services are concerning. The report revealed increasing pressure on services for families, and called for an urgent review of the approach to early intervention services.

### **Recommendation**

9. We endorse the Auditor General's call for an urgent review of the approach to early intervention services. This review should ensure that early intervention services have the capacity to take referrals from and reach out to the community, and that they are not dominated by child protection referrals.

### **3.6 Responding to risk of imminent physical harm**

The Risk Assessment and Management Panels (RAMP) have been an effective means of determining the risk of harm and establishing safety plans. The panels involve representatives from family violence services, Victoria Police, and, depending on the particular case: Corrections Victoria, Child Protection, Child FIRST, men's behavior change programs, local hospitals, Maternal and Child Health Services, Centrelink, the Office of Housing, mental health services and alcohol and other drug services. Other relevant services participate on a case-by-case basis.<sup>5</sup> This inter-agency approach requires a commitment, both from those agencies involved, and in Courts and government.

### **Recommendation**

10. Initiatives for women and children at risk of imminent physical harm (such as RAMP) must be funded, maintained and developed
11. The rate of breaches of intervention orders and the response to them must be urgently addressed. There is some evidence that immediate action by the Courts can result in behavior change.

### **3.7 Behavioural change**

Given the data around family violence, we know that changing male violent behaviour is essential. Men's behaviour change programs are one necessary part of the overall response to family violence.

### **Recommendations**

12. There is a need for review and evaluation of programs and outcomes for men and their partners - it should not be assumed that all men's behavioural change programs are equally effective. It is also important these programs are not funded at the expense of direct services to assist victims of family violence and promote safety.
13. All services and programs in contact with men, particularly those in high risk groups (such as those in the prison system) should be encouraged to

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<sup>4</sup> Victorian Auditor General's Office 2015 *Early Intervention Services for Vulnerable Children and Families* at <http://www.audit.vic.gov.au/publications/20150527-Early-Intervention/20150527-Early-Intervention.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Northern Integrated Family Violence Service <http://www.nifvs.org.au/resources/risk-assessment-and-safety-planning/risk-assessment-and-management-panels-ramps/>



build behavior change as an integral part into existing programs. The focus here should be to build behavioral change in ways that are evidence based and that prioritize safety of women as a fundamental part of the program.

14. Organisations will require resourcing to develop an appropriate level of expertise in behavioural change, and to ensure program effectiveness. Programs must also meet the needs of rural communities, and take into account culture and age/life stage.

### **3.8 Children**

Children who have experienced or been exposed to family violence must receive the support and care they need to recover. There should be services for children responding to their specific needs, in addition to those provided to family unit, due to their distinctive needs.

15. Support and services for children should be therapeutic and trauma informed.<sup>6</sup>

### **3.9 Indigenous communities**

16. Indigenous families must be supported and safe in their families and communities, and have the choice to receive culturally appropriate services.

### **3.10 The justice system**

There is a clear need for the courts to be better prepared for family violence cases. At Ringwood, Frankston and Dandenong, for example, we have heard about women and children being accommodated in the same, fairly small area as the perpetrator of the violence against them. This makes them even more anxious about seeking intervention orders or attending court hearings to give evidence, and in some cases, deters them totally from doing so. Safe and secure areas must be made available for those who decide to take a stand. These areas should be away from the area where the alleged perpetrators are waiting. In addition, legal representation for the women who are attending a court proceeding should be provided in a secure, private area at the court, and well in advance of the case being heard.

While the safety of women and children is paramount, strategies that isolate and marginalize offenders from the community are likely to be counterproductive and cause further harm.

### **Recommendations**

17. That courts be resourced to enable all arrangements to be structured around the safety and the dignity of victims of family violence.

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<sup>6</sup> We note the submission to the Commission from MacKillop Family Services, which provides an excellent overview of the needs of children and young people who have experienced family violence.



18. Strategies for dealing with offenders be developed that maintain the safety of women and children, but do not isolate and marginalize offenders from the community, lest they lead to further harm.

### **3.11 Affordable Housing**

We endorse the submissions to this Royal Commission from the Council to Homeless Persons<sup>7</sup> (of which we are a signatory) which argues that Victoria's shortage of affordable housing exacerbates the effects of family violence in a number of ways: it

- Deters victims from leaving violent relationships.
- Pushes victims into homelessness.
- Can make perpetrators more isolated and increase the risk of repeated or escalated violence.

Safety is dependent on access to housing. Women who wish to leave a violent situation (with or without children) should be provided access to safe, affordable housing. This is needed in the short term, in a Women's Refuge, but also for the longer term. Without such options, the costs of accommodation may prevent women from leaving a violent relationship.

A range of actions is needed to address this, all consistent with the building of a robust housing safety net. The suite of solutions required to break the links between family violence, housing and homelessness in Victoria require significant Government investment<sup>8</sup>, but they are essential, and are within the powers of the Victorian Government. Over time, an investment of \$200m a year would grow the affordable housing stock to an adequate level.

#### **Recommendation:**

19. That the Victorian Government invest in an affordable housing strategy that would remove the lack of affordable housing as a factor exacerbating the negative effects of family violence.

### **3.12 Economic abuse**

Economic abuse is a less recognised form of family violence and consequently it is inadequately addressed. As with other forms of family violence, the act of economic abuse erodes a victim's economic security, creating economic insecurity. Unless a system can better support women in enhancing their economic security, women will remain severely financially disadvantaged by experiences of family violence.

Part of the solution to this problem is to challenge financial institutions, essential service providers, and government departments to change their approach to

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<sup>7</sup> Council to Homeless Persons (coordinator) 2015 *Family violence, homelessness and affordable housing – a joint submission from 129 organisations*, at <http://chp.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Joint-submission-affordable-housing-and-family-violence-May-2015.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Justice Connect 2015 *Family violence and affordable housing*, at <http://www.justiceconnect.org.au/family-violence-and-affordable-housing>



mechanisms like hardship procedures and debt policies, to include awareness of and responses to family violence including economic abuse.

**Recommendation:**

20. That education around family violence be addressed to all relevant sections of the community, including financial institutions and others who have contact with family violence that includes economic abuse; and that this education encompass all relevant aspects of family violence.

### ***3.13 Human trafficking***

We endorse the analysis and the recommendations of Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking in Humans (ACRATH), in their submission to this Royal Commission. ACRATH notes that forced marriage is a form of family violence, but is not often treated or recognized as such. They thus recommend a change in the definition, and community education on this point.

**Recommendation:**

21. That forced marriage be treated and recognized as a form of family violence; and that community education broaden the understanding of relevant communities of this reality.

**Attached:** List of Member of Catholic Social Services Victoria



## Attachment

### Members of Catholic Social Services Victoria

Aboriginal Catholic Ministry	McAuley Community Services for Women
Assisi Centre	Missionary Sisters of Service
Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking in Humans (ACRATH)	Nazareth House/ Sisters of Nazareth
Bethlehem Community	Office for Justice and Peace, Archdiocese of Melbourne
Brigidine Asylum Seeker Project	Order of Malta Hospice Home Care Victoria
Catholic Chaplains Association for Health Care	Pregnancy Assistance Frankston
Catholic Homes	Project Dreaming Tracks
CatholicCare Melbourne	Rosies Oblate Youth Mission
CatholicCare Victoria Tasmania	Sacred Heart Mission
Centacare, Diocese of Ballarat	Shekinah Homeless Services
CatholicCare Sandhurst	Sisters of Charity Community Care
Corazon	Society of St Vincent de Paul
Corpus Christi Community	Solo Catholics
Don Bosco Youth Centre and Hostel	Southern Cross Care (Victoria)
Edmund Rice Camps	St John of God ACCORD
Edmund Rice Refugee & Community Services	St Joseph's Flexible Learning Centre
Good Samaritan Inn	St Joseph's Home for the Aged – Little Sisters of the Poor
Good Shepherd Australia New Zealand	St Mary's House of Welcome
Griefline	The Way Community
Jesuit Social Services	Vietnamese Catholic Family Mutual Assistance Network
John Pierce Centre for Deaf Ministry	Villa Maria
Kewn Kreestha - Rest Home for Mothers	VincentCare Victoria
Keysborough Learning Centre	Wellsprings for Women
Larmenier Child & Family Centre	
MacKillop Family Services	
Marillac	
Marist Youth Care	
Mary Aikenhead Ministries	
Mary MacKillop Aged Care	