



Submission to the Royal Commission into Family Violence

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1. Overview

Lifeline Australia wishes to make this submission to the Royal Commission on Family Violence, on behalf of the seven Lifeline Centres in Victoria that are Members of Lifeline Australia, providing information and insights from the crisis support, suicide prevention services and the development and delivery of issue-specific community education that Lifeline provides.

This submission is structured around several Terms of Reference for the Royal Commission on Family Violence:

- the prevention of the occurrence and escalation of family violence;
- ensuring the safety of people affected by family violence;
- provision of support for adults and children affected by family violence.

2. Lifeline Services and Programs

The Lifeline services that are relevant to the detection, response and prevention of family violence are as follows:

2.1 Lifeline 13 11 14

This national telephone crisis line operates 24 hours every day of the week. The service is open to all Australians to raise any issue that they are facing difficulties with in their lives. More than 800,000 calls a year are answered, reflecting the communities use of Lifeline 13 11 14 the primary national generalist helpline in Australia.

In 2010 research involving Data Analysis of the calls to Lifeline 13 11 14 showed:

- 43.6% of calls had family and relationship issues as the focus of the call;
- 8.3% of calls to had 'trauma and abuse' issues as the of the call;
- 18.2% of calls from 15-19 year olds, and 15.1% in calls from 20-24 year olds.
- Almost ten percent of the calls (9.8%) from the 15 to 19 year old females related to sexual assault and abuse;
- Calls from slightly older females, 20 to 24 were also about mental health (29.7%) or sexual assault and abuse (8.8%).

Where suicide was raised as a focus issue in the call, around double (18% compared to 9%) of younger callers (15 to 19 and 20 to 24 year olds) also raised issues relating to abuse and trauma.

In 2012, about 10% of all calls to 13 11 14 invoked a safety assessment: while most of these assessments were related to suicide (73%), the next most frequent reason for safety assessments was domestic violence (14%).

2.2 Lifeline Online Crisis Support Chat Service

Similar to the telephone crisis line, but using online chat technology, this service currently operates between 7:00 pm and 4:00 am, seven days a week. The demographics of visitors to the Lifeline Online Crisis Support Chat Service are generally younger than callers to the telephone crisis line, while more come from regional and rural areas, and more identify as from indigenous backgrounds:

- 60% of contacts are under 34 years of age
- 86% female, 13% male; 4% self identify as Indigenous
- 59% come from regional or rural areas in Australia
- 45% state that they have thoughts of suicide on the day they contact Lifeline

2.3 DV-alert Program

The DV-alert program, funded by the Federal Government and developed and delivered by Lifeline, equips people in communities who perform gatekeeper roles as health, allied health and community front line workers to “Recognise, Respond and Refer” –when a client or contact is experiencing domestic violence – www.dvalert.org.au

The primary focus of the program is up skilling health, allied health, Indigenous and Multicultural health and other frontline workers to recognise, respond and refer appropriately people at risk of or experiencing domestic and family violence.

Lifeline Australia has been delivering the Domestic Violence Response Training (DV-alert) Program across Australia since 2007 through the funding support of the Department of Social Services under its Gender Equality for Women Program. DV-alert is one of the key initiatives under the National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children 2010-2022.

DV-alert is a nationally accredited training program provided to health, allied health and community frontline workers to enable them to recognise signs of domestic and family violence, respond with appropriate care and refer to effective support services. DV-alert is designed against the unit of competency CHCDVF301A: Recognise and Refer Appropriately to Domestic Violence. The accredited training is delivered as a 2-day face-to-face workshop held in different locations throughout Australia and as an online course.

Since it was first rolled out, DV-alert has expanded and has been improved to equip community frontline workers with knowledge and skills to provide culturally responsive and appropriate support by recognising the diverse contexts of communities in Australia. To date, Lifeline is delivering the DV-alert program through various streams:

- i. General Workshop – for frontline workers in general
- ii. Indigenous Workshop – for frontline workers supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities
- iii. Multicultural Workshop – for frontline workers supporting multicultural communities

The program is designed to align with the objective of DV-alert as stated in the funding agreement with the Department of Social Services as follows:

“A nationally accredited training program which aims to improve the capacity of health and allied health professionals to recognise, respond to and refer clients who are experiencing, or are at risk of experiencing domestic violence to relevant support services.”

Four Key Outcomes from the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022 relate to DV-alert:

- Communities are safe and free from violence
- Relationships are respectful
- Indigenous communities are strengthened
- Services meet the needs of women and their children experiencing violence

Men sometimes facilitate and are often participants in the DV Alert Training Program. This shows males can be engaged in taking on leadership in the community for the prevention of domestic violence.

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Overall evaluation (years 1&2) for the general/mainstream program:

- 95% 'moderate' to 'significant impact' on knowledge of DFV
- 90% 'moderate' to 'significant impact' on skill of handling DFV related issues in a professional capacity
- 95% 'moderate' to 'significant impact' on confident to handle DFV related issues

For the Indigenous workshops, below are the final results:

- 74% have improved their knowledge
- 85% have improved their skills
- 74% improved their confidence in recognising DFV
- 81% improved their confidence in asking patients/clients about DFV
- 78% improved their confidence in referring patients/clients

The use of 'gatekeeper' training in domestic violence – as a tool to equip people and communities to take action – is an innovative approach, building bridges between those people who may be first responders to a domestic violence issue, and the specialist services and supports that are available.

The DV-alert program is currently rolled out as:

1. Accredited training delivered through the following streams:
 - a. General face to face workshops
 - b. Indigenous face to face workshops
 - c. Multicultural face to face workshops
 - d. e-Learning
2. Non-accredited two hour awareness sessions are delivered through:
 - a. DV-aware
 - b. Brothers Standing Tall.

Since 2011 to date, Lifeline have delivered 32 workshops within Victoria to 498 participants with an overall national attendance of 3612 participants at 264 workshops.

Since 2012, Lifeline have delivered 10 DV-aware sessions which are 2 hour awareness sessions to community within Victoria to approximately 290 participants with an overall national attendance of 1156 participants at 84 sessions.

2.4 Lifeline Centres in Victoria

Lifeline is a community based organization with Member Organisations operating Lifeline Centres in more than 40 locations throughout Australia.

Lifeline Centres operate in Victoria at the following locations:

Name of Lifeline Centre	Location
Lifeline Ballarat	Ballarat
Lifeline Central Victoria and Mallee	Bendigo
Lifeline South West Victoria	Warrnambool
Lifeline Gippsland	Morwell
Lifeline Albury-Wodonga	Albury
Lifeline Geelong	Geelong
Lifeline Melbourne	Melbourne

Each of these Lifeline Centres provides opportunities for engagement with metropolitan and regional and rural communities in Victoria through their physical presence and the conduct of community engagement and outreach activities.

These activities include:

- Training programs on suicide prevention, mental health literacy, ‘accidental counsellor’;
- Recruitment and training of volunteers for a range of roles including delivery of Lifeline 13 11 14, thereby building community capacity;
- Support groups on anger management, relationships, and mental health & wellbeing;
- Suicide bereavement and other grief and loss support programs;
- Delivery of DV-alert and other programs relevant to family violence at the community level.

Victorian Lifeline Centres are typically involved in regional networks such as primary health care partnerships, suicide prevention action networks, and mental health advocacy groups. This involvement is collaborative and co-operative and recognizes the strengths of the different stakeholders in order to deliver maximum benefit and efficiency in building more resilient, safer communities.

3. Research Evidence

The WHO Report on Global and Regional Estimates of Violence Against Women (2013) – 35% of women globally have experienced physical or sexual violence against them. 30% of all women in an intimate relationship have experienced physical or sexual violence by their partner. Estimated 7.2% of women have experienced non-partner sexual violence. Family violence is a major public health and well being issue.

In Australia, (Australasia) along with other high income countries, the prevalence of violence against women is less than that in lower and medium income countries, with an estimated 26% of women experiencing intimate partner violence, and 16% experiencing non-partner sexual violence.

The Personal Safety Survey, Australia, 2005 found that 15% of Australian women had experienced physical or sexual violence from a previous partner. So, one in seven women in Australia have experience intimate partner violence.

Family violence has profound effects on children – in Australia through the Personal Safety Survey, 61% of women who experienced partner-related violence had children under their care at the time, and 36% of these stated that children witnessed violent acts.

When exposed to prolonged or acute stress levels, a person is more likely to experience changes in the functioning of the brain that disable cognitive processing and may lead to mental health issues such as anxiety and depression and physical health problems such as cardio-vascular disease and diabetes. Behavioural responses may include greater use of alcohol and drugs.

Psychological factors may occur regarding the controlling behaviours of males who perpetrate violence – reducing a women's ability to access health treatments and social supports – escalating a decline in health and well-being.

Tragically, sexual health factors may be compromised resulting in exposure to diseases such as HIV-AIDS.

An examination of several published studies finds that those who experience domestic violence are 4.5 times more likely to attempt suicide.

The experience of traumatic stress itself can foster suicidal thoughts and ideation, in part due to the reduced coping capabilities, and because of the perceptions that there is 'no way out'. Sudden changes in life fortunes, shameful events, and sudden physical illness are likewise associated with the onset of suicidal ideation.

Studies have found a relationship between women's experience of violence and the onset of depression and anxiety disorders – twice as likely. Similar findings regarding alcohol use amongst women who have experienced violence.

4. Suggested Actions

4.1 Promotion of Lifeline Crisis Support Services

Lifeline believes that continuing promotion of crisis support services such as Lifeline 13 11 14 and Lifeline Online Crisis Support Chat Service should be included in strategies for the elimination of family violence and the provision of support to those affected by family violence.

These services are accessible, immediate and available confidentially and privately using telephone or online technologies. They are able to connect with people when they need support.

Lifeline crisis support services undertake safety checks with all callers/contacts as a routine practice and have formal and well developed protocols with police to initiate emergency responses for life-saving interventions when appropriate.

General crisis support services such as those Lifeline provides also form a key point of contact that can facilitate access to other specialist services in the fields of family violence, emergency housing, family support and mental health.

Often, people contacting Lifeline are living with complicated circumstances and multiple issues. This service provides an opportunity, even in a brief telephone call, to connect with a help seeker and provide support that enables that person to consider options and gain confidence to address issues in their lives.

The Lifeline Crisis Support services are also points of contact through which referrals can be made to specialist services, in particular to those services related to family violence. Lifeline has a well-developed understanding of the services in the community for people experiences family violence, having for many years provided the national telephone crisis line service, funded by the Federal Government, and accordingly acting as a gateway to referrals to other more specialist services. Lifeline Crisis Support services utilise a national service directory to efficiently and effectively identify suitable services in the community for people throughout Australia.

As suicide prevention is closely related to family violence, the use of Lifeline crisis support services also enables active engagement with suicidal persons and the opportunity to de-escalate suicidal crisis related to the experience and effects of family violence.

Overall, Lifeline Crisis Support services should be seen as vital community service infrastructure for the detection and crisis intervention response to family violence, and for the role they perform in responding to a range of other issues being experienced by individuals that may relate to the prevention or family violence if they are addressed earlier and before a crisis situation emerges. The funding for these Lifeline services should be seen in this context. The continued funding at appropriate levels by state and federal governments is very important to maintain the Lifeline 'safety net' role.

4.2 Use of the DV-alert Program

This program has been shown to be highly effective in building the capacity and motivation of health and community service workers in recognizing when family violence is being experienced by their clients and knowing what appropriate responses to initiate, including referrals to specialist services.

Lifeline has extensive experience in the delivery of this program and is well placed to promote the program in Victoria.

The DV-alert program includes special streams for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and for people from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Communities.

5. Contacts

Lifeline Australia welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Royal Commission on Family Violence. Should the Royal Commission wish to raise questions or further consider the experience of Lifeline Australia and its member Lifeline Centres in Victoria, we would be pleased to present at hearings or provide information in other ways.

The relevant contact person for this submission is:

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