



Submission by Warrnambool City Council to Royal Commission into Family Violence

1. Introduction:

Warrnambool City Council (WCC) appreciates this opportunity to make a submission into the Royal Commission (RC) into Family Violence (FV). Council has particular interest in and supports the RC's goals - particularly fostering a violence free society and aiming to reduce/eliminate family violence.

WCC has a strong commitment to the prevention of violence against women and children as illustrated by the breadth of advocacy, leadership and prevention activities outlined in this submission.

WCC's efforts to foster change have been largely prevention activities– raising awareness of FV as a significant issue for Warrnambool and increasing understanding about the contributing factors in the community. WCC's main focus is on primary prevention of FV in the community, in our workplace, through our services and via advocacy. In a response sense, Council provides direct service in early years intervention and support services (Integrated Family Services) for children and families.

2. Why is action on Family Violence a priority for WCC?

Local governments are mandated to support and promote community wellbeing by the State Public Health and Wellbeing Act (2008) by protecting, improving and promoting public health within their municipality. By integrating action across the social, cultural, built, economic and natural environments, council policies and practices can make major contributions to population health outcomes.

Councils can provide leadership in their communities to prevent violence against women by promoting gender equity and equal and respectful relationships between men and women. As large employers, they can also influence and change workplace cultures to promote gender equity and the safety of women.

Through the preparation of the Warrnambool Health and Wellbeing Plan (2011-13 & 2013-17) analysis of the available data about the community clearly highlighted family violence as a significant issue in Warrnambool (and most other municipalities in the Great South Coast).

Victoria Police data clearly illustrates the growing rate of family violence incidents/reporting in Warrnambool – a rate which has been consistently and significantly higher than the Victorian state average.

In 2013-14 the Warrnambool community experienced 15.8 incidents of family violence for every 1000 people – that equates to over 500 incidents in one year.

Family Violence Incidents	2010/11	2011/12	2013/14	Measure
Warrnambool	8.5	12.2	15.8	Rate per 1000 population
Victoria	6.5	9.1	11.3	

Source: Victorian Police Crime Statistics

As a result of this evidence WCC included the prevention of violence against women as a priority objective in the Warrnambool - A Healthy City (Health and Wellbeing Plan 2013-17) www.warrnambool.vic.gov.au/healthandwellbeing.

This recognition of family violence as a key strategic priority for Council provides the foundation for a range of strategies to which provide support for change in the community.

3. Leadership Actions:

a) **Signing MAV's Leadership Statement on PVAW**

In May 2012, the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) launched the "Prevention of Violence Against Women Leadership Statement" www.mav.asn.au/policy-services/social-community/gender-equity/Pages/leadership-statement.aspx. The statement is an outcome of the Local Government and Community Partnerships Program. This project recognised the role that local government across Victoria can take in leading a 'whole of community' approach to raising awareness and responding to opportunities to promote respectful relationships.

In 2012 WCC signed the MAV Leadership Statement on the Prevention of Violence Against Women. As a result of this action, WCC formally committed to the vision set out in the National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children, that "Australian women and their children live free from violence in safe communities"

This action has provided the foundation for leadership, policy and primary prevention actions since that time.

b) **Great South Coast (GSC) Prevention of Violence Against Women and Children Strategy**

The GSC PVAWC Strategy http://www.greatsouthcoast.com.au/images/GSC_PVAWC_Strategy.pdf is a collective regional approach to addressing the issue of family violence across five local government areas in the Great South Coast Region (Councils of Glenelg, Southern Grampians, Moyne, Warrnambool and Corangamite).

Finalised in 2013, it was developed by a partnership made up of Women's Health & Wellbeing Barwon South West, five Councils of the GSC, regional health & community services providers, regional family violence and sexual assault services, regional networks including the PCPs, State government departments and Victoria Police.

The strategy underpins the significant leadership, advocacy and primary prevention activities being undertaken across the region.

Significant outcomes so far include:

- Endorsement of the strategy by all local governments in the Great South Coast region and inclusion of PVAWC as a priority in their 2013 – 2017 Health & Wellbeing Plans.
- Incorporation of a Family Violence clause into all Council Enterprise Agreements.
- A broadening of White Ribbon activities across the region.
- Support for the roll-out of the Baby Makes 3 Plus program with over 250 first parents participating and the majority of Council's Early Years staff receiving Understanding Family Violence / Gender Equity training - > 12 sessions.

- The roll-out of the 'Take a Stand' workplace bystander program at Wannon Water, Southern Grampians Shire, Brophy Youth & Family Services and WCC, with other organisations also expressing interest.
- The delivery of the Everybody's Business conference which focussed on prevention of violence against women with a disability. More than 100 delegates participated and an action plan has subsequently been developed by the South West Carer Respite Network.
- The delivery of the VicHealth PVAWC short course in Warrnambool
- The delivery of information sessions on PVAWC to Youthlink 55, the South West Carers Network, Emmanuel Year 10 Young Women, the CWA and the Warrnambool Principals Network – Wellbeing Committee Forum – 10 sessions > 300 participants
- The commitment to a PVAW round by the AFL Western District Commission in 2015
- Piloting of a gender audit tool to assess sporting infrastructure
- Participation of three Councils in an organisational survey to assess attitudes community attitudes and knowledge relating to violence and gender equity.

4. Local Primary Prevention Activity (actions of the GSC PVAWC Strategy)

a) **Baby Makes Three Plus**

Baby Makes 3 "Plus" (BM3+) is an early identification and intervention strategy. An evidence based program developed by Whitehorse Community Health Service, City of Whitehorse and VicHealth to promote equal and respectful relationships between men and women during the transition to parenthood.

Funded by the Department of Justice through a Crime Prevention Grant, BM3+ has been running in the Great South Coast since April 2013.

This program is aimed at parents who have had their first child and focuses on gender equity and building respectful relationships. The program is running in all GSC Councils, embedded in the Maternal and Child Health Service's new parent groups. Both parents attend with their baby and the topics include:

- The transition to parenthood
- Expectations of mums and dads
- Who does what in the household / gender roles
- Healthy relationships
- Sex and Intimacy
- Dealing with conflict
- Communication

To date 267 parents have completed the 3 session program. The project is being evaluated by Deakin University including both qualitative and quantitative measures. The major evaluation report is to be presented to state government in November 2015 but data to date indicates that the program is well regarded by the parents who have attended with the majority rating the sessions as "very good or excellent"

Even after the major evaluation report is completed in late 2015 it will be too early to see whether this has made an impact on reducing the incidence of family violence in this region. As part of the evaluation parents are asked for their comments on the program.

Some of these are as follows:

"it is good for fathers to express their feelings"

"it is important to invest in this relationship with my partner"

"it's important to connect with other families and see we are not alone"

b) Take A Stand Against Domestic Violence: It's Everybody's Business

Take A Stand Against Domestic Violence: It's Everybody's Business (TAS) is a workplace-based bystander program that addresses the prevention of violence against woman.

The program was developed by Women's Health Victoria, funded by VicHealth, and has been informed by the input of leading researchers and authorities in the violence prevention field. It harnesses participants to consider themselves active bystanders in the fight against the sexist stereotypes and violence-supportive attitudes and behaviours, which give rise to domestic violence.

In addition, the TAS program gives employers the opportunity to help minimise and even prevent the devastating effects of domestic violence by establishing policies and processes to support women affected by violence either in the workplace, by implementing new policy related to domestic violence (eg. special leave), or in the home by providing list of support of services available in their region and/or promoting their Employee Assistance Program as support.

The heart of the program is about changing the attitudes and behaviours that sustain violence and encouraging staff working at WCC to 'take a stand' and effect lasting cultural change.

Women's Health and Wellbeing – Barwon South West has started the implementation of the TAS program mid 2014 throughout their region. This involves working with businesses from different sectors (local government, community services, education).

WCC is the largest organisation to sign on to the TAS program to date. WCC's commitment to the TAS program includes staff training, policy review and activities to promote a cultural change and support staff victim of domestic violence. Between April and June 2015, around 600 WCC employees will have attended the three mandatory TAS training sessions.

Meanwhile WCC existing policy on family violence was reviewed with the prospect of implementing the recommendations in the next round of the Enterprise Bargaining Agreement's negotiation.

Why it works?

The TAS program is an action of the Great South Coast Prevention of Violence against Women and Children Strategy 2013-2017. WCC's commitment to the program aligns with workplace health and safety.

WCC had a strong connection/partnership with WHW BSW prior its commitment to the TAS program. The ability of WHW BSW to meet and understand the needs of WCC had allowed roll out the TAS program throughout the whole organisation. The TAS program is offered at no cost to workplaces and the use of local facilitators allowed its implementation at WCC.

c) Everybody's Business Forum

While there is a lack of comprehensive data, the information that is available for both Australia and overseas indicates that the rate of violence against women with disabilities is significantly higher than for women without disabilities.

The Warrnambool Health and Wellbeing Plan - Action Plan 2015-17 identifies the development of a local strategy relating to family violence and people with disabilities.

WCC is a member of the South West Carer and Respite Services Network. The Network comprises 29 member organisations that provide essential carer and respite services to the carers of people who are frail aged, people who have a disability and people with a mental illness across South West Victoria.

A key strategic objective of the Network is to improve outcomes for service users by promoting gender equity among all Network Members, Service Users and Stakeholders.

Key actions under the objective are:

- increased knowledge and skill among network members about identifying and responding to violence against women with disabilities.
- increased confidence among service users that member organisations take an appropriate approach to gender equity issues including prevention of violence against women with disabilities.

To further highlight this issue, and to identify strategies to prevent and respond to violence against women with disabilities, the South West Carer and Respite Services Network and Women's Health and Wellbeing Barwon South West hosted the **'Everybody's Business'** Forum, held in Warrnambool in August 2014.

Keynote speaker at the Forum was comedian and disability advocate Stella Young, and a panel discussion included representatives from Women with Disabilities Victoria, the Disability Services Commissioner, and the Office of the Public Advocate, Victoria Police, South West Centre Against Sexual Assault and Emma House Domestic Violence Services. These presentations were followed by workshops involving over 100 attendees from community organisations, local government, the disability sector and domestic violence agencies.

Suggestions and ideas from the Forum workshops formed the basis of "Everybody's Business Action Plan" which details objectives, strategies, responsibilities and timelines for actions designed to better support women with disabilities and to prevent violence against them, and to enhance partnerships and coordination between the disability sector and domestic violence agencies.

Implementation of the Everybody's Business' Action Plan" commenced in February 2015

d) Gender Equity Audit of Council Owned/Managed Sport Grounds

WCC views investment in the City's sporting facilities as a significant investment in the health and wellbeing of the community. WCC has a responsibility to ensure that everyone has equitable access to Council provided sports grounds and associated facilities.

Clubrooms are important places as they are the public face of a club. A welcoming club is one where people [regardless of their gender, age, racial or religious background, sexuality or if they have a disability] feel comfortable and safe (Vichealth 2012, Everyone Wins).

Providing equitable and safe access for all involves taking a closer look at the physical environment of the club. WCC Gender Equity Audit Pilot currently underway will provide evidence for planning the future allocation of resources to ensure equity.

The audit process has been designed to be realistic about the resources available to conduct and respond to the audit. Initially it will focus on small wins such as improved signage, sight-lines and lighting for safety, as well as opportunities to boost natural surveillance. It is planned to embed it into building maintenance audits to create a sustainable approach to the issue.

It is anticipated that the audit process may highlight inequities related to provision of facilities such as change rooms and toilets for females that will require prioritisation for investment.

The State Government made a commitment in opposition to provide funding for new and upgraded sporting infrastructure which re-dresses gender inequity. It is expected that the audit process and data will ensure Council is well-placed if/when funding opportunities arise.

e) White Ribbon Day Community Initiatives

Sport

AFL Western District affiliated leagues and associations will take part in a newly created White Ribbon Round on May 30-31 2015 to support the prevention of violence against women.

This campaign is focussed on increasing awareness of and supporting the prevention of violence against women. All players and officials in every grade of football and netball will wearing a white armband on their left arm during any game played on the weekend of May 30-31.

Each club/league will promote their involvement in the White Ribbon Round through associated websites, social media accounts, club newsletters or weekly league records and will explain to their players/officials/supporters why this is an important issue and how they can help in building awareness throughout the community using materials and tools prepared by the AFL.

The AFL Western District Commission will be promoting the collective nature of this initiative through:

- Distribution of a Media Release to all local media including a photo.
- A social media campaign promoting the initiative and those involved.

Community

For the past three years organisations in Warrnambool have supported an engaging public awareness campaign in the City's CBD for White Ribbon Day.

Sponsorship by local for-profit and not-for-profit organisations has resulted in the installation of large-scale white ribbons in street trees and messages on the facades of landmark buildings. In addition, local media have provided free print and radio advertising space to support the campaign.



5. Council Service Provision

As a provider of Integrated Family Services (IFS) across the region, WCC is a signatory to the Family Violence Services, Child FIRST / Family Services and Child Protection Partnership Agreement. As a result there are a range of local referral networks that partner with WCC staff in responding to family violence referrals.

More than 30% of IFS's cases involve family violence. This is increasing. ChildFIRST practitioners are recording an increase in referrals where the child/ren have experienced or witnessed family violence.

Early awareness of FV issues and integration of services for families via innovative software (eg Patchwork) may result in improved integration and co-ordination of services to support families. Championed by the MAV, the Patchwork Pilot project is run in collaboration with 20 Victorian councils of which WCC is one. Patchwork has shown to improve collaboration, offer joined-up services from multiple agencies, lead to earlier intervention where required, deliver better outcomes for clients and improve the efficiency of administrative procedures <http://www.mav.asn.au/policy-services/social-community/children-families/Pages/patchwork.aspx>

6. WHAT ARE THE OPPORTUNITIES?

- As the success of the GSC PVAWC Strategy illustrates, the creation of a strong, regional strategic planning framework, underpinned by Municipal Health and Wellbeing Plans, creates an environment where integrated, co-ordinated and effective primary prevention activities can be implemented. The Strategy has provided a strong foundation for future efforts, investment and focus by partners to the plan. Statewide investment in strategic planning for prevention and community leadership will deliver returns to the community.
- Strong foundations for prevention cannot be built without leadership and partnership. The role of Women's Health and Wellbeing Barwon South West and passionate local government champions cannot be underestimated as critical success factors in the achievements of the GSC PVAWC Strategy.
- Women's health services, in partnership with local government and other community organisations, are best placed to deliver leadership on prevention. We would support a formal governance structure be adopted statewide (refer Women's Health Association of Victoria and Domestic Violence Victoria Governance Structure).
- Implementing policy and system change that supports and embeds evidence-based prevention approaches into universal service provision - eg BM3+ in maternal child and health programs and respectful relationships education programs in all government secondary schools across the state.
- Additional support for and resources to enable evidence-based workplace (eg Take a Stand) and sport settings (eg Everybody Wins) approaches which raise awareness and create cultural change.
- Supporting the use of collective impact approach in FV primary prevention by providing resources for co-ordination of effort (ie the backbone support) is critical to success.
- Better understanding the impact of rurality on FV and adapting prevention activities and service provision/response models to reduce the divide between metropolitan and rural experiences.

- Implement effective client management and collaboration software (eg Patchwork patchworkhq.com) in all funded community services – family, youth, maternal child and health, etc.

Patchwork can improve collaboration, offer joined-up services from multiple agencies, lead to earlier intervention where required, deliver better outcomes for clients and improve the efficiency of administrative procedures.

For more information about any aspect of this submission please contact Manager
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