

Victorian Coalition

Submission to the Royal Commission into
Family Violence

May 2015

“Family Violence is unacceptable at any time,
in any place and under any circumstances.”

The Hon Dr Denis Napthine, former Premier of Victoria

INTRODUCTION

Over recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the prevalence of family violence and of its devastating impact on its victims, principally women and children.

It has also increasingly been recognised that an integrated strategy is needed to prevent family violence occurring and to better protect and help its victims.

The previous Victorian government put together such a strategy, as set out in its ***Victoria’s Action Plan to Address Violence against Women and Children 2012-2015*** and other documents. Many elements of the strategy were fully implemented during the term of the previous government, and further elements had been announced and were in the course of being implemented at the time of last year’s state election.

In making recommendations for the future, it will be important for the Commission to understand what has been achieved to date and what is, or was, already underway.

While governments should always be seeking ways to improve on what has already been done, ***Victoria’s Action Plan*** and the measures that were in place, and underway in accordance with that strategy, established a strong framework for tackling family violence in Victoria.

It is important that what has been achieved to date is not lost, and that key initiatives that were in the course of being implemented are not abandoned or delayed.

This submission provides an overview of the reform strategy and initiatives of the previous government, identifies key reference documents, and sets out those initiatives underway at the time of last year’s election that the Coalition believes is vital to continue and which, where they have halted or delayed by the current government, should be reinstated and fully implemented.

KEY DOCUMENTS

The previous government's reforms are set out in a number of key documents. They include:

- Victoria's Action Plan to Address Violence Against Women and Children 2012 – 2015, Everyone has a responsibility to act (attached)
- Ending Violence Against Women and Children – Further initiatives for Victoria's Action Plan to Address Violence against Women and Children, 2014 (attached)
- Media Release: Record investment by Napthine Government to prevent family violence, Saturday, 11 October 2014 (attached)

VICTORIA'S ACTION PLAN

The previous government recognised the enormous impact of family violence across all sectors of our community. Upon coming to office, the government took decisive action.

During its term, the previous government implemented a range of initiatives and provided substantial investment to reform and integrate the system, while understanding there was still much to do.

The government established a co-ordinated approach across multiple portfolios and, in a Victorian first, established a Ministerial Council for Family Violence, led by the Premier and supported by all key ministers to drive the government's commitment to ending family violence.

Victoria's Action Plan to Address Violence against Women and Children 2012-2015 was released in October 2012, identifying that the response to family violence needed to address four key areas:

- Prevention – Stopping violence against women and children in our community
- Safety – Protecting women and children
- Accountability – holding perpetrators to account
- Driving Change – developing state-wide behaviour change campaigns

The ***Ending Violence Against Women and Children – Further initiatives for Victoria's Action Plan to Address Violence against Women and Children: Everyone has a responsibility to act 2012-2015*** built on and extended the 2012 strategy, with new initiatives across the full spectrum of family violence policy.

Over four years the government increased funding for family violence initiatives from \$70 million per annum to over \$110 million per annum and its *Further initiatives for Victoria's Action Plan* of 2014 committed additional funding of \$150 million,

increasing total investment to prevent family violence in 2015 to more than \$140 per annum – a doubling over the government term.

Working strategically in partnership with the police, courts and the community sector was recognised as being vital. Over its four years in office, the government also provided significantly more police resources and introduced legislation to enable tougher laws to increase perpetrator accountability.

In addition, the government recognised the need to work with the Commonwealth and initiated and subsequently partnered with them to establish a dedicated Foundation (*the Foundation to Prevent Violence Against Women and Children*) – now renamed *Our Watch*.

Areas of reform and additional funding under *Victoria's Action Plan* are outlined in detail below.

PREVENTION INITIATIVES / PROGRAMS:

The most important step in ending family violence is preventing it from happening in the first place. A range of prevention programs were implemented under *Victoria's Action Plan*.

This has included investment in building the capacity of Victoria's 79 local councils to undertake prevention activities. Workplace, Bystander and Respectful Relationships education programs are being delivered, alongside initiatives to promote and support the role of women and programs for women with a disability. Regional prevention plans are being developed by women's health services in collaboration with local government and community partners.

Work has been undertaken with the media to encourage improved reporting, raise awareness and to challenge the social norms and underlying causes of violence against women and children. This has included the Eliminating Violence Against Women Media Awards (the EVAs), the Domestic Violence Victoria Media Advocacy Program and, for the first time, supporting White Ribbon activities.

Having established the Foundation, the Coalition government also worked closely with *Our Watch*. *Our Watch* has already developed and is delivering new prevention initiatives, in CALD communities, schools and in health services, and was committed to working in partnership with the Government to deliver the committed and funded state-wide prevention and behaviour change campaign.

The state-wide campaign was to be tailored with localised material and include:

- Media relations activity with local media partnerships and tailoring for Aboriginal and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities

- An Ambassador/local spokesperson program
- Engagement with local schools, workplaces, and sports clubs
- Easy to access information for women and children experiencing family violence seeking information about what to do, where to go for help, and options available
- Engagement of a communications agency to develop localised strategy for media partnerships that would potentially include the AFL, individual sporting clubs/teams and Champions of Change.

Whilst there is a growing awareness of family violence within our community, the campaign was intended to be an intense and sustained effort to produce lasting attitudinal change across the community to recognise that family violence is not OK at any time, in any place and under any circumstances. The campaign was intended to produce a change of attitude of similar scale to road safety campaigns such as “Drink, drive, bloody idiot”.

The state-wide behaviour change campaign was to be supported by local action through proven prevention programs. The successful crime prevention Reducing Violence Against Women and Children Grants Program had funded 12 projects over three years, including four Aboriginal-specific projects. This was run from the dedicated crime prevention portfolio.

Interim evaluation of the Grants program by the Australian Institute of Criminology reported that each of the projects delivered substantial achievements in progressing efforts in the primary prevention of family violence. The state-wide campaign was to invest in expanding access to:

- Baby Makes 3 parenting program promoting equal and respectful relationships during transition to parenthood
- Respectful relationships education
- Programs promoting gender equitable and non-violent workplace cultures, and
- Culturally specific prevention projects focussed on building strong relationships, strong communities and the capacity of male community leaders

SAFETY INITIATIVES / PROGRAMS:

Safety is essential for the well-being and stability of women and children who are affected by violence. Initiatives in Government included:

- Piloted, evaluated and fully funded the state-wide rollout of Risk Assessment Management Panels (RAMPS), bringing together all relevant government agencies (DHS, Police, corrections, courts and family support services) to

respond quickly and effectively to assist and protect women and children at high risk of violence.

- Established an Australian first, and subsequently expanded, the Adolescent Family Violence program, an intensive program for teenagers who use violence in the home.
See: <http://www.health.vic.gov.au/healthvictoria/mar13/penin.htm>
- Recruited 1,900 additional police and 950 PSOs, including tripling the number of police in Family Violence Responses Units and doubling the number of SOCITs to 28.
- New legislation to better protect women and children and hold perpetrators to account, including empowering police to issue Family Violence Safety Notices 24 hours a day, 7 days a week rather than just business hours of 9-5pm on weekdays.
- Refined and expanded a range of existing programs including:
 - Family violence counselling and case management services to support an additional 1,200 women and children each year.
 - Additional flexible support packages for 1,000 victims, which help get families back on their feet after an incident of violence.
 - Sexual assault support services for women and children.
 - Sexually Abusive Behaviours Treatment (SABT) program funding.
 - Established four additional multidisciplinary centres (MDCs) in Geelong, Dandenong, Bendigo and Morwell. The MDCs co-locate police, child protections workers, and sexual assault support workers to enable a greater and holistic response.
 - Built new, or substantially renovated 6 refuges and expanded access to crisis accommodation and support allowing more women and children to access to immediate accommodation, with a focus on transitioning to long-term housing opportunities in the private rental market so they could stabilise their lives and regain independence.
 - Training for more than 6,000 mainstream and family violence specialist workers in the Family Violence Common Risk Assessment and Risk Management Framework (CRAF) – which provides a standardised, transparent approach to identify family violence and manage associated risk factors. Further targeted training for specific agencies such as Corrections Victoria was funded.
 - Substantially expanded the number of court-directed and voluntary Men’s Behaviour Change Program places, and added 2 additional

venues of the Magistrates Court which could make counselling orders, to break cycles of violence amongst men and reduce recidivism.

- Through an individualised response for Aboriginal people strategy, under the *Strong Culture, Strong Peoples and Strong Families: Towards a safer future for Indigenous families and communities – Indigenous Family Violence 10 Year Plan*, the Coalition directed funding tailored to each family's cultural needs and individual circumstances through practical assistance including counselling, healing, therapeutic and cultural support and assistance with housing costs. The strategy included developing Aboriginal specific training material to enhance responses to Aboriginal clients by family violence practitioners.
- Education pilot for children impacted by family violence: The pilot was a unique initiative of the Coalition, addressing the need for children to access education whilst fleeing family violence. There is currently no state-wide, coordinated approach to supporting the educational needs of children and young people who can often miss out on weeks or months of school. The Coalition provided funding to enable the pilot of a 'virtual' school that employs outreach teachers to work with and guide children. Teachers and specialist support staff working in the education system would receive training and development to support children and young people affected by family violence.
- Timely support is critical for women and children at high risk of violence: The next steps under the enhanced access to support services strategy was to implement integrated access points across the state using integrated family access teams at sites where there are community-led Services Connect partnerships, so that women get the support they need in a more timely way.
- Specialist triage teams: Teams would provide rapid risk screening of all family violence referrals to police (the L17 form) and immediate triaging and appropriate referral to expanded support services, including Services Connect, as required. These measures would also improve access for women from diverse groups, such as Aboriginal women, women from culturally diverse backgrounds and women with a disability. The establishment of Specialist teams had commenced and state-wide roll out had been funded.
- Flexible post-crisis responses for women and children: Allowed the differing needs of those affected by violence to be met through tailored responses to provide support, protection or short-term counselling.

Further steps in this initiative included investment to provide increased flexible support services to help families affected by family violence to build and maintain safer living arrangements.

- **Services Connect:** All of the specific Family Violence reforms are in the context of broader reform of the Human Services System. Services Connect is a new model for integrated human services in Victoria, designed to connect people with the right support, address the whole range of a person's or family's needs, and help people build their capabilities to improve their lives. It was piloted in 2012 and expanded in 2014 to include Partnerships with Community Sector agencies. Across the eight Partnerships, there are over 115 unique organisations with a wide range of service expertise. The Partnerships also provide good representation across the state, incorporating five metropolitan two regional areas, and one rural area.

The Services Connect Partnerships realign existing case worker positions to operate as Services Connect key workers, with a minimum of seven full-time-equivalent positions per Partnership. Partnerships provide support to all groups of vulnerable people who would normally access community and human services with the specific approach determined by each Partnership according to the needs and circumstances of each area. However all Partnerships must include a focus on three specific cohorts: women and children experiencing family violence, young people leaving care and families whose children are at risk of entering care.

For further information on Services Connect please see:

Human Services: The Case for Change

http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0007/679813/1_iwas_human_services_case_for_change_0412.pdf

Services Connect: Better Services for Victorians in Need

http://www.nwhn.net.au/admin/file/content2/c7/Services_Connect_-_Better_services_for_Victorians_in_need.pdf

Services Connect: Progress Report

http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/901694/DHS-Services-Connect-Progress-Report.pdf

ACCOUNTABILITY INITIATIVES / PROGRAMS

A range of initiatives/programs were implemented:

- Increased perpetrator accountability with tough new penalties of up to five years jail for serious and repeat offenders who breach family violence orders.

- Strengthened management of the parole system for violent and sex offenders.
- Legislation to ensure perpetrators are not able to hide behind their crimes by allowing for the reporting of breached family violence intervention orders.
- Additional funding to Victoria Legal Aid to better meet the increasing demand and increase the capacity of VLA to provide legal advice and support families both directly and through community legal centres.
- Expanding the Court Integrated Services Program which links defendants at the pre-trial/bail stage to support services and helps perpetrators reduce their re-offending was to improve provision of these support services to perpetrators of family violence. The program was funded to expand and therefore further assist the court system to address factors that contribute to family violence, promoting behaviour change and increasing compliance with orders.

The Further Initiatives package also saw the commencement of the implementation of the following:

- Trial of GPS monitoring of perpetrators: This was an important new initiative to enhance perpetrator accountability. The investment was directed to trial court-ordered GPS monitoring of high risk perpetrators with the aim to provide an extra layer of safety for women and children and to ensure perpetrators are held to account. The pilot was to be available for up to 200 perpetrators per year.
- Specialised court staff and safe waiting areas: Access to specialised staff, including staff to support applicants and respondents to intervention order proceedings was funded to ensure it was available in all high demand courts across the state.
- Extending coverage of specialist family violence workers: The Coalition's latest investment was to have workers based in all headquarter courts across Victoria (seven additional courts, bringing the total to 13 courts).
- Safe Waiting areas: Many courts do not have safe waiting areas and many women and children who have experienced family violence often need to wait for court proceedings in the same waiting area as the person who has been violent toward them. The Coalition provided funding to establish safe waiting areas in more courts.

- Reducing re-offending through targeted programs: Influencing offenders in correctional settings to change behaviour and ensure accountability is key. The Coalition package expanded programs delivered through Corrections Victoria for sentenced prisoners, those on parole and those on a Community Correction Order. As part of the \$84 million Callinan parole reform, funding of \$26 million was invested in programs to drive behavioural change and break the cycle of reoffending.

DRIVING CHANGE INITIATIVES / PROGRAMS:

Strong leadership and a governance framework are vital to the task of successfully implementing a whole of government strategy.

A new specifically focussed Ministerial Council for the Prevention of Family Violence, led by then Premier and Deputy Premier and supported by key Ministers, was established.

This Ministerial Council was intended to operate in close consultation with the community sector, police, courts, corrections and community members. It was planned to strengthen oversight and advisory mechanisms in line with government policy directions and monitor outcomes against benchmarks in the new performance framework.

The Further Initiatives package also saw the commencement of the implementation of the following:

- Information sharing: Information sharing in the context of family violence is a risk management strategy and the strategy included investment to pilot an information sharing IT solution to deliver critical information from police, courts and corrections to all decision makers across participating agencies.
- Enhancement of the systemic review of family violence deaths through the Coroner's Court: The Coroner's Court was funded to enable continual practice improvement and identify action that should be taken to prevent further deaths.
- Development of a performance framework to establish and monitor progress against benchmarks: This was to enable an effective performance framework to evaluate individual programs and importantly to measure the impact of coordinated initiatives on attitudes towards family violence.
- Research initiatives included improved data collection: Including for women from Aboriginal and culturally and linguistically diverse communities and

women with a disability.

- Evaluation of justice responses to family violence: Funding was also provided to undertake evaluation and to enable continuous family violence data and trend analysis.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

At the time of last year's election, a range of measures announced in October 2014 as part of the *Further Initiatives for Victoria's Action Plan* package were in the course of being implemented.

The new government's election policy costing document (Labor's Financial Statement 2014) indicated that the government would halt a range of these initiatives pending the recommendations of the Royal Commission, with a consequent cut in the overall level of funding for family violence measures other than the Royal Commission.

These halted initiatives appear to have included:

Education and Early Childhood Development

- Education pilot for children impacted by family violence

Human Services

- Crisis accommodation support for women and children
- Enhanced access to support services
- Flexible post-crisis responses for women and children
- Individualised responses for Aboriginal people
- Multi-Disciplinary Centres – expanding the scope to include family violence
- Multi-Disciplinary Centres – new centre
- Performance framework and monitoring
- Proven prevention and local coordination
- State-wide behaviour change campaign

Justice

- Crime prevention initiatives
- Evaluation of justice-related family violence responses
- GPS monitoring of perpetrators
- Information sharing and risk monitoring pilot
- Victoria Legal Aid expansion
- Targeted programs for offenders in correctional settings

(See the *Pre-Election Budget Update* published by Department of Treasury & Finance and the Labor Party's *Labor's Financial Statement 2014*)

These measures go to both the level of resourcing available to a range of existing programs and to innovative new initiatives.

It is submitted that the Royal Commission should recommend that the government should reinstate, or introduce reforms similar to, the following. In particular:

Education pilot for children affected by family violence: When children and their mother are forced to leave their home due to family violence, the children's education can easily be disrupted. This measure would provide short-term access to remote education resources so that children can continue to receive education until ongoing arrangements can be made.

Multi-disciplinary centres: These centres have proven highly successful in supporting victims of sexual assault. The number of centres should be increased (with greatest need identified in Wyndham) and the scope should be expanded to cover a wider range of family violence.

State-wide behaviour change program: A sustained campaign to change attitudes, similar to successful programs to tackle other widespread social problems such as road safety and smoking, is vital and should be re-established as soon as possible.

Localised crime prevention: Empowering local communities to implement measures targeted to their communities and shaped by local knowledge is a vital part of changing attitudes towards family violence and engaging the community in doing so.

Information sharing and risk monitoring: New forms of intelligent data analysis software have the capacity to draw on multiple databases across government, identify high risk situations and enable decision-makers to be fully informed, while also managing access and appropriately protecting information privacy. Projects using such data analysis software have been successful within Victoria police and Corrections Victoria, for example. Databases held by the courts, police, other emergency services, corrections, child protection, multiple parts of human services, hospitals and other health providers may all be relevant to identification of risks and to decision-making on responses. A pilot of the use of such software should be undertaken as soon as possible.

GPS monitoring: GPS monitoring technology is now available that can track perpetrators, identify when they are in proximity to victims, and allow direct communication by authorities with both perpetrators and victims in such

circumstances. Compared with other measures that solely allow victims to communicate with authorities in the event of attack or threatened attack, this technology has the potential to hold perpetrators to account, allow authorities to reinforce to perpetrators that their actions are being monitored, and give victims a level of re-assurance that they will be alerted if the perpetrator is in proximity. A pilot of this technology should be undertaken as soon as possible.

Stronger sentences for family violence perpetrators: The previous government announced that, if re-elected, it would introduce four year statutory minimum jail terms for perpetrators who seriously injured their victim in breach of an intervention order. This reform would build on the existing regime of statutory minimum sentences previously introduced by the government, and would add to the sentences of up to five years in jail previously also introduced by the government for serious or repeated breaches of intervention orders.

See: <http://www.robertclark.com.au/feature/ideas-and-solutions/four-year-minimum-jail-terms-for-attacks-in-breach-of-family-violence-orders/>

In addition to these measures, it is recommended that the Royal Commission should monitor in particular the deployment of the following further measures that were in the course of being deployed at the time of last year's election, and if necessary make recommendations for the further or enhanced deployment of these measures:

Services Connect: Victims of violence regularly highlight the lack of a coordinated response to, not only the violence, but the full range of needs of a family, many of which are connected with violence. Services Connect goes to the heart of that issue by simplifying access to human services, with one key worker, developing a single plan and one client record, helping to ensure that people are connected with appropriate services and supports. The outcomes from the Services Connect Partnerships need to be carefully evaluated, the model refined and, if early outcomes continue, to be rolled out across the State.

Additional applicant and respondent support workers at Courts: Having additional support workers available both enables better advice and support to help victims, and ensures better understanding by alleged perpetrators of their responsibilities and of options and advice available to them to respond to the allegations made against them.

Secure waiting areas at Courts: The previous government extended CCTV coverage to a wide range of courts in rural and regional Victoria that previously lacked such coverage, and provided funding to further improve court waiting areas for family violence victims. Opportunities to continue to improve waiting areas and security at courts for family violence victims should continue to be sought.

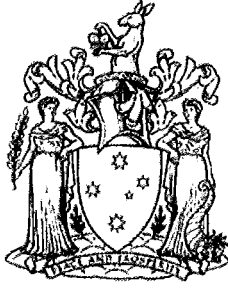
Expansion of the Courts Integrated Services Program: This program assists courts to better manage offenders with a wide range of cognitive, substance or behavioural impairments. The expansion of this program will assist courts to manage family violence offenders with such impairments, thereby reducing the risk of further family violence.

CONCLUSION

The previous government introduced a wide range of measures to bring about real shifts in values, attitudes and behaviour and to better protect and support victims of family violence.

As the 2012 *Victoria's Action Plan* and the 2014 *Further Initiatives for Victoria's Action Plan* documents recognised, ending family violence will require sustained effort and attitudinal change throughout the community, where everyone has a responsibility to act.

It is important that success to date and the benefits of important projects underway at the time of the change of government are not lost and that the Commission's recommendations build on what has been achieved to date, not only by government but by many able and dedicated individuals and organisations throughout the community.



Media release

The Hon Dr Denis Naphthine MP

Premier
Minister for Regional Cities
Minister for Racing

The Hon Peter Ryan MP

Deputy Premier
Minister for State Development
Minister for Regional and Rural
Development

Saturday 11 October 2014

Record investment by Naphthine Government to prevent family violence

- Victorian Coalition Government invests an additional \$150 million to prevent violence against women and children
- Wide-ranging new measures to address prevention, safety and accountability
- Naphthine Government building a safer Victoria

A comprehensive \$150 million action package that will reduce the incidence of family violence across Victoria has been unveiled today by the Victorian Coalition Government.

Premier Denis Naphthine, Deputy Premier Peter Ryan, Attorney-General Robert Clark and Minister for Community Services Mary Wooldridge launched the package in Melbourne this morning.

Dr Naphthine said the new investment doubled family violence funding since the Coalition came to office and would make a real difference in preventing violence and keeping women and children safe, in addition to holding perpetrators to account.

"Violence against women and children is unacceptable at any time, at any place and under any circumstances," Dr Naphthine said.

"Victorians, particularly women and children will be safer as a result of this comprehensive, whole-of-government strategy that tackles this insidious crime at all levels.

"These new initiatives address the causes of family violence, they educate the community, they provide support services for victims and they hold perpetrators to account," Dr Naphthine said.

Highlights of the \$150 million package include:

- \$41 million to deliver Victoria's largest ever prevention campaign in partnership with *Our Watch*, including a social marketing and behaviour change campaign and local community action;
- Expanded crisis accommodation support for women and children;
- A new Multi-Disciplinary Centre for women and children who experience sexual assault, complete with police, sexual assault and family violence experts and child protection staff;
- Outreach teachers to work with children fleeing family violence;
- A trial of GPS monitoring of high risk perpetrators;

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- Additional legal and advocacy support for women;
- Behaviour change programs for men in prison as a result of family violence;
- Specialist staff in courts to assist victims and perpetrators of violence through the court processes; and
- Improved and expanded post-crisis support for women and children.

Mr Ryan said the new \$150 million package builds significantly on the Coalition Government's existing efforts in tackling family violence.

"In contrast, the Labor Party have offered \$1.5 million in recycled announcements and an expensive Royal Commission that will cost millions of dollars and delay action for years," Mr Ryan said.

"The Coalition is getting on with the job. We have a plan, and we are investing in what we know works based on the best advice of victims of family violence, frontline family violence workers, Victoria Police and the courts. The Government is not willing to put more families at risk by procrastinating and delaying rather than implementing a real plan to make families safer.

"Preventing family violence is part of the Coalition's vision for a better Victoria. We want to change community attitudes, we want women and children to be safe in their homes and communities, and to get the support they need, and we want to hold perpetrators to account and stop them from re-offending," Mr Ryan said.

Attorney-General Robert Clark said the Napthine Government would provide additional workers in Victoria's courts to help those affected by family violence and trial GPS tracking technology to protect those at risk.

"These extra staff will provide support for victims throughout the court process and help ensure their safety, while also increasing perpetrator accountability and compliance with court orders," Mr Clark said.

"New GPS technology has the potential to improve safety and confidence for victims of family violence while also making perpetrators realise their movements are being monitored and recorded. This new technology to protect against family violence will now be the subject of a comprehensive trial," Mr Clark said.

Dr Napthine also announced a new Ministerial Council for the Prevention of Violence Against Women and Children, led by the Premier and Deputy Premier.

"We have strong and effective Ministers leading the charge on preventing family violence. We will work with all relevant Ministers to ensure that we have an integrated and effective whole-of-government approach to tackling all aspects of family violence," Dr Napthine said.

Minister for Community Services Mary Wooldridge highlighted the Coalition Government's strong investment in preventing violence against women and children.

"This is Victoria's largest single investment in family violence prevention. There will be a statewide campaign and every area across the state will be provided with funding for local action to prevent violence against women and children," Ms Wooldridge said.

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"Through this significant investment, the Napthine Government continues its commitment to preventing violence, as well as improving responses to violence against women and children when it occurs," Ms Wooldridge said.

Dr Napthine said the Coalition Government had already ensured more police were in place to tackle family violence.

"In addition, we have increased penalties for breaching intervention orders, we are providing expanded services and support to victims of family violence and we are investing in prevention and behaviour change programs," Dr Napthine said.

"With this new package, the Coalition Government has increased total spending to prevent violence and support the women and children who are victims of family violence to more than \$140 million next year. This represents a doubling in funding since 2010."

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2012-2015

VICTORIA'S ACTION PLAN TO ADDRESS VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN & CHILDREN

Everyone
has a **responsibility**
to **act**



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October 2012 (0240812)

FOREWORD

Violence against women and children is unacceptable in any form and under any circumstances and in any community in Victoria. The Coalition Government is committed to preventing violence happening, holding perpetrators to account for their actions and making sure we are supporting those women and children who experience violence.

This Action Plan outlines the government's approach to reducing violence against women and children. Prevention through education, community engagement and early intervention are fundamental to ensure long lasting change across the community.

Our plan provides education and community engagement measures, to help prevent violence against women and children before it occurs.

Our plan provides measures to help identify and assist those women and children who are at risk of experiencing violence. It also provides early intervention measures to help change the behaviour of those at risk of committing violence, before it occurs.

Our plan provides a strong law and order focus, signalling our intention to deter perpetrators from committing violence, hold them accountable for their behaviour and help change their behaviour. Our plan provides compassionate and supportive response services for women and children who experience family violence and sexual assault because these women and children need support to rebuild their lives.

Finally, our plan involves a more co-ordinated and integrated approach by government and other agencies to helping these women and children. It recognises that research, education and early intervention are vital to ensure long lasting change across the community.

The Victorian Government will be committing over \$90 million in 2012-13 to prevent violence against women and children, provide early intervention services and fund support services. This is a 20 per cent increase in funding in just two years. It includes an injection of an additional \$16 million over four years, announced in September 2012, to relieve some of the immediate pressures that have been placed on family violence and sexual assault support and men's behaviour change services as a result of recent increased reporting of family violence.

However, government acting alone will not produce the changes needed – we need the whole community involved. Everyone has a responsibility to act. That's why our plan outlines an extensive range of existing and new measures, and highlights the need to work together across government and across the community to stop violence.



The Hon Ted Baillieu
Premier



The Hon Peter Ryan
Deputy Premier
Minister for Police & Emergency Services



The Hon Mary Wooldridge
Minister for Women's Affairs
Minister for Community Services



The Hon Robert Clark
Attorney-General



The Hon Wendy Lovell
Minister for Housing



The Hon Andrew McIntosh
Minister for Crime Prevention
Minister for Corrections



The Hon Jeanette Powell
Minister for Aboriginal Affairs
Minister for Local Government

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OUR APPROACH

The Victorian Government believes that violence against anyone in any form is unacceptable. Violence against women and children is particularly devastating for families, the community and the state.

Family violence and sexual assault impact negatively on the physical and mental health of women and children. Women living with violence can become isolated, unable to reach out for and receive the support that they need. They may be stopped from going to work and participating in their communities. Children are also deeply affected. When violence is directed at them or when they are otherwise exposed to it, children may be unable to participate fully in education, sports or social events. More generally, the sheer impact of family violence and sexual assault on the health of women and children experiencing it is profound and spans many quality of life measures.

Violence against women and children has massive social and economic costs. The financial costs of family violence are estimated to be over \$3.4 billion per annum for Victoria. Businesses are impacted when employees cannot get to work. Women and families may be forced to forgo earnings. Communities miss out on the valuable contributions of those experiencing violence.

Levels of family violence are unacceptably high and reported family violence in Victoria has more than doubled over the last ten years. While some men are the victims of family violence and sexual assault, women and children of all ages are overwhelmingly the victims of these forms of violence.

Increased reporting is vital to uncovering violence against women and children. We want women to feel more confident to report experiences of violence when they occur and receive the right services at the right time.

Better reporting has been facilitated through the introduction of the Victoria Police Code of Practice for responding to and investigating family violence and the *Family Violence Protection Act 2008*. As a result of these measures, women feel more confident that their experience will be treated seriously by the police and the justice system. Police are responding with more police officers, more call outs, more referrals, more Family Violence Safety Notices, and more criminal charges against perpetrators.

The Victorian Government will continue to encourage reporting of family violence and sexual assault. The Victorian Government will implement a rigorous plan of action to reduce the incidence of family violence and sexual assault and lessen the impact on women, children, other family members and the broader community.

A long-term vision

Our vision is for women and children to live free from violence in Victoria.

Given the extent and complex nature of violence against women and children, our long-term vision is underpinned not just by actions over the next three years, but by directions for the future. Our plan is an important foundation in a longer journey to realise our vision.

We want a future where men do not commit violence against women and children.

We want a future where women do not experience any form of violence by a partner, husband, father or family member and where children do not witness or personally experience violence.

We want women and children in Victoria to be able to realise their potential and participate fully in all aspects of their lives.

To achieve this, women and children must feel and be safe – within their relationships, families and communities.

A shared responsibility across government

Violence against women and children cannot be addressed through the police, justice or community services portfolios alone. Even though these portfolios are integral, other areas such as health, mental health, housing, crime prevention, Aboriginal affairs, education, local government, employment, sport, recreation and youth have roles to play in preventing violence against women and children and in assisting women and children to rebuild their lives if they have experienced violence.

The government will continue to integrate its approach to family violence across all portfolios and broader policy reviews and developments. A snapshot of how our Action Plan sits alongside other Victorian Government policies and strategies is provided at Appendix 3. In particular, our plan will complement the *Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families – Towards a safer future for Indigenous families and communities 10 year plan* which specifically addresses family violence in Aboriginal communities.

The family violence and sexual assault reforms in Victoria to date have been characterised by the establishment of the integrated family violence system, the implementation of sexual assault reforms and significant legislative changes. The work of community and government leaders in initiating and implementing these reforms is recognised and applauded.

While existing efforts to develop integrated and connected policies in relation to family violence and sexual assault will provide a strong base for the actions outlined in our plan, survivors have told us that this is an area still in need of improvement.

Our plan will therefore focus on ensuring that affected women and children receive consistent connected support and service, not endless referrals or multiple application forms. Dedicated reforms, such as the Department of Human Services' new Services Connect model and our innovative approach to homelessness support for women escaping family violence will help (see Appendix 3). There will also need to be ongoing improvement of the mainstream system, including the need to improve information flow across services.

A shared responsibility across the community

The Victorian Government cannot end violence against women on its own. We need change across our community to stop violence against women and children. We need the community talking about this issue and rejecting violence against women and children. We need men to lead and challenge other men about this issue. All of us must take a stand on this issue – violence against women and children is unacceptable.

Realising the long-term vision of all women and children living free from violence in Victoria involves everybody including governments, businesses, media, community organisations, sporting organisations, communities, families and individuals.

We believe that there is increased preparedness across the community to act against violence towards women and children. Our plan encourages and supports this.

Our focus

Reflecting its priority status across government, our plan reflects a whole-of-government approach, linked to other government agendas and strategies. It will be led by ministers across a range of portfolio areas.

Our plan takes a direct approach to the issue: violence against women and children is unacceptable. From this very clear starting point, our plan builds on previous Victorian leadership and works towards a long-term vision of all women and children living free from all forms of violence.

Forms of violence experienced by women and children in Victoria are addressed in the Action Plan and are included in Appendix 1. The context for the Action Plan is outlined in Appendix 2, which sets out the extent of violence against women and children in Victoria and its social and economic impact.

The plan is supported by an investment of \$90 million in 2012–2013 which includes expanded family violence and sexual assault counselling services, alongside broader reforms to legal, police and court processes and better connected services for women and children who experience violence.

This Action Plan will leverage partnerships with other organisations and communities to:

- prevent family violence from occurring
- intervene earlier to identify and support women and children who are at risk of violence
- respond to violence by holding perpetrators to account, ensure connected services are available, and provide strong deterrents to stop re-offending.

Prevention

Prevention is at the core of our Action Plan. Our emphasis is on educating the community to change attitudes and behaviours that have allowed violence against women and children to continue.

Major new initiatives in schools, media and workplaces will be implemented to educate and promote respectful and non-violent relationships and to ensure that all Victorians reject the use of violence against women and children.

Action will also be taken to engage organisations and communities to promote gender equity, cultural respect and a culture of non-violence. Regional action plans with a community focus will be developed to connect community organisations and individuals working on this issue and to raise awareness, share information and educate communities.

New prevention initiatives that are tailored to meet the needs of multicultural communities will also be implemented. Prevention initiatives will also be undertaken to better understand and address the dynamics of family violence experienced by women with disabilities.

Early intervention

Early intervention is a critical part of addressing violence against women and children.

We will act to identify women and children who are at the greatest risk of violence and provide interventions that reduce their risk and increase their safety. Initiatives include the expansion of family violence risk assessment and management training and resources for service professionals to identify and manage the safety of women and children at risk of violence.

Action will also be focused on changing the behaviour of men who use violence. Initiatives will include training for mainstream services so that they are better equipped to work with men who are at risk of being violent and a pilot program for adolescents who use violence in their homes to prevent further escalation of violence, ensure the safety of all family members and change the young person's behaviour.

Response

A comprehensive, integrated system will provide consistent, coordinated and timely responses to women and their children and will hold perpetrators of family violence to account. Under our plan, support services to women and children in areas of greatest need will be expanded, including, women's and children's family violence counselling and case management and sexual assault counselling.

We will continue to build community confidence to report family violence to police.

Reducing family violence is an operational priority for Victoria Police and it remains strongly committed to responding effectively and consistently to violence against women and children.

To improve the way in which it responds to and investigates family violence, Victoria Police has introduced the Enhanced Family Violence Service Delivery Model and currently engages dedicated Family Violence Advisers and Family Violence Liaison Officers. It also utilises family violence teams in areas of high demand across the state.

Victoria Police has strengthened its approach to sexual assault and child abuse through the implementation of Sexual Offences and Child Abuse Investigations Teams and has worked with other agencies such as the Department of Human Services and the Department of Justice to establish and operate multidisciplinary centres to provide holistic responses to victims of these crimes.

Victoria Police will continue to improve responses to sexual assault, family violence and child abuse through *Living Free from Violence: Upholding the Right – Victoria Police's strategy to reduce violence against women and children*, as well as actions outlined in this Action Plan.

Specialist family violence courts have also contributed to increased confidence in the system through consistent specialist support and improved integration with police and services. The justice system must be able to respond swiftly and effectively to increased rates of reporting.

Under our plan, new laws are proposed to hold perpetrators to greater account and to enhance police and court processes, so that family violence matters can be dealt with more expeditiously, meaning swifter justice for perpetrators and improved safety for victims. These reforms will be developed by the Victorian Government in consultation with the community.

New offences and penalties will be introduced for breaches of family violence intervention orders, including the introduction of an indictable offence with a maximum penalty of five years imprisonment.

We will also be extending the operation of Family Violence Safety Notices issued by police so they can operate for up to five days, rather than the current three days. This will better protect women and children by extending the immediate protection police can provide to family violence victims before the case can be heard by a court. It will also give victims more time to obtain advice and make decisions, and will allow cases to be better scheduled for hearings, meaning less congestion and shorter waiting times at court for victims and their families.

Our Action Plan also provides for more mandated men's behaviour change programs, to bring about a fundamental change in the attitudes and behaviours of men who continue to act violently against women and children. The number of places in these programs will almost double. We will also pilot a program for offenders in prison or on community based orders.

These actions will protect and empower women and children, get tough on perpetrators and reduce re-offending.

A strong collective impact

By taking a strong, practical approach based on a fundamental premise that violence against women and children is unacceptable, our Action Plan provides a coordinated plan that will have a strong collective impact.

Our plan recognises that violence against women and children is a complex social and economic problem that affects all Victorians. A complex issue needs a multi-faceted approach based on practical action across many areas of government and across the community as a whole. This plan contains a set of mutually reinforcing initiatives across the spectrum of prevention, early intervention and response.

While the Victorian Government can provide strong leadership and integrated approaches, the task of reducing the incidence and impact of violence against women and children also involves communities, organisations and individuals taking action – everyone has a responsibility to act.

Working together, we can reduce the incidence of family violence and reduce the negative impact on women and children, families and communities.

THE ACTIONS

The Victorian Government initiatives to address violence against women and children fall within three streams:

- **Preventing violence against women and children** by educating to change attitudes and behaviours and to promote respectful non-violent relationships and engaging organisations and communities to promote gender equity and stop violence.
- **Intervening earlier** by identifying and targeting individuals and groups who exhibit early signs of violent behaviour or of being subjected to violence.
- **Responding through an integrated system** which provides consistent, coordinated and timely responses to women and children who experience family violence to protect and empower them to rebuild their lives and to get tougher on perpetrators and prevent re-offending.





PREVENTION

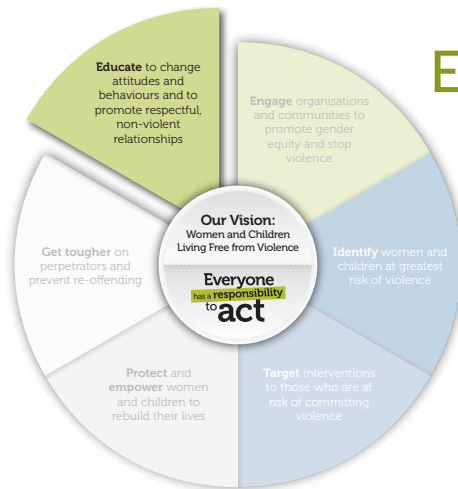
Preventing violence against women and children by fostering relationships, organisations, communities and cultures that are gender equitable and non-violent

Primary prevention strategies seek to prevent violence before it occurs. Interventions can be targeted at the whole population or tailored to particular groups or communities

Areas of focus

Prevention initiatives are grouped into two areas of focus:

- **Educate** to change attitudes and behaviours and to promote respectful, non-violent relationships.
- **Engage** organisations and communities to promote gender equity and stop violence.



Educate to change attitudes and behaviours and to promote respectful, non-violent relationships

Actions to improve attitudes towards women, to promote respectful and non-violent relationships and to ensure that all Victorians reject the use of violence against women and children, in all circumstances

Current Initiatives

- **White Ribbon Awareness Raising** – a male-led initiative to prevent violence against women. The initiative supports awareness raising through White Ribbon activities, including an event where Victorian Members of Parliament make a pledge to say no to violence.
- **Bullying Prevention Programs** – a suite of programs including the Stamp Out Bullying program, to raise community awareness and promote local action to address and prevent bullying (including cyber-bullying) in schools.
- **Media Advocacy Project for Victims/Survivors of Violence against Women** – trains and supports survivors to engage with the media and be spokespeople for media interviews and public events.
- **Eliminating Violence Against Women Media Awards (EVAs)** – recognise excellence in the responsible reporting of violence against women, including family violence or sexual assault.
- **Victoria Police Indigenous Family Violence and Sexual Assault Awareness Campaigns** – locally produced television commercials in four regional locations, that reinforce the message that violence and sexual abuse against women and children is not part of Aboriginal culture and encourages reporting of family violence and sexual assault.

Further Initiatives

- **Respectful Relationships Education** – a whole-of-school program to build respectful relationships education into the curriculum and provide other relevant resources and teacher training, to work with schools to improve student social media literacy and to support the safe use of technology as a platform for respectful relationships.
- **Disability Sector Resources and Training** – information, resources and training programs for people who work with women with disabilities so that they can better understand and address the dynamics of violence that affects women with disabilities.
- **Comprehensive Media Program** – information sessions and resources for journalists and media, (including the ethnic and Aboriginal media) for reporting on violence against women and other issues related to portrayal of women in the media.
- **Promoting Positive Media Portrayal of Women and Girls** – work with other governments across Australia and the media to promote positive media representations of women and girls and consider how we can limit the sexualisation of women and girls in the media and popular culture.



Engage organisations and communities to promote gender equity and stop violence

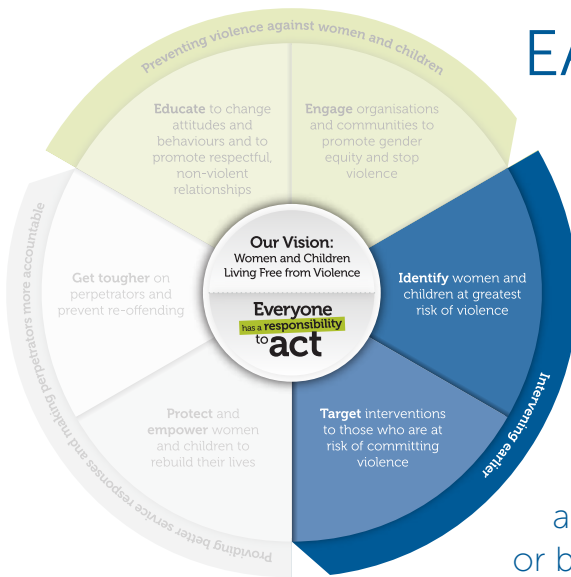
Actions to address the underlying causes of violence against women and children including unequal power relations, adherence to rigid gender stereotypes and broader cultures of violence

Current Initiatives

- **Preventing Violence Against Women in our Community Project Pilot** – delivering a range of locally relevant initiatives to prevent violence against women in three local government clusters.
- **Reducing Violence Against Women and their Children Grants** – provides regionally-based funding to encourage innovation, strengthen partnerships and build the evidence base for early intervention and primary prevention initiatives, including the Koori Community Safety Grants Program.
- **Local Government Program** – resources and training delivered to Victorian local councils to build their understanding of and capacity to prevent violence against women.
- **Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families Plan** – continue to implement actions from *Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families – Towards a safer future for Indigenous families and communities 10 year plan*.
- **Implementing the Indigenous Family Violence Primary Prevention Framework** and funding for the Indigenous Family Violence Community Initiatives annual grant round.

Further Initiatives

- **Regional Action Plans** – develop and implement coordinated and cohesive regional action plans and activities to engage community organisations across regions in preventing violence against women.
- **Toolkits and Training for Workplaces** – provide resources, toolkits and training for workplaces to develop environments that are inclusive, safe and supportive of women.
- **Bystander Program** – to equip people to know what to do when someone known to them is experiencing or using violence against women.
- **Prevention in Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Communities** – work with targeted culturally and linguistically diverse communities on a program of activities and resources that are culturally sensitive, to raise awareness, provide information and promote leadership on preventing violence against women.
- **Preventing Violence against Women in our Community Pilot Review** – consider findings of the evaluation to inform how we best promote good practice approaches to prevent violence against women in local communities through local government.



EARLY INTERVENTION

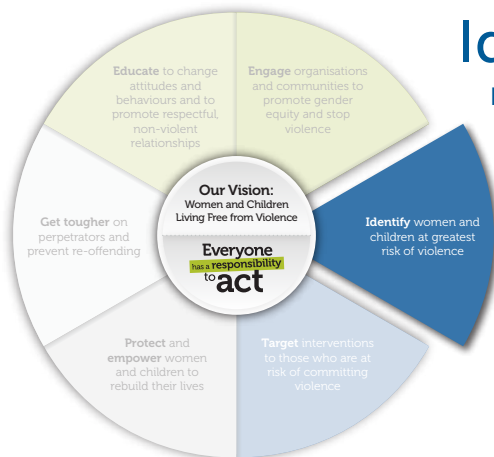
Identifying and targeting individuals and groups who exhibit early signs of violent behaviour or of being subjected to violence

Strategies are aimed at identifying vulnerability and developing the skills of individuals and groups where there are indications that violence might occur or be repeated

Areas of focus

Early intervention initiatives are grouped into two areas of focus:

- **Identify** women and children at greatest risk of violence.
- **Target** interventions to those who are at risk of committing violence.



Identify women and children at greatest risk of violence

Actions focused on the identification of vulnerable women and children, and on minimising violence and its impact

Current Initiatives

- **Family Violence Risk Assessment and Risk Management Framework** – provides a standardised, transparent approach and tools to identify family violence and manage risk to improve the safety of women and their children. Recently extended into mainstream community service organisations and sectors as well as to a broad range of other specialist services.
- **Resourcing Health and Education Program** – works to prevent violence, encourage increased reporting and identify perpetrators of violence against sex workers. It also provides support to sex workers when they report assaults to police.
- **Pilot Perinatal Emotional Health Program Model** – this model aims to improve the capacity of the metropolitan perinatal service sector to identify and support women experiencing mental health symptoms, and psychosocial risk factors such as family violence and drug and alcohol use.
- **Antenatal Routine Psychosocial Screening Training** provided to staff in hospital antenatal settings to identify women with psychosocial risk factors, and how to respond to screening results.
- **Protecting Children Protocol** – to ensure ongoing collaboration between Victoria Police and the Department of Human Services in relation to vulnerable children.
- **Mental Health Inpatient Facilities** – improving the safety and security of women in care in mental health inpatient services through defined female areas and other improvements to facilities.
- **On-line Bullying Prevention Toolkit** – to assist schools to identify the prevalence and types of bullying occurring and determine the most effective strategies for addressing bullying.

Further Initiatives

- **Further extend Family Violence Risk Assessment and Risk Management Framework in Health Sector** – to Mental Health and Drug and Alcohol providers, Hospitals, GPs, Ambulance staff and to Emergency Management personal support and recovery staff.
- **Strengthen hospital responses to family violence** – develop a project to review and improve quality processes which strengthen hospitals' responses to family violence and optimise their relationship with the integrated family violence system.
- **Further extend Family Violence Risk Assessment and Risk Management Framework** to community corrections officers across the state.
- **Adapt Family Violence Risk Assessment and Risk Management Framework** for use in Aboriginal communities.

- **Assessing children and young people experiencing family violence** – a specialist practice resource and supporting training for family violence practitioners.
- **Family Violence and Homelessness Innovation Action Project** – as part of the *Victorian Homelessness Action Plan 2011–15*, a Family Violence and Homelessness Innovation Action Project which focuses specifically on early intervention and prevention for families at risk of or experiencing homelessness due to family violence.
- **Online Advice and Information** – improve online visibility of advice and information on sexual assault and family violence.
- **Integrated services** – retain family violence regional integration coordinators to better coordinate services and create strong inter-agency partnerships at a local level.



Target interventions to those who are at risk of committing violence

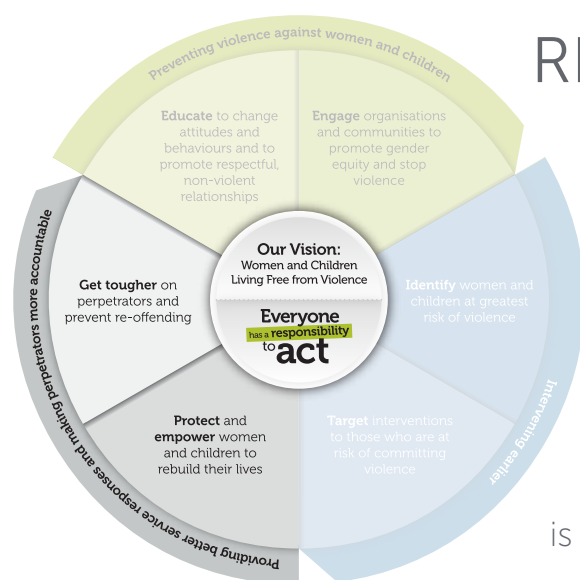
Actions focused on identifying those at risk of committing violence and intervening to change their behaviour

Current Initiatives

- **Voluntary Men's Behaviour Change Programs** – provide ongoing groups for men who use (family) violence with information and skills to change their behaviour and refer them to other services as required.
- **Therapeutic Treatment Orders and specialist treatment services** provided through the Sexually Abusive Behaviour Treatment Program to address problem sexual behaviour or sexually abusive behaviour displayed by children or adolescents.
- **Indigenous Time Out Services and Men's Group Programs** – provide support for Aboriginal men who use violence.

Further Initiatives

- **Pilot Behaviour Change Program for Adolescents** – pilot a new scheme for adolescents who use violence in the home to increase safety and reduce the likelihood that they will offend in adulthood.
- **Expanded Sexually Abusive Behaviours Treatment Program** – increase the number of Sexually Abusive Behaviours Treatment Program places from 240 per annum to 445 and establish an ongoing professional development program.
- **Training for mainstream services to work with men** – training sessions for mainstream services on how to work more effectively with men who have used violence against women.



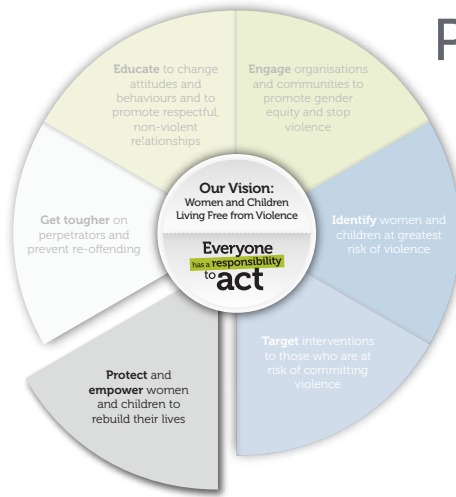
RESPONSE

Responding to violence after it has occurred through an integrated system which provides consistent, coordinated and timely responses to women and children and which holds perpetrators to account

Strategies aim to deal with violence, its consequences, and reduce the risk that it is repeated or escalates

Response initiatives are grouped into two areas of focus:

- **Protect and empower** women and children to rebuild their lives.
- **Get tougher** on perpetrators and prevent re-offending.



Protect and empower women and children to rebuild their lives

Actions to ensure that service responses protect, support, and empower women and children who are victims of violence

Current Initiatives

- **Immediate crisis care services** – such as emergency accommodation and support for women and children, crisis care responses including through Crisis Care Units, after hours services, police and legal support services.
- **Service responses** – such as women and children’s counselling, family violence support services, including outreach support, safe at home options, services for Aboriginal women experiencing family violence and extended after hours support.
- **Family Violence Protection Act 2008** – legislation that aims to protect victims of family violence and hold perpetrators to account.
- **Justice responses** – includes specialist family violence court services and intervention, Child Witness Service, specialist sexual offences lists in the Magistrates’ Court and the County Court, training for judges and the legal profession on issues surrounding sexual assault, a forensic nursing network, specialist Sexual Offences Units within the Office of Public Prosecutions, legal support services for Aboriginal women experiencing family violence.
- **Sexual Assault Reform Strategy** – reforms to the justice system’s response to sexual assault to meet the objectives of increasing rates of reporting and improving the experience of sexual assault victims in the justice system.
- **Sexual Assault Multidisciplinary Centres** – three centres are currently operating involving co-located partners: police investigators, sexual assault counsellor/advocates and child protection workers, to provide improved support for adult and child victims of sexual assault, enhanced investigation of sexual offences and child abuse, improved quality of evidence in sexual offence cases, increased reporting and reduced complaints withdrawn from justice and ongoing improved engagement with health and support systems.
- **Statewide Advisory Services** – including the Domestic Violence Resource Centre, Domestic Violence Victoria, Women with Disabilities Victoria, In Touch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence, No to Violence and Indigenous Men’s Resource and Advisory Service.
- **Strengthening Risk Management Demonstration Projects** – two sites testing the implementation and delivery of coordinated multi-agency approaches to strengthen family violence risk management, providing for consistent and timely responses when assessing, planning and responding to the needs of a woman and her children, regardless of whether she reports family violence to police or other services.
- **Indigenous Healing Services** – services for families who have experienced family violence.
- **New Statewide Aboriginal Women’s Response Services** in Mildura and Morwell.
- **Sexual Assault Support Services** – provide counselling, advocacy and support to child and adult victim/survivors of sexual assault.

- **Referral Pathways and Integrated Support for Older Women** – the *Elder Abuse Prevention and Response Guidelines for Action 2012–2014* raise awareness and ensure appropriate service responses are available to older women in the family violence and homelessness sectors.
- **Sexual Offences and Child Abuse Cross Training** – cross training between Sexual Offences and Child Abuse Investigation Teams and other service providers to improve responses to women and children.
- **Disability and Family Violence Crisis Response Pilot** – provides immediate disability support to women who have a disability or who have a child with a disability so they can access family violence crisis accommodation response or remain safely in their own home.
- **Family and Reproductive Rights Education Program** – supports culturally-sensitive, participatory work with affected communities, prioritises women's empowerment and seeks to increase access to, and improve, sexual, reproductive and mainstream health services for those at risk, or affected by female genital mutilation.
- **Responses to sex trafficking** – Sex Industry Coordination Unit established within Victoria Police to monitor legal and illegal brothels and develop intelligence capabilities around human trafficking, including sexual servitude. Victoria Sex Industry Strategic Management Group established, to oversee a multi-agency enforcement program against illegal sex work.
- **Victoria Police Enhanced Family Violence Service Delivery Model** – implementation of the enhanced service delivery model to ensure consistency of service delivery across the state whilst maintaining capacity for local innovation and response.
- **Family Violence Teams** – increased Victoria Police Family Violence Teams, especially in high incidence areas as well as Family Violence Advisers and Family Violence Liaison Officers.
- **Victoria Police Code of Practice for the Investigation of Family Violence** – ongoing implementation of the code to enhance safety and support for victims, early intervention, investigation and prosecution of criminal offences, and to minimise of family violence in the community.

Further Initiatives

- **Services Connect** – extend Services Connect lead sites to incorporate family violence services, police and children's services within an integrated service delivery model.
- **Koori Family Violence Police Protocols** – expansion to three more sites in the Grampians, Shepparton and Dandenong in addition to existing sites in Mildura, Darebin and Bairnsdale.
- **Expanded Women's and Children's Counselling and Case Management** – to support those women and children experiencing family violence.
- **Sexual Assault and Child Abuse Multidisciplinary Centres** – three additional centres to be established to provide improved support for adult and child victims of sexual assault.
- **Expanded Sexual Assault Support Services** – for adult and child victim/survivors of sexual assault.
- **Sexual Assault Reform Strategy** – further work on the use of remote witness facilities, consideration of the most appropriate way for dealing with historical sexual assault matters and exploration of processes to more effectively identify and deal with sexual assault occurring in family violence contexts.
- **Support to Culturally and Linguistically Diverse women who have been trafficked** – to identify options for leaving the sex industry.
- **Resources regarding available protection for service providers and clients** – to help manage contact from offenders and prisoners known to have perpetrated family violence.
- **Strengthened Risk Management Framework and Guidelines** – to be published in 2012–2013.



Get tougher on perpetrators and prevent re-offending

Actions to stop perpetrators from committing violence, bring them to justice, change their behaviours and deter others

Current Initiatives

- **Victoria Police Enhanced Family Violence Service Delivery Model** – Victoria Police effort to ensure consistency of service delivery across the state whilst maintaining capacity for local innovation and response.
- **Enhanced Investigative Responses** – to family violence, sexual assault and child abuse by Victoria Police.
- **Men's Case Management** – men's family violence case management (MCM) support program works with men who are removed from the family home to address immediate needs and assist them to take responsibility for their use of violence and mitigate the risks of re-offending. The MCM program has the primary objective of increasing the safety of women and children by assisting men to stop their violent and abusive behaviours.
- **Post-release programs for serious sex offenders** – group treatment and individual treatment to high risk and complex needs sex offenders subject to post-sentence orders to facilitate their treatment and rehabilitation.
- **Male Adolescent Program for Positive Sexuality** – for youth justice clients aged 10–21 years who have been found guilty by the court of committing a sexual offence and are referred for assessment and treatment.
- **Forensicare Problem Behaviour Program** – provides specialist psychiatric and psychological assessment and treatment services focused on individuals with problem behaviours and includes violence against women.
- **Mandated Men's Behaviour Change Programs** – men's behaviour change programs where attendance has been mandated by a court order.
- **1,700 new police members.**
- **Expansion of Victoria Police family violence teams** in high incidence areas.

Further Initiatives

- **Enhanced Approach to Recidivism** – implement enhanced policing approach to managing recidivist offenders.
- **Graduated Offences Regime for Breaches of Intervention Orders** – to ensure greater consequences for breaches of Intervention Orders.
- **Improving Family Violence Safety Notice and Intervention Orders processes** – streamlining court processes, reducing delays and waiting times.
- **Expanded Court-Directed Men's Behaviour Change Programs** – increased capacity for more court-directed men's behaviour change programs targeting offenders including a pilot for those in prison or on community based orders.
- **Working towards a National Approach** – participate in work being undertaken through the Standing Council on Law and Justice to explore a national approach to domestic and family violence orders and to consider a joint response to recommendations made through the Australian Law Reform Commission/ New South Wales Law Reform Commission Family violence inquiry.

OTHER ELEMENTS TO GIVE EFFECT TO THE ACTION PLAN

Research and evidence

To respond effectively to violence against women and children, we need to better understand the complex causes and contributing factors of such violence and what works in preventing and responding to it. Our plan will draw on research and evidence to support actions.

A comprehensive, coordinated and prioritised program of research is required to enhance our understanding of the complexity of violence against women and to inform our strategies about prevention, early intervention and response.

The problem of violence against women and children extends across Australia and each state and territory is working on this issue. To maximise our research effort and avoid unnecessary duplication, the Victorian Government supports the establishment of a National Centre of Excellence for family violence and sexual assault research and will actively participate in its establishment.

We will also evaluate the impact of programs that we invest in to address violence against women and children and continue to monitor trends through the Victorian Family Violence Database to inform future actions and directions.

Strengthening the workforce

Identifying and responding to violence against women and children requires an effective workforce. We are already collecting information about the family violence workforce through our Community Sector Workforce Knowledgebase and we will use this information to shape future workforce directions. We are also contributing to the National Workforce Agenda on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault.

In this Action Plan, we commit to:

- Training frontline workers across a broad range of sectors in family violence risk assessment and risk management.
- Extending the family violence risk assessment and risk management training and resources into the health sector.
- Working to develop information, resources and training programs for those who work with women with disabilities so that they better understand the dynamics of violence for women with disabilities.
- Delivering training for mainstream services about how to work more effectively with men who have used violence against women.

Information and data

Appropriate collection and sharing of information between agencies is vital to achieving good outcomes for women and children experiencing violence. In the case of family violence, it is a critical element of managing risk to women's safety.

Work is commencing in the Department of Human Services on how to enhance information sharing and referral of clients to ensure that clients tell their stories once and that the service system is connected around them. Work is also underway to improve the flow of information between police, courts and corrections to more effectively identify perpetrators and improve safety for affected women and children. Information from reviewing family violence related homicides will also inform our approach to addressing violence against women.

The Victorian Government will also share learning from examples of good collaborative practice, such as the Multidisciplinary Centres, and work to promote partnerships between family violence specialist service providers and services that support vulnerable children and families.

Reporting on progress

Our Action Plan to Address Violence against Women and Children provides a foundation that must be built on to achieve our long-term vision of eliminating all forms of violence against women and children.

We know from reform experience to date, that we are likely to see a continued increase in the numbers of women and children reporting family violence and sexual assault, before they decrease.

This is in part due to enhanced responses from the police, the justice and service system to protect women and children from men who perpetrate family violence and sexual assault.

There is no single measure to determine whether women and children are safer, or whether men are more accountable or more likely to stop using violence. We will develop a performance framework to identify and use indicators that will most effectively measure the success of our plan and its impact.

The Victorian Government will report annually on progress in implementing our Action Plan. We will establish mechanisms to keep stakeholders informed and involved, and most importantly work side by side with the women and communities in Victoria for whom this plan is critical.

Ongoing governance

Addressing violence against women and children requires strong and committed leadership across government and community. It also requires dedicated effort to take action which changes and challenges attitudes and behaviours that condone such violence and which holds perpetrators to account so that they stop their violence.

To deliver a strategic and integrated plan – we must have the right governance arrangements in place to enable us to work together on this issue.

Our plan will be overseen by a small, high level Addressing Violence against Women and Children Advisory Group. This group will comprise key sector experts, in conjunction with key Ministers, and be convened by the Minister for Women's Affairs. This approach will raise the profile of violence against women and children, improve co-ordination across government and community and will identify major and emerging issues. It will also support the implementation of our plan.

Appropriate departmental and agency arrangements will support and complement the Advisory Group.

While the Advisory Group is the formal government consultation mechanism, individual ministers may choose to have their own ongoing or temporary advisory forums. For example, the Attorney General will continue to convene the Sexual Assault Advisory Committee, with a specific focus on justice related aspects of responses to sexual assault.

The Minister for Aboriginal Affairs will continue to lead the implementation of the Indigenous Family Violence Partnership Forum's *Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families: Towards a safer future for Indigenous families and communities 10 year plan*.

The following principles will underpin our approach to working together in the future:

- Strong leadership and commitment from all government ministers to ensure implementation of our Action Plan.
- Government departments working effectively together on implementing the Action Plan.
- Engagement with organisations and communities that are working with us on this issue.

Only by working together across government and community will we be able to address this issue in a comprehensive way.

Acknowledgement

This plan has been informed by a range of evidence and a public consultation process that involved over 260 participants, as well as women who had personally experienced family violence and sexual assault. Over 130 written submissions were also received. During the consultation process, a number of women shared their experiences of the violence that they and their children had suffered. The determination of these women to bring about systemic and societal change to stop this violence, not just for their families, but for all women and children, is inspirational.

APPENDIX 1 – Forms of violence against women and children

Family violence

Family violence occurs between people who are in a relationship and amongst family members. The violence can take many forms – physical, emotional, sexual, mental or using financial power – and it is used to control other family members. Family violence includes physical, sexual, emotional and psychological abuse and threatening or coercive behaviour, including towards or witnessed by children.

Physical violence can include slaps, shoves, hits, punches, pushes, being thrown down stairs or across the room, kicking, twisting of arms, choking, and being burnt or stabbed.

Psychological and emotional abuse can include a range of controlling behaviours such as control of finances, isolation from family and friends, continual humiliation, threats against children or being threatened with injury or death.

Although only some aspects of family violence are criminal offences, any behaviour that causes the victim to live in fear is unacceptable.

For the purpose of action taken through the Victorian judicial system, the *Family Violence Protection Act 2008* defines family violence as:

- (a) behaviour by a person towards a family member of that person if that behaviour –
 - (i) is physically or sexually abusive; or
 - (ii) is emotionally or psychologically abusive; or
 - (iii) is economically abusive; or
 - (iv) is threatening; or
 - (v) is coercive; or
 - (vi) in any other way controls or dominates the family member and causes that family member to feel fear for the safety or wellbeing of that family member or another person; or
- (b) behaviour by a person that causes a child to hear or witness, or otherwise be exposed to the effects of, behaviour referred to in paragraph (a).

Sexual assault or violence

Sexual assault is unwanted sexual behaviour or activity that makes the victim feel uncomfortable, frightened or threatened. It is sexual activity that the person has not consented to and refers to a broad range of sexual behaviours, including the use or threat of violence to force another person to engage in a sexual activity against their will. The definition of sexual assault includes rape, incest, child abuse and unwanted sexual behaviour, such as unwanted kissing and touching. It also includes behaviour that does not involve actual touch such as forcing someone to watch pornography.¹ Some of these acts are serious indictable crimes. Sexual assault is an abuse of power. Sexual assault is never the fault or responsibility of the victim/survivor.

General sexual offences under the *Crimes Act 1958 (Vic)* include:

- rape and assault with intent to rape
- indecent assault
- incest
- administering drugs to enable sexual penetration
- sexual offences against young people
- offences against people with impaired mental functioning.²

Sexual harassment

Sexual harassment is any unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favours, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature. Sexual harassment often manifests itself in subtle ways, such as sexually suggestive comments, unwanted touching, risqué jokes, or blatant demand for sexual contact. These actions may take place within a range of settings, including work or educational settings. *The Equal Opportunity Act 2010* (Vic) prohibits sexual harassment.

Child sexual abuse

Child sexual abuse can be defined as any situation in which an adult or another child threatens forces or manipulates a child into sexual activity. Many times the offender does not need to use physical force with the victim. Instead, they take advantage of their own position of trust and authority. Child sexual abuse can include exposing a child to pornography, fondling the sexual parts of a child's body, making a child engage in sexual activity with others, and sexually penetrating a child, orally, anally or vaginally with the penis, hand or any object. Incest is intercourse or touching of sexual parts between an adult family member and a child or between siblings. Child sexual abuse includes children and young people up to and including 17 years of age. Child sexual abuse is a criminal offence.

Sex trafficking

Sex trafficking is the trafficking in persons (recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons), by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of sexual exploitation, including prostitution.³

Sexual exploitation

Sexual exploitation involves exploitative situations, contexts and relationships where people receive something (e.g. food, accommodation, drugs, alcohol, money) as a result of them performing and/or another or others performing on them, sexual activities.

Stalking, cyber-stalking and bullying

Stalking is when one person engages in a course of conduct with the intention of causing physical or mental harm to another person. This includes making a person fearful or concerned for their safety or conduct that causes another person to self-harm. Stalking often includes repeated unwanted contact and/or communications that cause the victim fear or distress. Cyber-stalking and cyber-bullying include the use of technology such as the internet or mobile phones as a means to harass. The communications may be used to intimidate, control, manipulate, or humiliate the recipient. Stalking and serious bullying offences are covered by the *Crimes Act 1958* (Vic).

Female genital mutilation

Female genital mutilation is performed on girls and women for cultural rather than medical reasons. It is internationally recognised as a violation of human rights, and is banned in Australia.

APPENDIX 2 – The context

The scope of the problem

Violence against women and children remains a serious problem for our community. It has a devastating and lasting effect on women, children, families and whole communities. It undermines women's rights, their health, their education and employment prospects, their economic security and, in the most tragic circumstances, their lives or the lives of their children.⁴

Violence against women and children is a major social and economic concern facing Victoria and leads to crime, homelessness, unemployment, and lower productivity.

Violence against women describes forms of violence that are mostly experienced by women and are mostly perpetrated by men. The extent and range of violent actions perpetrated against women is broad. It can include family violence, sexual abuse and assault, sex trafficking, female genital mutilation, sexual exploitation and sexual harassment. For women in Victoria, family violence and sexual assault are the most prevalent forms of violence experienced. While sex trafficking and female genital mutilation are not experienced by as many women, their effect is profound.

Through the use of new technologies, new forms of violence against women – such as cyber-stalking and 'sexting' are becoming more prevalent.

Violence against women damages the health and wellbeing of children and young people directly and indirectly, as they witness or fear violence being perpetrated against their mothers or female care givers. Different forms of violence against women share many of the same underlying causes and result in short and long-term impacts on women, children and families.

The evidence suggests that the key drivers of violence against women are:

- unequal power relations between men and women
- adherence to rigid gender stereotypes
- broader cultures of violence.

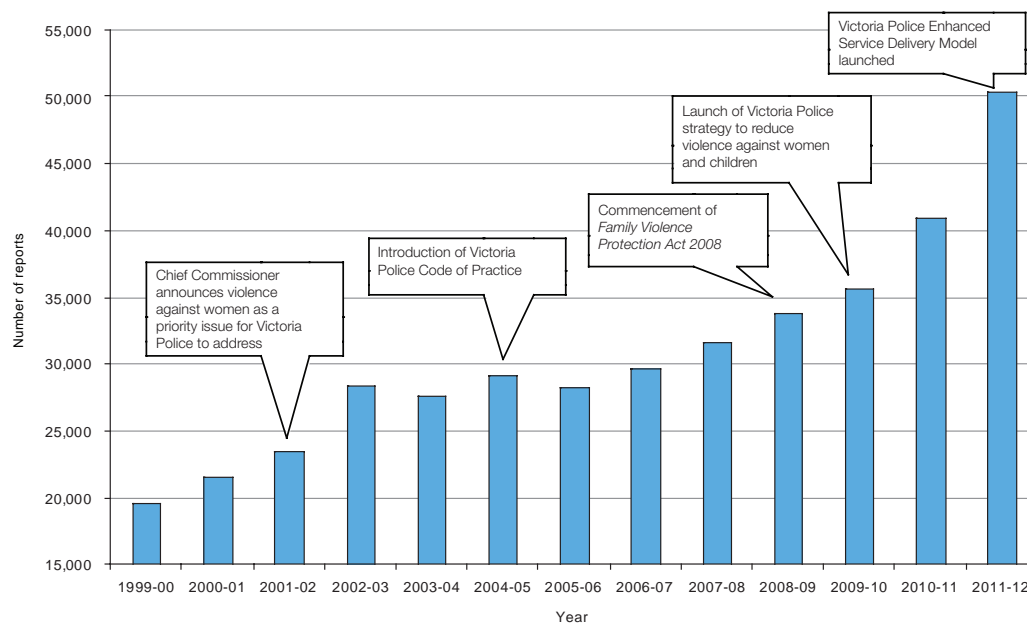
Gender stereotypes are reinforced throughout our culture. There is research which indicates links between a culture of sexualisation of women and girls and acceptance of violence against women. Studies have shown that regular exposure to material which sexually objectifies women reinforces sexist attitudes and gender stereotypes.⁵

Pornography is also increasingly accessible, and may often contain scenes of aggression against women. A recent study found that 92 per cent of boys and 61 per cent of girls reported exposure to online pornography (13–16 year olds).⁶

Increased reporting

Reporting of family violence and sexual assault is vital to addressing it. Unfortunately it is only in recent years that reporting has been encouraged by the community and that more women have been confident to report such violence – knowing that their reports will be taken seriously by the police and judicial system.

Victoria Police Crime Statistics for 2011–2012 show that the incidence of family violence remains unacceptably high, with 50,382 family violence incidents reported, up by 23.4 per cent from the previous year. The incidence of sexual assault is also disturbing with 2,044 incidents of rape recorded in Victoria in 2011–2012, up by 11.8 per cent from 2010–2011.⁷

Figure 1 Family Violence Reports to Police, Victoria, 1999 to 2012⁸

Over the past ten years legislative reforms and improvements to the way that Victoria Police respond to and investigate family violence (as highlighted in Figure 1) have resulted in greater confidence in the system and thus higher levels of reports of family violence.

Most violence against women is committed by men. According to Victoria Police Crime Statistics for 2011–2012, women make up 75.8 per cent of family violence victims, 88.7 per cent of rape victims and 79.5 per cent of victims of sex (non rape) offences. Children were present in 36 per cent of family violence incidents attended by Victoria Police in 2011–2012.

In Victoria, the number of children recorded as affected family members in police family violence incidents reports has tripled since 1999. The number of children identified in the court data as affected family members (aged 17 years and under) has risen 341 per cent over the 11 year period, from 4,530 children in 1999–2000 to 19,974 children in 2009–2010.⁹

More than half of the women seeking assistance for family violence through a specialist family violence court in 2010–2011 had children in their care, and one fifth included a child on their intervention order application.¹⁰

The Australian Bureau of Statistics Personal Safety Survey in 2005 found that almost one million Australian women experienced sexual abuse *before* the age of 15. Over 40 per cent were five to eight years of age. Almost half were between the ages of nine and 14 (48.7 per cent). Close to 43 per cent of these were perpetrated by non-family members and an additional nine per cent were perpetrated by strangers.¹¹

The Personal Safety Survey also reported that in almost 80 per cent of cases, women knew the men who had assaulted them.¹² Victorian court and police data also indicates that around 80 per cent of adult female victims experienced the violence from an intimate partner (including current and former domestic partner as well as intimate personal relationship).¹³

Repeat offenders

Violence against women is often repeated. Since 2006–2007, one quarter of incidents reported to police had a history of between one and three previous reports to police.¹⁴ Of reports to police by affected family members, two out of five indicate that the family violence had been occurring for more than two years.¹⁵

We can identify a group of men who are repeatedly violent against women and indeed against many women. As a community we cannot condone this abhorrent behaviour – which robs women and children of their rights and ability to participate fully in Victoria's economic and social life.

Community attitudes

Community attitudes about violence against women have improved but are still disturbing. The National Survey on Community Attitudes to Violence Against Women¹⁶ revealed that around one in five people believe that family violence can be excused if it results from people 'temporarily losing control' or if they 'truly regret' what they have done.

This survey also found that:

- One in twenty Australians believed that 'women who are raped ask for it'.
- Just over one-quarter of the community still believed it is not rare for women to make false claims of being raped.
- Thirteen per cent agreed that women 'often say no when they mean yes' and 16 per cent agreed that a woman 'is partly responsible if she is raped when drunk or drug-affected'.
- One fifth of the community believed that men and women are equal perpetrators of violence in the home.
- Over one third of the community believed that 'rape results from men being unable to control their need for sex' (VicHealth 2010).¹⁷

These attitudes are not based on the evidence we have about violence against women, but they highlight the need for additional education and engagement to ensure that more Victorians are prepared to act to stop violence. The Victorian Government believes that all forms of violence against women and children are unacceptable.

Women who are most vulnerable

Violence against women happens in many settings – at home, on the street, on public transport, in the workplace and within a range of relationships, from family members and partners to complete strangers. However, in the majority of cases, women know the men who are violent towards them.

We know that violence against women occurs in all cultures, socio economic groups, and areas across Victoria. For women who are affected, the experience is profound and painful.

However, statistics indicate that some women may be at increased risk of family violence and sexual assault, including women from some culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, women with a disability, women with mental health issues or illnesses, older women, and girls. Other factors known to increase the risk of women experiencing violence include separation, pregnancy and social isolation.

Women from some communities face additional barriers to access the right services and support – these include distance, language barriers, the fear of being excluded by their family or community on reporting violence by a man known to them, the fear of being deported, the fear of being abandoned when the abuser is their carer, and the fear of being denied access to their children.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women report higher levels of physical violence in their lifetime than do other Australian women and they are more likely to experience sexual violence, sustain injuries or be killed. While family violence is not part of Indigenous culture, the causes of destructive behaviours, including alcohol and other drug abuse and violence against women and children, in Indigenous communities include breakdown of community kinship systems, traditional culture and Indigenous law, racism and vilification, economic exclusion and entrenched poverty and loss of traditional roles and status.¹⁸

Women with disabilities are more likely to experience partner or sexual violence, of great severity, and over a longer period of time, than women without a disability.¹⁹ Women with disabilities who are dependent on their carer for access to, and communication with, the outside world, their home, to administer medication and support their mobility are particularly vulnerable and isolated when their carer is also their abuser. Abuse of women with disabilities may also manifest by having equipment, food and medication withheld.²⁰

Older women experience an increasing vulnerability and risk of violence as they become increasingly frail. Older persons are more likely to report abuse from their children or another family member than their partners. However, the rates of abuse from a current partner is higher among older women than younger women, with 29 per cent aged between 45 and 55 years and 26 per cent aged 56 years and older.²¹

The research indicates that pregnancy is also a risk factor for family violence and women often experience their first assault during pregnancy, or experience an increase in the form or intensity of violence.²² The Australian Bureau of Statistics Personal Safety Survey in 2005 found that 59 per cent of women who experienced violence by a previous partner were pregnant at some time during the relationship; of these, 36 per cent reported that violence occurred during a pregnancy and 17 per cent experienced violence for the first time when they were pregnant.²³

Geographical and social isolation compound problems of sexual assault and family violence, mainly because they reduce the victim's access to support networks. There is evidence of a higher reported incidence of sexual assault and family violence in rural and remote communities than in urban Australia.

Sex trafficking

The number of women trafficked in Australia for sexual purposes is difficult to ascertain as official statistics do not capture the extent of the problem. There are a number of ways that women are trafficked, which include coercion and deception about legitimate employment.

Sex trafficking is hidden, as women who have been trafficked may fear disclosing information to the police and fear retribution from traffickers. It can leave women with long-term psychological and physical health issues due to the physical and sexual violence perpetrated against them.

Female genital mutilation

Like sex trafficking, information about female genital mutilation is also difficult to obtain. However, the impact can be damaging to women's health. Female genital mutilation is addressed by the Department of Health through the Family and Reproductive Rights Education Program.

Causes and contributing factors

To prevent violence against women, we need to understand its causes and contributing factors, and determine why it persists.

There is no single cause of violence against women and children; rather, it appears to arise from a complex interaction between individual attitudes towards women, and social and cultural practices and values across our society and communities. These attitudes and practices can foster unequal and abusive power relations between men and women, gender stereotypes and can often exist in broader cultures of violence.

Factors which are known to increase or correlate with the risk of men perpetrating family violence include drug and alcohol misuse, a history of violent behaviour, threats of or previous use of violence, against their current or former partners, children, pets, other family members, stalking, and obsessive and controlling behaviour and separation. In the period of 2009–2010 police identified separation as a factor in 26 per cent of family violence incidences and controlling behaviour in 16 per cent incidences. Both of these factors were identified as a risk for twice as many women as men.²⁴

Most men who drink alcohol do not use violence against women. However in the 2009–2010 data, police identified alcohol as a definite factor in 43 per cent of family violence incidences (either party) and a possible factor in 27 per cent of incidences.²⁵ Alcohol is a contributing factor of individual men's violence against women and children rather than a cause.

Financial difficulties and psychological illness or depression were also identified in more than one in ten reports of family violence.²⁶ These factors do not cause family violence nor do they mean that a person who has a psychological illness or is experiencing financial difficulty will use violence against women.

The social costs

The impact of family violence and sexual assault against women, children and young people is profound, wide-ranging and long term. It affects women's personal wellbeing, disrupts families and community relationships.

For women

Violence against women has an enormous cost to a woman's health and wellbeing.

Sexual assault can cause major physical and mental health effects. Physical effects include the immediate injuries, sexually transmitted infections, unwanted pregnancies and ongoing physical problems. Sexual assault can cause severe psychological effects, including intense fear of death and disassociation during the assault, anxiety and ongoing fears, low self-esteem, self-blame, guilt, shock and confusion, self-harm and attempted suicide, suicide, and post-traumatic stress disorder.²⁷

Women's perception of threat of sexual assault also creates fear in women generally. Women often try to reduce their risk in public places and at night.²⁸ This limits women's actions and their full participation in our society and economy.

Australia-wide, women who have experienced intimate partner violence are likely to use health services more often, and have poorer health. Intimate partner violence is responsible for more ill health and premature death in Victorian women aged 15 to 44 than any other of the well known risk factors, including high blood pressure, obesity and smoking.²⁹

Women who have experienced violence perpetrated by their partners are more likely to suffer from mental health issues such as post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, self-harm tendencies and suicidal thoughts.³⁰ It has also been estimated that between 50 to 80 per cent of women using psychiatric services are recorded as having a history of sexual abuse or assault.³¹

Family violence is also one of the main causes of homelessness among women in Australia.³² Homelessness for young women can also be related to the experience of sexual assault. This in turn, increases their vulnerability to further sexual assault – on the street, in hostels, refuges and squats, and through links with drug use and prostitution.³³

Australian women who have lived with a violent partner are more likely to experience financial difficulty.³⁴ Many women are economically dependent on their partners and this can make it more difficult for women to escape violent partners.

Women who have experienced violence may not have the confidence and skills, may have health issues, or experience ongoing interruptions to their lives such as court appearances, needing to move home, making it difficult to hold down a stable job. This impacts on women's short term and long-term economic security.

For children

Violence against women damages the health and wellbeing of children and young people directly and indirectly, as they witness or fear violence being perpetrated against their mothers or female care givers.

The evidence indicates that even when children are not direct victims, exposure to violence can have significant psychological, emotional and behavioural impacts and adverse developmental effects on them, comparable to children experiencing violence directly.³⁵ This may include anger, trauma, sadness, shame, guilt, confusion, helplessness and despair. Children do not have to be physically present when the violence occurs to suffer the negative consequences associated with exposure.

Children's exposure to family violence can increase the risk of mental health, behavioural and learning difficulties in the short term and development of mental health problems later in life. It is also a key indicator of both adolescent male and female victimisation in intimate relationships.³⁶

The evidence is unclear as to whether boys who have witnessed an incident of physical violence towards their mother or stepmother have an increased risk of perpetrating violence against their partners. Where children and their mothers or stepmothers are provided a safe and supportive environment to recover, where there is exposure to healthy relationships and parenting models, children and young people can build their own respectful and non-violent relationships and can become some of the strongest advocates against violence.³⁷

The economic costs

Violence against women and children exacts unacceptable and immeasurable costs to its victims, as well as our community more widely. It severely curtails the ability of women and children to participate fully in so many aspects of life – in education, in sport, in the community, in employment. It ultimately means that violence against women and children is undermining Victoria's productivity.

The estimated economic cost of violence against women and children in Australia was approximately \$13.6 billion in 2008–2009 of which \$3.4 billion was the estimated cost to Victoria.³⁸ Unless appropriate action is taken to prevent violence against women that sum will increase to \$15.6 billion per year by 2021, with Victoria's share of that cost reaching approximately \$3.9 billion.³⁹

Most of the direct costs associated with violence against women are borne by the government and community sector, with income support and accommodation costs being the largest components of this. Most of the indirect costs are associated with pain and suffering and premature mortality borne by the victims, their children, families and friends.

Ending violence against women and children will enhance the ability of women and children to participate in all aspects of life.

APPENDIX 3 – Connection with other government strategies

Our Action Plan also complements and supports government strategies.

- In responding to the *Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children Inquiry* recommendation to develop a stronger systems approach to protecting vulnerable children, the Victorian Government's *Victoria's Vulnerable Children Directions Paper* (May 2012), emphasised the importance of effectively responding to family violence to prevent the incidence of abuse and neglect. The Directions Paper committed the government to the development of **Victoria's Vulnerable Children** strategy. This strategy will detail a whole-of-government strategy to prevent child abuse and neglect, reduce its negative impact and improve outcomes for vulnerable children and young people. Violence against women and children is a critical factor in this work and our approach will be developed to ensure connectedness at every level of leadership and practice. Both strategies will work towards ensuring more integrated supports and services to women and their children across government and government funded services.
- *Victoria's Vulnerable Children* strategy will be accompanied by the establishment of a new **Commission for Children and Young People** to monitor the protection and safety of vulnerable children and young people.
- **The Sexual Assault Reform Strategy Final Evaluation Report**. Reforms to the justice system's response to sexual assault continue to be supported. These reforms aim to meet the objectives of increasing rates of reporting and improving the experience of sexual assault victims in the justice system. The next steps in progressing these reforms include: undertaking further work on the use of remote witness facilities, considering the most appropriate way for dealing with historical sexual assault matters and exploring processes to more effectively identify, and deal with, sexual assault that occurs in family violence contexts.
- **Living free from Violence – Upholding the Right, Victoria Police's strategy to reduce violence against women and children 2009–2014**. Victoria Police will continue to improve responses to sexual assault, family violence and child abuse by implementing the actions outlined in this strategy. Victoria Police is also playing a leading role in the government's effort to respond to illegal activity in licensed and illegal brothels as part of effort to address sex trafficking in Victoria. This is in addition to the broader effort by Victoria Police to implement actions under the Australian Policing Strategy to Combat Trafficking in Persons 2011–2013.
- **Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families: Towards a safer future for Indigenous families and communities 10 year plan**, the Victorian Government's strategy to prevent and respond to family violence in Aboriginal communities 2008–2018 and supporting *Indigenous Family Violence Primary Prevention Framework*. Where Aboriginal communities or family violence in Aboriginal communities are referenced in this Plan, the principles set out in the 10-year plan are the framework for understanding and working on these issues as they affect Aboriginal families and communities.
- **Victorian Homelessness Action Plan 2011–2015**, the Victorian Government's four-year plan to deliver services to people experiencing homelessness in a new way. This includes the *Family Violence and Homelessness Innovation Action Project* that will focus specifically on early intervention and prevention for families at risk of or experiencing homelessness due to family violence.

- **The Elder Abuse Prevention and Response Guidelines for Action 2012–14** outlines the government's priorities, actions and measures to prevent and respond to elder abuse and include specific actions to address the specific needs of older women in the family violence service system who experience elder abuse.
- This plan will further inform the **Whole of Government Victorian Alcohol and Drug Strategy** to address alcohol and drug-related harms in Victoria and include reforms to the Alcohol and Drug Treatment Services. One of the priorities of the treatment strategy is to include initiatives to make treatment more family-inclusive.
- **Services Connect** is the improved way the Department of Human Services and its service providers will support clients in the future. Focusing on the needs of clients and their families to achieve outcomes that measurably improve their lives, Services Connect will seek to deliver integrated responses to clients' needs based on one needs identification, one client record, one key worker and team and one (family) plan.
- **The Victorian Health Priorities Framework 2012–2022** states that reviews of the women's and men's health plans should be a priority for the Department of Health. These plans and *Koolin Balit: Victorian Government Strategic Directions for Aboriginal Health 2012–2022*, are relevant to the prevention, early intervention and response to violence against women and children.
- **National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022**. The Victorian Government signed up to the plan in February 2011. Victoria's Action Plan will form Victoria's jurisdictional implementation plan under the National Plan.
- **The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)** is about lifetime support for people with a disability, based on their individual needs. We are working with our Commonwealth and state counterparts and will be trialling the scheme in Barwon region commencing July 2013.

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ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND CHILDREN

Further initiatives for *Victoria's Action Plan to
Address Violence against Women and Children:
Everyone has a responsibility to act 2012–2015*

Everyone
has a **responsibility**
to **act**

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October 2014

Foreword

Violence against women and children is unacceptable at any time, at any place, and under any circumstances.

Over the last four years, the Coalition Government has been working hard to address the prevalence of family violence. We have taken a tough no excuses approach to perpetrators of family violence, with investment totalling over \$110 million in 2014–15 in initiatives that prevent violence, keep victims safe and help families get back on their feet. But we know there is more to be done.

In 2013, 44 Victorians died as a direct result of family violence. Each of these people was a mother, father, son or daughter, and their deaths are an unacceptable tragedy. Family violence now represents 42 per cent of all crimes against the person in Victoria, and there were more than 65,000 family violence incidents attended by Victoria Police last year.¹

Alarming, the National Community Attitudes Survey recently indicated that attitudes which justify, excuse and minimise violence against women persist in a significant proportion of our community. One in five people believe that violence against women and children can be excused if the violent person regrets it; one in five people believe that if a woman is raped while drunk or affected by drugs she is at least partly responsible; and three-quarters of those surveyed hold attitudes that minimise or trivialise violence against women and children.²

In 2009 the annual cost to Victoria of violence against women and children was estimated at \$3.4 billion.

Just as Victoria led the world in saving lives on our roads by changing the culture around drink driving, we must change community attitudes and violent behaviour towards women and children. Ending violence against women and children is a shared responsibility.

Ending violence against women and children is a strategy that outlines \$150 million of new investment over five years to further strengthen our efforts, through *Victoria's Action Plan to Address Violence against Women and Children: Everyone has a responsibility to act 2012–2015*. The strategy provides a comprehensive package of initiatives addressing:

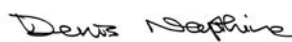
- **Prevention** – *Stopping violence against women and children in our community*
- **Safety** – *Protecting women and children*
- **Accountability** – *Holding perpetrators to account*

An additional funding commitment of \$150 million has increased total investment to prevent violence against women and children to more than \$140 million next year, a doubling since we came to government.

Making a real difference requires a whole of community response.

Working across police, courts, the community sector, housing, schools, businesses and the broader community is of vital importance. We have a long standing commitment to keeping women and children safe, holding perpetrators to account and working to challenge violence-supportive attitudes and behaviours. We all have a responsibility to do so.

We can only reach our vision by working in partnership. *Ending violence against women and children* will only be achieved by all stakeholders working closely together to comprehensively implement the commitments outlined as part of our plan.



Hon Denis Napthine MP
Premier



Hon Robert Clark MP
Attorney-General



Hon David Davis MLC
Minister for Health



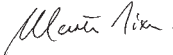
Hon Heidi Victoria MP
Minister for Women's Affairs



Hon Peter Ryan MP
Deputy Premier



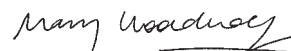
Hon Kim Wells MP
Minister for Police and Emergency Services



Hon Martin Dixon MP
Minister for Education



Hon Tim Bull MP
Minister for Aboriginal Affairs



Hon Mary Wooldridge MP
Minister for Community Services



Hon Wendy Lovell MLC
Minister for Housing



Hon Edward O'Donohue MLC
Minister for Corrections
Minister for Crime Prevention



Hon Matthew Guy MLC
Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Citizenship

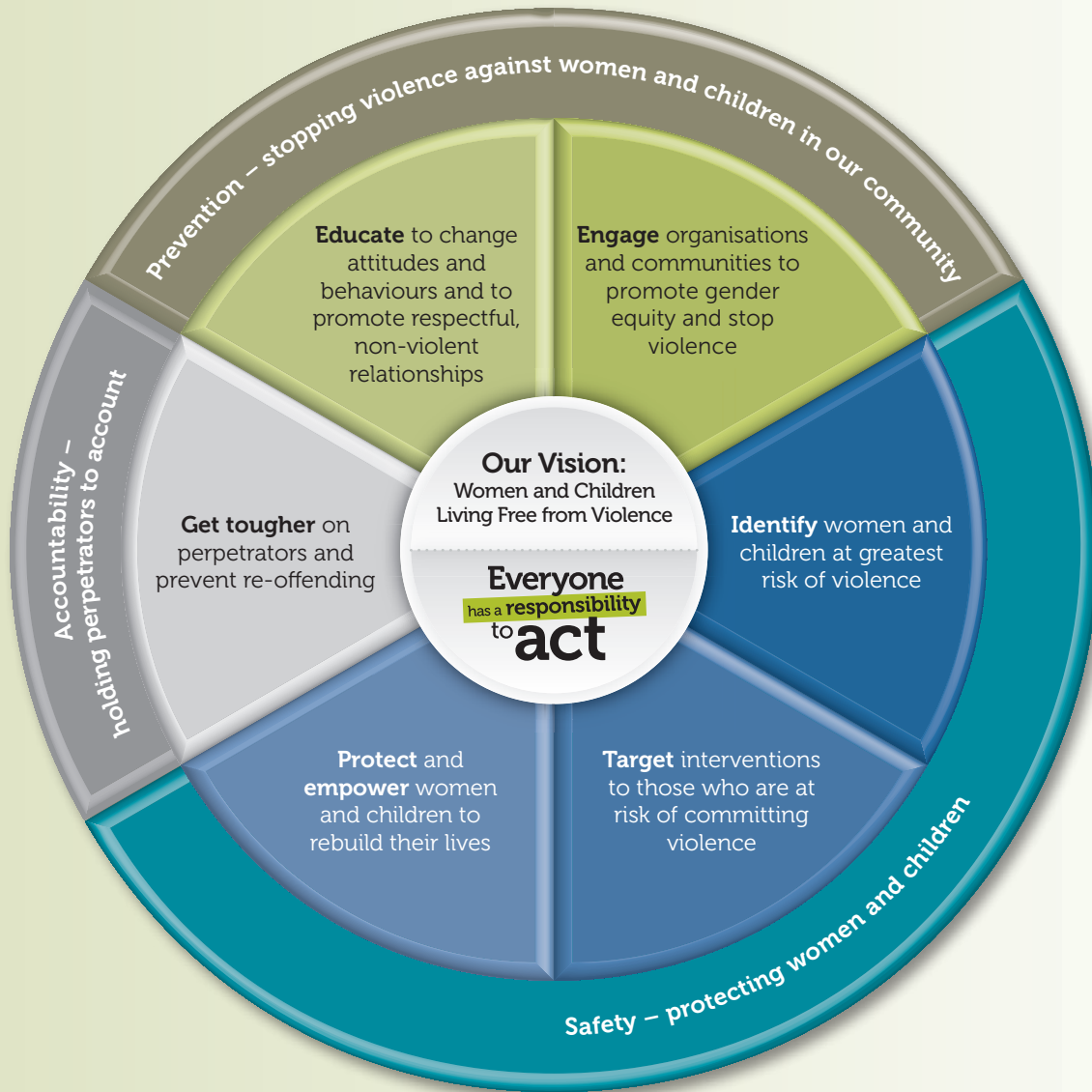
1 Victoria Police Crime Statistics 2013–14

2 National Community Attitudes Survey 2013

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*Victoria's Action Plan to Address Violence against Women and Children:
Everyone has a responsibility to act 2012–2015*



Building on our Action Plan

Over the next 5 years our aim is to ensure

- Violence against women and children is reduced
- Awareness is raised and community attitudes regarding violence against women and children are improved
- People making decisions about safety and accountability have the right information at the right time
- The whole system works effectively to address the diverse needs of women and children experiencing violence
- Perpetrators are held to account and re-offending is stopped or reduced

Great work has been achieved – and will continue – under Victoria's *Action Plan to Address Violence against Women and Children: Everyone has a responsibility to act 2012–2015*.

Substantial reforms and an investment totalling over \$110 million in 2014–15 has further integrated government and community sector work to tackle violence against women and children. The Victorian Government acknowledges that the job will not be completed until violence against women and children has ended.

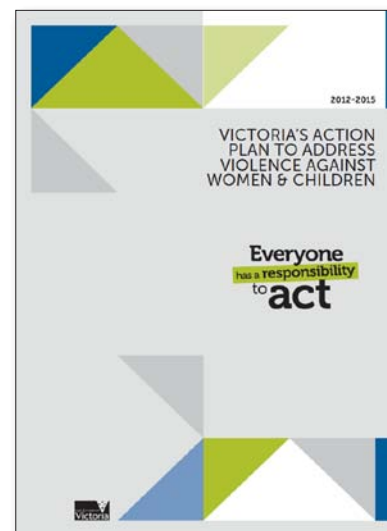
Ending violence against women and children delivers additional strategies and investment to ensure that the Action Plan is meeting the needs of women and children.

Key achievements under the Action Plan

Some of our key achievements under the Action Plan include –

Our Watch

The Victorian Government's leadership in establishing Our Watch (formerly known as the Foundation to Prevent Violence against Women and their Children) and our five year funding commitment contributes to nation-wide efforts to change the culture, behaviours and attitudes across Australian society that underpin and support violence against women and children. In Victoria, the government with VicHealth and others, has invested significantly in prevention initiatives that have built capacity in local councils, developed proven programs for workplaces and schools and supported regional prevention planning.



Protecting women and children at greatest risk

The Strengthening Risk Management program brings together the Department of Human Services, Victoria Police, Corrections Victoria and support services to identify and respond to women and children at highest risk of family violence, holding the most dangerous perpetrators to account.

Four multi-disciplinary centres co-locate police, sexual assault specialists and child protection workers to improve support for adult and child victims of sexual assault and victims of child abuse, with two more in the pipeline.

The Victorian Government's recent investment for 2014–15 will expand state-wide the successful Strengthening Risk Management program, and also trial fast-tracked support for victims of family violence through streamlined police assault, and reports and referrals; plus further invest in case management, counselling including for sexual assault and practical support for women and children fleeing violence.

Better policing

The Victorian Government has put 1,700 extra police on the streets and has increased the number of Family Violence Response Units to 32. Police are attending more family violence incidents as women and children have greater confidence to come forward and report to police.

Legislative reform

The Victorian Government has also made important changes to the law to better protect women and children and make perpetrators more accountable for their violence. New legislation now also makes it easier for agencies to share information that can help to keep women and children safe.

Legislative reform, has included the creation of new indictable offences for serious and persistent breaches of family violence intervention orders, extending family violence safety notices from 72 to 120 hours and introducing legislation to further protect children from sexual abuse.

Leadership and commitment

Our efforts have been underpinned by strong leadership and ongoing commitment across government and in partnership with the community sector.

The Ministerial Council on Social Policy Reform enables Ministers to oversee implementation of the Action Plan.

A Ministerial Advisory Group provides direct insights to relevant Ministers, and a State-wide Forum provides a platform for collective government and community sector action and shared accountability.

At the local level, Regional Integration Committees allow agencies and services to come together to work across boundaries and deal with family violence issues.

Taking the next steps

Ending violence against women and children takes the next steps to prevent violence, keep women and children safe, and bring perpetrators to account.

It outlines the Victorian Government's ongoing commitment to the long term vision articulated in the Action Plan – for women and children to live free from violence in Victoria. *Ending violence against women and children* includes funded initiatives in prevention, safety and accountability.

Prevention

Stopping violence against women and children in our community – new investment of \$42 million

We need to confront dangerous attitudes and behaviours in our community. To stop the cycle of violence this strategy places prevention at the forefront. People who know that violence against women and children is going on often don't know how to act or how to help. With the support of community leaders our prevention initiatives will get the message out on what we can all do, and how communities can be mobilised into action. The prevention campaign builds on the important work undertaken to date by Our Watch and other prevention partners, with funding from the Victorian Government and our commitment to funding proven prevention programs.

The strategy will fund the following prevention initiatives:

- a state-wide prevention campaign in partnership with Our Watch including a social marketing and behaviour change campaign
- proven prevention programs that we know work well, chosen by local communities. Including:
 - Respectful Relationships program in schools
 - workplace programs
 - Bystander programs
 - Baby Makes 3 and parenting programs, and
 - targeted programs that respond to the needs of Aboriginal people, women with a disability, and women and children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.
- crime prevention grants to community organisations to deliver initiatives in regional strategies to prevent violence against women and children.

Safety

Keeping women and children safe – new investment of \$61 million

Even with significant investment to date for initiatives to support women and children experiencing violence, further services are needed to help women and children to be safe and build safer lives. Fast access to the right services, and services that meet the needs of all women and children are key parts of this strategy.

The strategy will fund the following prevention initiatives.

- a new multi-disciplinary centre (MDC) in Wyndham and an expanded scope for the Geelong MDC to include family violence services
- increased crisis accommodation support for women and children enabling immediate flexible assistance to get into safer housing together with a range of supports women and children need to get back on their feet
- pilot education support for children impacted by family violence employing outreach teachers to work with and guide children who are displaced from their home or traumatised as a consequence of family violence
- specialist triage teams to provide rapid risk screening of all family violence referrals, and immediate triaging and connection to expanded support services as required
- increased flexible post-crisis responses for women and children impacted by family violence, with responses tailored to each family or child's individual need, and
- more individualised support responses for Aboriginal women and children affected by violence.

Accountability

Holding perpetrators to account – new investment of \$42 million

Some perpetrators repeatedly offend. We know victims and the community want perpetrators to be held to account, especially to reduce repeat offending. They also want services to share the information that can protect victims from more violence, strengthen court responses and know that courts are safe places.

The strategy will fund the following accountability initiatives:

- trial of GPS monitoring of high risk perpetrators, to help keep women and children safe and to make sure perpetrators are held to account
- increase specialised court staff, including support workers for applicants and respondents to intervention order proceedings
- safe waiting areas in more courts
- more legal aid to better meet family violence demand, promote consistency in intervention orders and to make sure perpetrators are aware of the consequences of breaching orders
- expand the Court Integrated Services Program to additional court locations across Victoria – this program helps to reduce re-offending, through addressing perpetrator contributing factors such as mental illness or substance abuse, and
- expand tailored programs for family violence offenders in correctional settings targeting behaviour change.

Driving change

Leading performance and information sharing – new investment of \$5 million

A new Ministerial Council for the Prevention of Violence Against Women and Children, to be led by the Premier and the Deputy Premier, will drive government's commitment to ending violence against women and children, informed by the voices of all stakeholders.

Through this Ministerial Council a detailed implementation plan will be developed in close consultation with the community sector, police, courts, corrections and community members.

To help drive the changes needed to implement this strategy, the government will also:

- establish a new Ministerial Council for the Prevention of Violence Against Women and Children led by the Premier and Deputy Premier
- build the capacity of the sector through funding targeted at enhancing skills and practice in community service organisations
- introduce better information sharing by police, courts, corrections, child protection and family violence services to manage family violence risk including piloting a longer-term IT solution for information sharing
- further invest in the systemic review of family violence deaths through the Coroner's Court to make sure that we continually improve practice to help prevent further deaths, and
- measure performance through an effective performance framework, increased research and evaluation and monitoring results, overseen by the Ministerial Council.

**Ending violence against women and children –
\$150 million new investment**

**Prevention: stopping violence against women and children –
\$ 42 million**

**Safety: protecting women and
children – \$ 61 million**

**Accountability: holding perpetrators
to account – \$ 42 million**

**Driving change: leading performance and information sharing –
\$ 5 million**

Prevention – *stopping violence against women and children in our community*

What do we need?

- **Changed attitudes and behaviours that promote respectful non-violent relationships**
- **Proven prevention activities undertaken at a local level**
- **Collaboration between governments, businesses, the community sector, the media, the education sector, sporting codes, faith leaders and the broader community**

To stop violence against women and children we need to change the culture that promotes, justifies excuses or condones it.

The commitment to stopping violence against women and children needs to be shared. Everybody in the entire community needs to speak up when they know somebody who is experiencing violence. Attitudes and behaviours that tolerate violence in relationships and in the broader community need to be stopped.

The prevention programs implemented through *Victoria's Action Plan to Address Violence against Women and Children: Everyone has a responsibility to act 2012–2015* provide a great starting point. The Victorian Government is now in a strong position to work with sector partners and local communities to deliver programs to families, across schools, local governments and workplaces, where people live, work and play. These localised strategies will be backed up by a state-wide media campaign to drive attitudinal change.

Building on the substantial research and evidence developed by the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth) over the last 10 years, Victoria's efforts will align with national prevention initiatives, including Our Watch and the Commonwealth Government's *National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children 2010–22*.

Our work to date

The Victorian Government has undertaken a range of prevention initiatives since 2010.

This government is committed to building our prevention efforts based on a solid understanding of the complex causes of violence against women and children and the contributing factors, and what works to prevent them.

Together with the Commonwealth Government, the Victorian Government co-founded Our Watch. Our investment over five years will contribute to nation-wide efforts to change violence supportive culture, behaviours and attitudes across Australia.

As part of a comprehensive approach to preventing violence against women and children across all parts of the Victorian community, prevention strategies have been implemented in a range of settings.

This has included investment in building the capacity of Victoria's 79 local councils to undertake prevention activities. Workplace, Bystander and Respectful Relationships education programs are being delivered, alongside initiatives to promote and support the role of women and programs for women with a disability. Regional prevention plans are being developed by women's health services in collaboration with local government and community partners. Work has been undertaken with the media to encourage improved reporting, raise awareness and to challenge the social norms and underlying causes of violence against women and children.



Local community prevention efforts have been supported through the Reducing Violence Against Women and their Children Grants. These local approaches challenge attitudes which justify violence against women and children and work towards developing safe and gender equitable communities.

Preventing violence against women and children: Our Watch

Our Watch has been established to drive nationwide change in the culture, behaviours and attitudes that underpin and condone violence against women and children.

Our Watch was established by the Victorian Government in partnership with the Commonwealth Government in July 2013, is headquartered in Victoria and is chaired by Natasha Stott Despoja AM.

The Victorian Government has committed five years of funding towards Our Watch to 2017, totalling \$6.4 million. This includes core operational funding and project funding for Respectful Relationships Education; the project *Strengthen Hospital Responses to Family Violence*; and developing models of good practice in working with culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

VicHealth is partnering with Our Watch to develop a national framework that will guide prevention policy and practice on a national scale. This will build on the internationally recognised framework developed by VicHealth – *Preventing Violence Before it Occurs: A Framework and Background paper to prevent violence against women in Victoria*.

Our next steps

With the investment in this strategy, our next step in prevention is a comprehensive campaign focused on preventing violence against women and children in our community. The campaign will:

- deliver a state-wide prevention campaign in partnership with Our Watch including a social marketing and behaviour change campaign
- roll out proven prevention programs that we know work, chosen by local communities and
- provide crime prevention grants to community organisations to deliver initiatives in regional strategies to prevent violence against women and children.

State-wide behaviour change campaign

This initiative is entirely new – no state-wide behaviour change campaign currently exists in Victoria.. The level of investment provided by this strategy in a sustained violence against women and children campaign is a first for Victoria.

Behaviour change campaigns are a critical component of effective prevention strategies – providing a common basis for communities across Victoria to begin discussions in schools, workplaces, sporting clubs and at home – wherever people live, work and play. The campaign will reach all communities across Victoria, as all communities are affected by violence against women and children. The media will be an essential part of our strategy. Investment over recent years has highlighted the critical role of the media building awareness and challenging social norms.

Significant and sustained action is required as the levels of violence against women and children in Victoria remain high – while some improvements have been made, the prevalence of violence against women has remained high for the last 10 years.

The harm to women and children, families and communities, and the effort and cost of the response of police, services and the courts, will be ongoing until violence is prevented from occurring in the first place.

Prevention requires effort from everyone and community mobilisation is critical: governments, business, the community sector, schools, the media, sporting clubs, faith leaders and families need to get behind the campaign.

Local leadership and local initiatives have made a difference in changing community attitudes and behaviour to issues including road safety and smoking.

Everyone can be a leader in preventing violence against women and children. The entire community needs to have conversations about the culture, attitudes and behaviours underpinning social norms that permit violence against women and children – at school, at work, in families and in social settings such as sporting clubs. These conversations need to be underpinned by common understandings and language that challenges discriminatory social norms and behaviours.

The campaign will be delivered in partnership with Our Watch with state-wide and local elements that create a platform for behaviour change through proven prevention programs. The Victorian Government will work carefully with a wide range of stakeholders and communities, to ensure the diverse voices in the community are heard.

Changing attitudes and behaviour: the New Zealand experience

In 2007 New Zealand launched a community-driven media campaign to reduce society's tolerance of violence and change people's damaging behaviour within families. The message was *Family Violence is not OK but It is OK to Ask for Help*. By 2008 research showed a 95 per cent awareness of the campaign, almost 1 in 4 people reported change in their views on family violence, and 22 per cent said they had taken some action.

In 2010 a new message *It is OK to Help* was added in response to feedback that people want to help when they become aware that there is family violence but are not sure what to do. An evaluation in 2011 found that the National Collective of Independent Women's Refuges reported more women seeking help after experiencing violence for many years, and more seeking help earlier. Most importantly, more men were seeking help for their use of violence.

Our campaign will include:

- a state-wide social marketing initiative supported by tailored, localised materials
- media relations activity with local media partnerships and tailoring for Aboriginal and culturally and linguistically diverse communities
- ambassador/ local spokesperson program
- engagement with local schools, workplaces, and sports clubs, and
- easy to access information for women and children experiencing violence about what to do, where to go for help, and what the options are.

Proven prevention programs delivered at school, work and play

The state-wide behaviour change campaign, will be supported by local action through proven prevention programs and every local area will be provided with funding to deliver these programs in key settings – such as schools and workplaces. These are the settings where the evidence is strongest that attitudes and social norms can be changed.

Broad based strategies that engage communities, schools, workplaces and sporting clubs to address gender inequality will make violence less likely to occur in the first place. Our next steps include investing to expand access to:

- Bystander Programs that empower individuals and communities to take a stand and workplace programs to change existing workplace culture
- Respectful Relationships Education focused on building the capacity of children and young people to form respectful relationships
- Baby Makes 3 and parenting programs that focus on a critical time in families' lives when children are first born, and
- targeted prevention programs that are responsive to the specific needs of women from Aboriginal and culturally and linguistically diverse communities and women with a disability.

To achieve sustained change, our initiatives are designed to be wide reaching and touch on people's everyday lives.

Local leadership, strategic partnerships and strong governance

While a state-wide social marketing and behaviour campaign creates momentum for change, and proven prevention programs show people how to change, extra support is needed to drive change at the local level.

That is why local leadership, strategic partnerships and strong governance are key features of our strategy.

Our next steps include investing in existing local platforms, by expanding the role of local Children and Youth Area Partnerships with representatives from state and local governments, sector partners and the community to:

- back up the state-wide campaign with local messages
- identify the proven prevention programs that will make the biggest difference to their local community
- be accountable and meet local benchmarks to measure change.

Mobilising the local community: Go Goldfields

Go Goldfields started as an innovative alliance of local organisations that wanted to fix the long term social problems facing the Central Goldfields Shire Council. With Victorian Government funding of \$2.5 million in 2011, it introduced its placed-based *Best Start Strong Families* program. By 2013 this holistic suite of strategies for improving outcomes for local children needed a focused effort on family violence, and a dedicated strategy was introduced. The local council has reported that early evaluations show family violence is trending in the right direction because 'we are all working on it together'.

A more detailed evaluation is underway with a report expected at the end of 2014.

Crime prevention initiatives

The Reducing Violence Against Women and Children Grants focus on supporting prevention and early intervention projects, developed by communities to target identified needs. The Reducing Violence Against Women and their Children Grants Program has already made a substantial contribution to engaging organisations and communities to promote gender equity and stop violence.

Over the last three years, the Reducing Violence Against Women and Children Grants program has funded 12 projects of three years duration across the State to help reduce violence against women and their children, including four Aboriginal-specific projects. Projects include:

- the successful Baby Makes 3 parenting program, promoting equal and respectful relationships during transition to parenthood
- the development of regional prevention strategies and community action plans
- the development of programs promoting gender equitable and non-violent workplace cultures, and
- culturally specific prevention projects focused on building strong relationships, strong communities and the capacity of male community leaders.

The interim evaluation of the Reducing Violence Against Women and Children Grants program conducted by the Australian Institute of Criminology has reported that each of the projects has delivered substantial achievements in progressing efforts in the primary prevention of violence, and clear evidence of positive outcomes.

The Reducing Violence Against Women and Children Grants will continue to enable projects and programs that target both innovative new and proven existing prevention and early intervention initiatives across Victoria, consistent with the strategy.

Conclusion

Dangerous attitudes and behaviours in our community need to be confronted. In addition, people who know that violence against women and children is going on often don't know how to act or how to help.

To address these issues and stop the cycle of abuse this strategy places prevention at the forefront. Importantly, prevention initiatives will be developed for local communities and also have community leaders involved in getting the message out on what we can all do so that everyone takes up their responsibility to act.

Safety – *protecting women and children*

What do we need?

- Stronger, joined-up services – including family violence, sexual assault, child protection, police, housing, courts and corrections across the state
- Fast access to the right services focused on the best interests of women and children
- A focus on meeting the needs of women and children who are from Aboriginal communities, culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds or with a disability

While prevention will work in the long term to stop violence in our community, the safety of women and children is an immediate priority. Safety is essential to bring stability to the lives of women and children affected by violence. Services need to understand the needs and circumstances facing individual women and children and the risks they face, and act to make sure women and children can be safe. This has to be done by sharing intelligence with the police and justice systems and holding perpetrators to account.

This also means understanding the particular vulnerabilities of certain groups within our community, including women from Aboriginal and culturally and linguistically diverse communities and women with a disability and providing services that better meet their needs.

Our work to date

Four multi-disciplinary centres (MDCs), with two more under construction, co-locate police, sexual assault specialists and child protection workers to provide integrated support for adult and child victims of sexual assault and victims of child abuse. This co-location means that assault victims do not always have to attend a local public hospital to access these important services. It affords victim/survivors with a level of confidentiality while enabling them to receive counselling and support, as well as speak with police about the nature of the offence they have experienced, all in the one client-centred location. To this end, it is a crucial initiative to bring perpetrators to justice.

The Strengthening Risk Management program brings together the Department of Human Services, Victoria Police, Corrections Victoria, courts and family support services to provide a multi-agency response to women and children at highest risk of family violence, holding the most dangerous perpetrators to account. Trialled from 2011, the Victorian Government's recent investment in 2014–15 provided for state-wide expansion of this successful program.

The Family Violence Risk Assessment and Risk Management Framework enables early identification of women and children at risk of violence using a standardised, transparent approach and tools. Over 6,000 workers across a range of services have been trained, including general practitioners, allied health workers, police, community corrections officers and specialist family violence workers. This is being rolled out even more widely.

Keeping women and children safe in supportive refuge environments is a priority. In the past four years we have modernised and improved our refuges by completing six capital projects to build new or substantially renovate existing properties. This includes building and redeveloping Aboriginal specific refuge accommodation in regional and metropolitan areas.

Our accommodation responses recognise women and children should not have to leave their homes following family violence. We have invested over \$40 million in flexible funding through our housing establishment fund and also through private rental brokerage programs to give people experiencing homelessness, including women and children who have experienced violence, more choices. Programs like 'safe at home' have kept women who are victims of violence in their communities and avoided the disruption of children having to move houses and change schools because perpetrators commit horrendous acts.

Funding announced in May 2014 will provide fast-tracked support for victims of family violence trialled through streamlined access points to support services; expanded case management and practical support for women and children fleeing violence; strengthened hospital responses to family violence and sexual assault; and sexual assault counselling and support to more women and children.

The Victorian Government has put 1,700 extra police on the streets and has increased the number of family violence response units to 32. Victoria Police Sexual Offence and Child Abuse Investigation Teams (SOCITs) have been expanded and now 28 teams work across Victoria to provide a consistent and specialised response to sexual assault victims and to reduce trauma, which can lead to the victim withdrawing their report.

Our next steps

With the investment in this strategy, our next steps in safety focus on more services that take a multi-agency approach to protect women and children and consider and act on perpetrator risks. These include:

- establishing a new multi-disciplinary centre in Wyndham and expanding the scope of the Geelong multi-disciplinary centre to include family violence services, so child protection and family violence services can work closely with police
- increasing crisis accommodation for women and children enabling immediate flexible assistance to get into safer housing together with a range of support women and children need to get back on their feet
- piloting education support for children impacted by family violence employing outreach teachers to work with and guide children who are displaced from their home or traumatised as a consequence of family violence
- specialist triage teams to provide rapid risk screening of family violence referrals, and immediate triaging and connection to expanded support services as required
- increasing flexible post-crisis responses for women and children impacted by family violence, with responses tailored to each family or child's individual need, and
- more individualised responses for Aboriginal people affected by family violence.

Multi-disciplinary centres – a new centre and expanded family violence services

The new multi-disciplinary centre (MDC) in Wyndham will build on the current model to include a family violence response. In providing increased access to specialised services to victims of family violence and sexual assault, women and children can receive integrated services within a supportive environment. The new MDC will bring the total number of centres state-wide to seven.

The MDC model has successfully delivered an environment that provides safety, support and access to justice for sexual assault victims, as well as holding perpetrators to account. MDCs co-locate Victoria Police's SOCITs, child protection workers and Centres for Sexual Assault counsellors to provide a multi-agency response to sexual assault and child sexual abuse.

Expanding the Geelong MDC to include some targeted family violence services, will add family violence support workers together with child protection practitioners and specialist family violence police officers to share intelligence and respond to both family violence and sexual assault risk factors.

Crisis accommodation support for women

When women cannot access appropriate accommodation and services they can be forced to return to dangerous family situations or they can end up in accommodation without the right supports in place.

Given the current prevalence of violence against women and children, crisis housing and responses to victims of sexual assault are key parts of the service system that are under pressure.

This initiative will provide safe and immediate accommodation for families at risk, at the time they need it. With the right supports, and working in partnership with police, some of these families will have the capacity to safely return to the family home, others will be helped to access long-term private rental housing. A focus of this initiative will be on transitioning women and children in crisis to long-term housing opportunities in the private rental market so they can stabilise their lives and regain independence.

An education pilot for children impacted by family violence

Family violence takes a big toll on children who witness or are subjected to violence. The impact of trauma on children can profoundly effect a child's development. It is critical to ensure children are protected from perpetrators and that services use child-focused planning.

To ensure children who are exposed to violence do not disengage from education, this strategy enables the pilot of a "virtual school" that employs outreach teachers to work with and guide children who are displaced or traumatised by family violence. Teachers and specialist support staff working in the education system will receive training and development to support children and young people affected by family violence.

Providing safety and support for traumatised children: education pilot

Children in families fleeing from violence often miss out on weeks, if not months, of school and face a range of barriers to education. The impact of changing schools can be very daunting for traumatised children who are likely to experience fear, loss and hardship. The time taken between leaving the family home and school of origin, and finding new accommodation and school ranges from 4 days to 6 months, or even longer in some cases. Where school cannot be accessed for children, this can result in long-term absenteeism and disengagement from education.

Teachers in the virtual school will have an understanding of the effect of trauma on children and young people. With this skill base, these teachers can play a crucial role in fostering a child's positive attachments to school and learning. Children will be referred to the virtual school from refuges and other services.

Enhanced access to support services

Timely support is critical for women and children at high risk of violence. It can be the key to whether a woman takes action against a perpetrator. Increasing reports of violence against women and children challenge governments and agencies to provide the right services faster.

In 2013–14, Victoria Police attended in excess of 65,000 family violence incidents³ and referred:

- more than 35,000 victims of family violence to support services for assistance⁴
- more than 22,000 perpetrators of family violence for assistance in addressing their violent behaviour⁵
- more than 10,000 reports to child protection.⁶

Many other approaches are made to family violence agencies directly by affected women and children or through referrals from other agencies.

There have been advances in connecting the justice and human services systems so women and children can get support when impacted by family violence and perpetrators can be held to account. For example, Victoria Police L17 forms are used to bring affected women, children and men who use violence, to the prompt attention of human services, including family violence support agencies, child protection and Child FIRST/family services. However, the volume of reports and duplication sometimes means women and children miss out on the right response.

³ Victoria Police Crime Statistics 2013–14.

⁴ Referral data provided by Victoria Police.

⁵ Referral data provided by Victoria Police.

⁶ DHS Child Protection data.

Our next steps under the strategy are to implement integrated access points across the state using integrated family violence access teams at sites where there are community-led Services Connect partnerships, so that women and children get the support they need in a more timely way. This will streamline and connect better with the Victoria Police L17 referral process and provide rapid risk screening for all clients, with immediate referral and connection to appropriate support services for high risk cases. Cases not requiring an immediate response will also receive a comprehensive risk assessment and needs identification, followed by appropriate referrals.

These measures will improve access for women from diverse groups, such as Aboriginal women, women from a culturally diverse background and women with a disability, and will help to make sure that women receive support that is appropriate to their needs.

Organisations providing services under the community-led Services Connect partnerships must demonstrate that they understand the cultural needs of their local community, use bilingual practitioners or interpreters to overcome communication difficulties and establish working relationships or partnerships with local culturally and linguistically diverse community organisations.

Through this initiative, these integrated family violence access teams and the eight Services Connect partnership sites will combine the assessment referral processes into one coordinated service response. This will deliver comprehensive risk assessment for people affected by family violence as well as risk assessment and referral pathways for perpetrators of family violence.

Flexible post-crisis responses for women and children

The experiences and needs of women and children affected by violence are different, so services need to respond in a flexible way. These responses may include short-term or ongoing support and protection, or short-term counselling to deal with trauma.

Flexible support can include the practical things such as funding for making people feel safe and secure in their own homes, purchasing new school uniforms and books when a child has to change schools, or whitegoods to set up a new home, or tailoring packages of assistance to include the support of specialist family violence or child protection workers. In addition, this initiative will better connect family violence specialists within child protection response teams.

Our next steps under the strategy include investment to provide increased flexible support services that will help to make a difference in the lives of families affected by family violence to help them to build and maintain safer living arrangements. Plans will be developed with each woman and child and tailored to their needs.

Individualised responses for Aboriginal people

We know that Aboriginal families experience high rates of family violence. Our strategy will target assistance to these families and develop Aboriginal specific training material to enhance responses to Aboriginal clients by family violence practitioners.

Under the *Strong Culture, Strong Peoples and Strong Families: Towards a safer future for Indigenous families and communities – Indigenous Family Violence 10 Year Plan*, we will provide flexible responses to Aboriginal families who have experienced family violence. Responses will be delivered by Aboriginal community controlled organisations, including Healing and Time Out Services, and tailored to each family's cultural needs and individual circumstances.

Our next steps include funding being directed to help families heal and provide practical assistance to overcome crises, including counselling, healing, therapeutic and cultural support, and assistance with housing costs. This initiative will increase the capacity and flexibility of services to achieve better and sustainable outcomes.

Working with communities

Strong Culture, Strong Peoples and Strong Families: Towards a safer future for Indigenous families and communities provides a partnership approach to Aboriginal family violence in the short, medium and long term.

The 10 Year Plan is a living document which outlines the vision, objectives and actions which guide, inform and direct the Aboriginal community and the Victorian Government to reduce Aboriginal family violence over the coming years. It is the result of considerable collaborative effort and commitment by the Indigenous Family Violence Partnership Forum. A mid-term evaluation of the 10 Year Plan has commenced to:

- confirm progress that has been made to date with implementing actions and opportunities for improvement;
- provide advice on ways to strengthen governance structures and community partnerships;
- provide advice regarding an appropriate Aboriginal family violence target for inclusion in the *Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework 2013–2018*; and
- ensure programs and practices create a safer Victoria for all Aboriginal families and communities.

The 10 Year Plan responds to Aboriginal community and state government priorities, while also positioning State Government and Aboriginal community partners to respond to the findings of the evaluation to ensure its continued effective implementation.

Led by the Office of Aboriginal Affairs Victoria, government funding has been coordinated across the Department of Human Services, the Department of Justice and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.

In September 2014 the Government announced funding for a range of projects through the 2014–15 Indigenous Family Violence Initiative Fund. The funding will support 38 projects across Victoria, which focus on engaging and supporting young people, Elders, women and men to raise awareness of family violence with local Aboriginal communities and help participants develop strategies to address family violence.

Conclusion

Even with significant investment to date women and children experiencing violence are not always getting the services they need. Even faster access to the right services is critical, and services need to be able to deliver for all women and children regardless of their background.

We will provide more crisis accommodation support for women and children, and trial a virtual school to help children impacted by violence continue their education. We will make more effective referrals from reported incidents and improve access to the right services, including a new multi-disciplinary centre that includes some targeted family violence services and more funding for individualised supports that help. All of these initiatives will involve close working relationships and information sharing between police, child protection and family violence services in particular.

Accountability – *holding perpetrators to account*

What do we need?

- Increased perpetrator management and, where possible, support to prevent reoffending
- More widely available specialised family violence justice responses and better resourced courts and legal services

Our justice system must hold perpetrators to account, protect women and children, and send a message to the community that violence and sexual assault is unacceptable.

The justice system plays an important role in supporting women, holding perpetrators to account, helping to reduce repeat offending, monitoring perpetrator compliance with orders, and helping to address perpetrator behaviours and attitudes. The courts and legal services need to be specifically resourced to address the needs of families experiencing violence. Specialised family violence justice responses have been unevenly distributed and not available in all areas of high need.

Our work to date

The Victorian Government has made important changes to the law, including the creation of new indictable offences for serious and persistent breaches of family violence intervention orders, extending family violence safety notices from 72 to 120 hours and legislation to further protect children from sexual abuse. We are addressing deficiencies in the criminal justice system in responding to cases of sexual assault. The government has introduced legislation to make sexual assault laws clearer and fairer, and improve the way the law deals with cases of repeated and systemic sexual abuse and addresses the new phenomenon of 'sexting'.

Legislation has also strengthened the management, supervision and treatment of serious violent offenders and sex offenders both in prison and while on parole, including the requirement that these offenders complete offending behaviour treatment programs while in prison prior to their consideration for parole.

The *Privacy and Data Security Act 2014* will make it easier for agencies to share information that can help to keep women and children safe. We have also invested in perpetrator accountability by providing additional men's behaviour change programs and undertaking and subsequently expanding a pilot program for adolescents using violence in the home.

Two additional venues of the Magistrates' Court of Victoria have been enabled to make counselling orders, which require respondents to family violence intervention orders to attend mandatory men's behaviour change programs.

Our next steps

With the investment in this strategy, our next steps to hold perpetrators to account include:

- trial of GPS monitoring of high risk perpetrators, to help keep women and children safe and to make sure perpetrators are held to account
- increase specialised court staff, including support workers for applicants and respondents to intervention order proceedings
- safe waiting areas in more courts
- more legal aid to better meet family violence demand, promote consistency in intervention orders and to make sure perpetrators are aware of the consequences of breaching orders

- expand Court Integrated Services Program to additional court locations across Victoria – this program helps to reduce re-offending, through addressing perpetrator contributing factors such as mental illness or substance abuse, and
- expand tailored programs for family violence offenders in correctional settings targeting behaviour change.

Trial of GPS monitoring of perpetrators

Men who commit acts of violence pose a dangerous threat to the safety of women and children. Additional compliance measures and safety mechanisms will help keep victims safe and enhance perpetrator accountability in cases that present a high risk of further violence.

Our next steps under the strategy include investment to trial court-ordered GPS monitoring of high risk perpetrators. The initiative aims to provide an extra layer of safety for women and children and to ensure perpetrators are held to account.

Specialised court staff and safe waiting areas

Access to specialised staff, including staff to support applicants and respondents to intervention order proceedings, is not currently available in all high demand courts across the state. Specialised family violence court staff provide vital support and advice to family members through court proceedings, helping to ensure court processes run smoothly and lead to effective outcomes. Family Violence Registrars and Applicant and Respondent Support workers are trained in the dynamics of family violence, ensure a less adversarial environment in which family violence matters are dealt with, undertake risk assessments, provide information and link both parties into ongoing support offered by the broader family violence system.

Our next steps under the strategy include investment to extend coverage of specialist family violence workers to have workers based in all headquarter courts across the state (seven additional courts, bringing the total to 13 courts). Providing specialised family violence services in headquarter courts across the state will significantly improve coverage and help ensure better outcomes for victims of family violence.

Many courts do not have safe waiting areas. Women and children who have experienced family violence often need to wait for court proceedings in the same waiting area as the person who has been violent towards them. This can be intimidating for victims and make it difficult for them to take the legal steps required to keep them safe. It can also increase the risk to them.

Ending violence against women and children will provide funding to establish safe waiting areas in more courts.

Increased Legal Aid to better meet family violence related demand

Legal advice is important for safer outcomes at court. Legal advice ensures that intervention orders are appropriately tailored and that respondents are aware of order conditions and the consequences of breaching an order. It can promote consistency with orders in other jurisdictions such as family law. This reduces the likelihood of the matter returning to court for variations and can reduce unintended breaches.

Our next steps under the strategy include funding to increase the capacity of Victoria Legal Aid (VLA) to provide legal advice and support in family violence matters, both directly and through community legal centres.

Court Integrated Services Program expansion

The Court Integrated Services Program links defendants at the pre-trial/bail stage to support services (for example, drug and alcohol, homelessness, or mental health services) and has been operating in Melbourne, Sunshine and Latrobe since 2007. An external evaluation in 2009 showed its effectiveness in reducing re-offending.

The Court Integrated Services Program helps perpetrators to reduce their re-offending. Many family violence perpetrators can benefit from Court Integrated Services Program to assist with addressing contributing factors such as mental health or substance abuse, and to promote behaviour change and compliance with orders.

Our next steps under the strategy will enable an expansion of Court Integrated Services Program to improve provision of these support services to perpetrators of family violence. This will assist the court system to address factors that contribute to family violence, promoting behaviour change and increase compliance with orders.

Reducing re-offending through targeted programs

Contact with the corrections system provides a key opportunity to influence offenders to change behaviour and ensure accountability.

Programs delivered through Corrections Victoria to address the family violence behaviour of offenders are being expanded for sentenced prisoners, those on parole and those on a Community Correction Order.

The programs enable offenders to accept responsibility for their violent behaviour towards family and to understand triggers and risks associated with their behaviour. The programs are psycho-educational in nature and focus on skills acquisition, increasing awareness and relapse prevention.

Each program is accompanied by a Partner Contact service which has been developed to offer an opportunity for female partners of men who are participating in the program to access supports, information and referral pathways. The Partner Contact service also has the function of holding perpetrator's accountable if they continue to demonstrate abusive behaviour towards their partner during the program's duration.

Our next steps under the strategy include providing investment to expand the number of opportunities to influence offenders to change their behaviour and ensure accountability.

Conclusion

Some perpetrators repeatedly offend. We know victims and the community want perpetrators to be held to account, especially to reduce repeat offending. They want services to share the information that can protect victims from more violence and to know that courts are safe places.

We need to end violence by bringing perpetrators to account and build on the important legislative changes made to date. Our strategy will strengthen court responses with specialist court staff, increased legal aid, an expansion of the court integrated services program and funding to create safe waiting areas. It will also help change perpetrator behaviour through targeted programs to reduce reoffending.

Driving change

What do we need?

- **Strong leadership and governance**
- **Enhanced skills and practice in community service organisations**
- **Better sharing of information so the system works together to protect women and children, save lives and identify the women and children at the greatest risk of violence**
- **A performance framework, including benchmarks, research, evaluation and data collection, that measures impacts and provides evidence on what works best, so we can continually improve practice**

Effective implementation of this strategy, *Ending violence against women and children*, will require strong leadership and ongoing commitment across all areas of government. It requires collaboration between government departments as well as active engagement with communities and community service organisations.

To help drive the changes needed to implement this strategy, the government will also:

- establish a new Ministerial Council for the Prevention of Violence Against Women and Children led by the Premier and Deputy Premier
- build the capacity of the sector through funding targeted at enhancing skills and practice in community service organisations
- introduce better information sharing by police, courts, corrections, child protection and family violence services to manage family violence risk including piloting a longer-term IT solution for information sharing
- further invest in the systemic review of family violence deaths through the Coroner's Court to make sure that we continually improve practice to help prevent further deaths, and
- measure performance through an effective performance framework, increased research and evaluation and monitoring results, overseen by the Ministerial Council.

A strong leadership and governance framework

We will strengthen oversight and advisory mechanisms in line with government policy directions and monitor outcomes against the benchmarks in the performance framework.

Formal governance mechanisms will be led by the new, specifically focused Ministerial Council for the Prevention of Violence Against Women and Children, led by the Premier and Deputy Premier, and supported by Ministers who will oversee progress and implementation.

Stakeholder advice will be provided through the Ministerial Advisory Group to Address Violence Against Women and Children, chaired by the Minister for Community Services. The Group will advise on the impact of our strategy over time and inform future directions. We will work closely with stakeholders to further develop and implement our initiatives.

The Violence Against Women and Children Interdepartmental Committee will monitor performance across the state.

Local level structures, including Regional Family Violence Committees and the local Children and Youth Area Partnerships, will identify strategies and issues for advice and consideration by government. These structures will work closely with the Indigenous Family Violence Partnership Forum, which will continue to oversee and drive the implementation of the *Indigenous Family Violence 10 year plan: Strong People, Strong Communities, Strong Culture*. The Community Sector Reform Council, which advises the government on the implementation of reform of community and human services, will also be involved.

Other advisory structures will be maintained and adjusted as needed.. These will include the Violence Against Women and Children State-wide Forum; the Department of Justice's Family Violence Steering Committee and Stakeholder Reference Group and the Attorney-General's Sexual Assault Advisory Committee.

The government remains committed to strong collaboration with our community sector partners which is key to the successful implementation of our strategy.

Building the capacity of the sector

Building the capacity of both the integrated family violence and allied sectors will also provide leadership in the planning and delivery of appropriate services to victims and perpetrators of family violence and sexual assault. Through *Ending violence against women and children*, funding will be provided over three years to enhance the sector's capacity to respond to violence against women and children.

The Victorian Government will continue to invest in the Family Violence Risk Assessment and Risk Management Framework (CRAF) as a central part of our strategy.

Targeted training for specific agencies, such as Corrections Victoria, will increase capacity for building more effective responses, with benefits including referral into appropriate treatment and support pathways for offenders, as well as women experiencing violence.

Building a specialist workforce is central to the prevention of violence against women and children. Effective action in this area requires a multidisciplinary approach as initiatives are required across the range of workforces, such as within schools, local councils, workplaces and sporting clubs.

Better information sharing to manage family violence risk

Information sharing in the context of violence against women and children is a risk management strategy. It is about agencies ensuring critical information about the risk inherent in an intervention order application is put before decision makers to better inform what action needs to be taken to protect victims from further violence.

Our next steps under the strategy include investment to pilot an information sharing solution that will deliver critical information from police, courts and corrections to decision makers across participating agencies. Where an intervention order is granted, the risk profile relating to the order will be updated if persons named in the order have new dealings with participating agencies.

Legislative reform to support information sharing

This year the Victorian Government introduced new privacy legislation. The *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014* strengthens the protection of citizens' private information held by government agencies. It also provides clear avenues for departments and agencies to decide when they can use and share information, and to put in place arrangements where information can be shared when necessary, for example, to protect people's safety.

The legislation allows the Privacy and Data Protection Commissioner to determine that current information sharing is allowed by existing law, or that it is in the public interest for information to be shared.

These changes will help agencies including police, courts, child protection and others to establish arrangements and processes to share information when they think a person is in danger, for example, where a women or child is at high risk of family violence.

Expanding Coroner's Court family violence review

Our strategy makes an important commitment to the identification and development of indicators. Overarching indicators, and other useful measures, such as people's experience of a service, will need to be applied in consistent and coordinated manner to evaluations of initiatives and of our strategy as a whole.

We will invest in the systemic review of family violence deaths through the Coroner's Court to make sure that we continually improve practice and take action to prevent further deaths.

Measuring performance – research, monitoring, evaluation

Ending violence against women and children will invest in the development of a performance framework to establish and monitor progress against benchmarks.

An effective performance framework will enable the evaluation of individual programs, but even more importantly, will also help to measure the impact of coordinated initiatives on attitudes towards violence against women and children, and on the prevalence and seriousness of violence against women and children over time.

Developing an effective performance framework requires the identification and development of indicators that can measure our effectiveness in stopping family violence and sexual assault, supporting women and children and keeping them safe, and bringing perpetrators to account.

Some of these indicators are already in place and have been used to inform the work of *Victoria's Action Plan to Address Violence against Women and Children: Everyone has a responsibility to act 2012–2015* – such as the incidence of family violence reporting, repeat offending and breaches of Family Violence Intervention Orders, notifications to Child Protection, referrals to family violence services and outcome measures for individual programs and initiatives. They will be expanded to make sure that the initiatives funded through *Ending violence against women and children* are making a difference.

We will also continue to look at how we can improve data collection, including for women from Aboriginal and culturally and linguistically diverse communities and women with a disability, to make sure we know what works best for all women and children.

Funding will also be provided to undertake an evaluation of justice responses to family violence and to enable continuous family violence data and trend analysis.

Conclusion

Violence against women and children will only be addressed through leadership, coordinated initiatives, long term investment and local action. A successful behaviour change campaign, leading to increased awareness about violence against women and children, could see a range of indicators increase – for example, as more women seek help and report violence, as more professionals identify people who are at risk, and as more people in the community speak up and take action.

There are a range of measures that will be used to identify real shifts in values, attitudes and behaviour in the community. Eventually, we would expect to see a sustained reduction in the frequency of violence against women and children – but this will take some time and requires inter-generational change. It will be important to remain committed and to use what we learn from ongoing evaluation of our work to apply what works, to continue to build on existing initiatives and to inform future directions.

Key initiatives

Ending violence against women and children

- \$150 million package of new initiatives to prevent family violence before it occurs, keep victims of violence safe and hold perpetrators to account.
- The Victorian Government has now doubled funding to tackle family violence: \$140 million per annum



Accessibility

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