

1. Introduction

The pioneering feminist response to domestic and family violence (DFV) began in Victoria with the setting up of Women's Liberation Halfway House (WLHH) in 1974. WLHH was the first women's refuge in Victoria and the second in Australia, behind Elsie in Sydney. WLHH defines itself as a secular feminist organisation committed to addressing and challenging the inequities and oppression women and children face as a result of their position in society. We are a state-wide service based in the eastern region. Preventing violence against women and children is the primary focus of WLHH. Our analysis of sexism and racism within the Australian context recognises the disadvantages of women and the disempowerment confronted by minority groups, individuals from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, Indigenous Australians and individuals with marginalised religious and political beliefs. We seek to provide a service that moves beyond short term solutions for our service users and to the long term objective of societal improvement through feminist philosophical thinking, social justice and human rights frameworks. WLHH practice stems from the recognition of the importance to women of utilising their rights to live a life free from violence and the recognition of the individuality of each woman's experience. We seek to run a service that ensures the diverse needs of women and children are addressed in a flexible and culturally appropriate manner.

More than 40 years later, WLHH still operates in accordance with our stated philosophy. However, there are historic inequities that still continue to undermine our work with women and children. State and federal funding streams for DFV services remain insecure due to different political philosophies and policy agendas. For WLHH, specifically, these differences undermine employment stability as we wait to see how long the homelessness funding brinkmanship between governments will continue, for example our current funding agreement is for the next two years only. WLHH does not believe DFV funding should be a political football. The dominance of masculinist centred politics and anti feminist attitudes adds to WLHH's difficulty to plan its own future and to provide security of ongoing support to women and children experiencing DFV. It also inhibits our greater cultural objectives of improving societal attitudes to women and reducing the inequity experienced by women, including feminists, and children, and DFV victims, specifically.

This submission, then, focuses on four aspects of the DFV response that we believe should be considered by the Commission. These are:

1. The importance of not separating out responses to DFV from the broader gender inequities experienced by women and children in Australia, these inequities contribute to gendered violence and of men's violence against women and children, more broadly.

2. The inappropriate and insufficient funding for refuge and crisis services under homelessness and the problem of inadequate housing options for women and children seeking to escape DFV.
3. Changes to justice responses that have occurred from 2006, onwards, and opportunities for continued improvement in this space.
4. The continuing importance of independent, feminist women's services in responding to DFV.

Are there other goals the Royal Commission should consider?

The level of domestic/family violence (DFV) in all states of Australia is a national emergency. The Royal Commission into Domestic/Family Violence should be nationwide not limited to Victoria. To limit the Royal Commission to Victoria denies many individuals the opportunity to tell their stories, it limits the opportunity for services to describe and discuss how funding to assist victims has been managed differently in different States of Australia and how this process can be discriminatory. Further, it limits opportunities for the general public in Australia to learn and grow from nationwide introspection and reflection on our conception of acceptable behaviour in families and, in conjunction with the national Royal Commission into the abuse and maltreatment of children by government and non government institutions, the opportunity to reflect on;

- the effects on DFV refuge services of economic rationalist thinking by governments and government departments,
- negative psychological, sociological and linguistic stereotypes and perceptions of women based on gendered roles within families, discrimination experienced by women in broader society, and language that identifies 'the feminine ' and, by extension, women, as being manipulative, devious and anti male, even in English where gender is covert rather than overt
- And the discriminatory impact of masculinist thinking which dominates society and ignores or sidelines different views such as secular feminist philosophical thought particularly in relation to DFV service delivery.

2. Addressing the causes of family violence and violence against women

Responding to Issues Paper questions 3 5,, 6 and 7

The questions asked in the issues paper have a very specific focus on DFV reforms in Victoria, however WLHH questions the value of separating DFV from other continuing inequities experienced by women and children in Australian society.

Evidence about changes in financial circumstances, particularly as a result of women becoming pregnant, are widely recognised as having an association with DFV. However at a broader social level the persistence of unequal political representation for women in Australia, common experiences of unequal pay, a generalised lack of respect for feminists, feminist oriented services and feminist theorists, and the dominance of men and masculinist thinking in most institutions in Australia creates an atmosphere that is not inclusive of women and feminists and can result in attitudes that fuel the occurrence and persistence of violence against women in public and in private homes. In Australia women who attempt to speak up for themselves often meet a stereotypical male response along the lines of “What are you - a feminist!” Given the commonness of this response to women’s statements of empowerment we believe new approaches to policy and politics are required that question the supposed “gender neutrality” of responses by governments and institutions if responses to DFV and the status of women in Australia are to be improved. For example the Issues paper states

“Research shows that it is overwhelmingly women and children who are affected by family violence, and men who are violent towards them. For this reason, family violence is described as being ‘gendered’. Although family violence is gendered, men may also be affected by it.” (Royal Commission Issues Paper, 2015 p3)

The Commission may be attempting to demonstrate gender neutrality in its approach by recognising male victims of DFV i.e. an equality framework in relation to individual incidents of DFV however this minimises the wider social experience of violent behaviour. It fails to connect ‘gendered’ personal experiences by women and children with other sociological realities about violence in Australia.

There is no equality in the use of violence by men and women. There is no equality of paedophile rings, paedophile priests, or incidents of sexual assault between men and women in Australia; there is no equality in murders of domestic partners killed by men and women; just as there is not equality in pay between men and women despite equal pay legislation.

The Issues paper then states;

“Because of the variety of behaviours which amount to family violence and the wide range of people affected by it, we have chosen to use broad language, referring to ‘people who are affected by family violence’ and ‘people who have been violent’.” (Royal Commission Issues Paper, 2015 p3)

This statement effectively removes 'gender' from the issue of DFV and effectively sidelines sociological differences between the women and men. To surrender the 'gendered' nature of DFV immediately after highlighting the 'gendered' nature of DFV appears to be an overly simple response to a complex issue. Feminists have written about the positivity of the masculine and negativity of the feminine in language since the 1970's and how this affects women, children. Feminist theory has questioned the way in which people who use power can also claim to be speaking 'gender neutrally' for decades, yet this ongoing critique is often ignored. Perhaps Commissioners who be interested could read "To Speak Is Never Neutral" (Irigaray, 2002). Understanding of the relationship between claim to power and claims to 'gender neutrality' have developed considerably and form part of the development of feminist and feminist post modern philosophies.

It is also of interest that in 'Preventing violence before it occurs: A framework and background paper to guide the primary prevention of violence against women in Victoria' (2007) the authors state;

"Explanations proposed by feminist activists and theorists emphasised the gendered nature of abuse and identified prescriptive gender roles and the unequal distribution of power and resources between men and women as primary causes. Meanwhile, other social theorists looked to a range of other factors, such as the effects of social and economic stress, the learning of violence in families and the impacts of alcohol and drug use. A common criticism of these theories was that they tended to propose single-factor explanations, and in so doing belied the complex nature of abuse. Feminist theorists were criticised for their failure to explain why only some men were violent, while alternative explanations were questioned because they failed to account for the gendered patterns of violence against women (Heise, 1988)" (VicHealth, 2007, p26)

Without knowing which feminist theorists are being referred to it is difficult to understand the reason for these criticisms of feminist theorists in a VicHealth publication unless as an example of the ongoing failures to accept and engage with the variety of feminist approaches. Perhaps if the Commission is interested in insightful developments in feminist philosophy and the empowerment of women globally you would be interested to read about Luce Irigaray's conceptualisation of 'sexuate rights' and texts such as 'An Ethics of Sexual Difference' (1993). Even people with the best intentions to be inclusive can inadvertently act in inequitable ways.

Questions about reducing DFV or the effects of recent reforms may benefit from a wide focus that includes sociological, psychological and linguistic analysis of 'gender' and 'gender neutrality'. Whether recent reforms in Victoria have been effective may be more effective if they included international comparisons between different countries that have made progress on wider issues of women's involvement in all social institutions, government and in educating societies about women's and children's rights. The amount of time given to organisations to make submissions to

this Royal Commission is insufficient to provide such a response, however the most successful ways to support the ongoing safety and wellbeing of women and children affected by DFV are;

- By governments providing better support through; financial support for individual women, by funding DFV services separately from homelessness services, and by better support and services for single parent families
- By police, courts and other services engaging in self reflective work within their own structures and with feminist theorists and services to understanding how DFV can affect women's and children's ability to take action to feel safe and, to support them through the many changes that occur before, during and after they have left violence homes.

The biggest gaps are;

- In providing sufficient money to assist women to and in their ongoing need for financial support, particularly financial support to access safe housing.
- Changing the pervasive dominance of men and masculinist thinking in our institutions and society and the underlying negativity of attitudes to women and feminist theorists, which requires at minimum compulsory educational programmes for all professionals working in law, police and other parts of the justice system, in parliaments and local councils – both elected representatives and paid officials or bureaucrats.
- More resources and money to directly addressing issues raised by feminists and women's organisations in Australia could help reduce occurrences of violence against women and children and result in societal change to make Australia a more equitable and inclusive culture.
- Programmes that genuinely are directed to ensuring that violence against women does not arise in the first place, which requires ongoing programmes of training consistent with Continuing Professional Education Programmes and incorporated into these programs in law, medicine, nursing, social work, welfare work and other professions and trades.

3. Refuge funding gaps and the housing crisis

Responding to Issues Paper questions 8, 9 and 10

While removal of a violent person from a women's home might be useful, it can also be important for women and children to leave their home, at least for some period of time, to ensure they understand what it feels like to be safe. A house or flat may contain constant reminders of all the abuse that has occurred and it may be that a fresh environment and opportunities to talk to other women who have experienced similar abuse can provide support and encouragement to act self-protectively and protectively towards children. Sharing stories with other victims of DFV can be a

very empowering experience, as can work with specialist DFV professionals. For some women refuge is the only safe option, particularly where violent perpetrators are unable to be located or where the risk is deemed to be extremely high. This should never mean, however, that violent men are left in the homes where they have subjected their families or any member of a family to abuse, exploitation and violence. Such an approach rewards the perpetrators whilst penalising victims/survivors

Although refuge is clearly an important DFV response for women who have experienced violence, DFV refuge services, such as WLHH, are only funded under government programs related to homelessness. DFV is an issue, in itself, and should be funded as such. It is also a part of a 'gendered' pattern of inequality and discrimination experienced by women and children in patriarchal societies like Australia, something which homelessness funding cannot recognise. Funding DFV refuge providers under the umbrella of homelessness separates the personal from the political. In Australia, DFV policies are based on simplistic attitudes by politicians about how awful DFV is. However, this then turns into paternalistic policies which attend only to concerns about shelter, rather than focusing on the broader harm caused to women and children by men with a sense of gendered entitlement and/or politicians who continue to show a general lack of interest, knowledge or respect for feminist theory. Funding DFV refuge providers, with their specialist knowledge of dealing with women and children experiencing DFV, under homelessness fails to recognise and properly value the skills of many in these community agencies. A well funded and resourced State and Federal government Department with responsibility for all DFV related services i.e. both public campaigns, advice lines and DFV refuges which could align with broader social goals to address gender inequality in Australia and entrenched discriminatory views about women could make real inroads to assist the groundswell of support within communities crying out for something to be done to protect women and children for men who use violence and to the end backwards slide on wider issues such as pay inequality, inequitable treatment of single mothers and language and cultural practices based on masculinist views claiming to be 'gender neutral'.

Funding DFV refuge under homelessness also misses the urgent support needs of children. Children are not funded as clients by government under the homelessness funding arrangement. Children's specific needs for readily accessible counselling services are not adequately funded, nor are any of their personal and care needs, e.g. clothing, bedding, toys, school costs, outings, art therapy. The need for women and their children to rebuild their relationship after leaving DFV also has no specific funding allocation. Successive governments have failed to meet the needs of children who have

experienced or witnessed DFV in their homes. Both state and federal policy makers fail to include the specialist knowledge of DFV refugees in their policy development processes and this continues inequities for children who have experienced DFV. All children are provided with support in feminist refuges but we would like to improve these responses and need more resources and funding to do this important work.

The funding model for DFV refuge is based on number of women served. However, this model of funding is irrational, given that women who enter refuge often have nowhere to move on to and require increasingly long stays. Indeed, the consistent lack of housing supply, including rental, transitional or long-term public housing, means that women are having increasingly longer stays in refuge, sometimes up to five or six months, and “targets” for numbers of women served cannot reasonably be met. Public housing is inadequate to meet the needs of homelessness linked to a social disadvantage and all governments in Australia need to re-examine their policies, however since women leaving violence need a more diverse range of supports than simply access to public housing. The Housing Establishment Fund (HEF) can be effective in assisting women to gain independent housing of their choice; however, this funding stream is insufficient in terms of the amount of money available to individual women and the length of time this support is offered. If housing support was ongoing until a woman was financially self-supporting, this would improve housing stability for women and children after leaving violent homes and provide options other than public housing for women and their children whose financial situation has changed. Further, where victims/survivors come from families where the family house is owned, not rented, women should be recognised as having ownership rights, so that they are not forced into the public housing sector hence depriving them of their own property and lessening public housing availability for those without property interests.

Currently, due to a lack of capacity in the DFV refuge sector, women and children are often placed in motels before going to refuge. This is far from ideal at the crisis stage of DFV incidents. The crisis-driven funding model has led to the bandaid crisis advocacy and response regional funding, which has been ineffectively brokered in most regions. WLHH, for example, provides outreach services to women in motels under this model but does not receive any of the funding. There are also gaps in assessment when work is crisis-driven, i.e. careful consideration to what stage the particular woman is at in her experience of DFV is often not paid. Is the woman ready to leave, permanently? Could an intervention in her current relationship, such as Men’s Behaviour Change, provide an effective response to the situation? There is a need for more home-like environments where such

assessments take place before decisions about interventions—such as referral to Child FIRST, Men’s Behaviour Change, drug and alcohol, mental health services or DFV refuge—are taken. WLHH believes a large investment in DFV is needed for effective change to occur.

The lack of access to safe and affordable housing significantly exacerbates the problems of women and children who want to start a new life free from violence. Women who choose to act self-protectively and protectively in relation to their children is effectively choosing to take herself and her children into poverty, often leaving property and assets behind, in the control of the perpetrator. Many women who experience DFV end up heading single parent families. Single parent pensions barely meet the food and shelter needs of these families and efforts to make men financially accountable are often poorly managed by institutions and sometimes manipulated to the detriment of women and children. There have also been recent policy directions, such as changing Single Parents (mainly women) to Newstart, linked to the age of the youngest child. Thinking that this policy will empower women to participate in work at a time of increasing pay inequality is bewildering.

Education for people who work in homelessness services is provided by TAFEs and Universities however in current Community service training packages DFV subjects are optional electives and few educational institutions in Victoria offer DFV training in their qualifications. Similarly Psychology and Social Work degrees vary greatly in the quality of their training on DFV issues, their connection to DFV service providers, and their inclusion various feminist theorists in course reading materials. This means that critical aspects of learning about DFV can be missing when people apply to work in the DFV sector. Furthermore, TAFE funding has been cut severely and this sector must be reinstated as a fully funded, fully operative body providing well-supported education to a wide variety of professionals and tradespeople whose work is fundamental to ending violence against women. The TAFE sector also provides paid work for women who have been deprived of jobs due to economic policies which are regressive.

Legal and Police training about DFV can lack depth or focus too much at the level of individual experience while lacking sociological, linguistic and cultural aspects that might lead to some self-reflective activities that could change underlying attitudes. DVRC is the only Victorian service providing dedicated training specifically designed to address some of these issues but may be undervalued and underutilised by vocational institutions and universities. Such training must be

ongoing rather than 'one off' in the recognition that ending violence against women requires ongoing concerted effort, not single sessions or unsustained courses.

4. Improving justice responses

Responding to Issues Paper question 2

Going to court is a stressful experience for most ordinary people. In the experience of WLHH, the establishment of courts with a family violence division has had little effect on victims of DFV seeking intervention orders. Many women have still had the experience of having to face perpetrators at court; indeed, there remains a need to provide safer, remote, video-linked sites for women to make their court appearance. This will alleviate some of the fear women feel when they must physically attend court for a contested hearing. Simply being physically present in the same location can rob women of their ability to speak up for themselves, as it heightens their immediate fear of violence and diminishes their ability to speak coherently about their experiences. While WLHH support workers know when and how to use the security measures available at some courts, they are often not effectively used by women attending court on their own.

One of the most useful support services at court is the presence of lawyers from the Women's Legal Service; however, this service appears to be underfunded and WLS must be better funded and available at more courts. It is being seriously underutilised due to lack of funding and resources. Legal aid funding can also be difficult for women to access, especially if they are named on the title of a property. This should not stand in the way of women being able to access legal advice and representation. If necessary, a caveat can be placed on the house although this should be done in strictly limited circumstances only. Part of women's experience of DFV can include men refusing to discuss financial issues such as the sale of a property and/or the 'transmission' of debt. Such circumstances are often overlooked in the assessment of access to legal aid funding and can drive women away from using courts because they are embarrassed by their lack of knowledge about financial rights and responsibilities. This can also lead to women gaining bad credit ratings and being held legally responsible for debts they did not accrue.

The reforms have also not dealt with some of the ongoing issues related to intervention orders and criminal court processes. This has been outlined by the Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse, who write:

The emphasis on civil protection orders in Australia has been criticised by some commentators. For example, McGregor & Hopkins (1991) see irony in the fact that that the focus of activism was recognition of the criminal nature of domestic violence. Yet in many

cases where assaults have occurred, no charge is laid by the police and a civil order taken instead. Scutt (1990) regards this as effectively decriminalising domestic violence. Based on her Melbourne research, Hunter (1999) argues that the emphasis on consent – mutually agreed settlements – in hearings concerning protection orders has the advantage of affording access to protection for women, but at the same time helps to maintain the silence about abuse and violence. Defendants are strongly encouraged to consent to the order being made ‘without admissions’, yet, as Hunter points out, no one asks the woman if she would prefer to tell her story and prove her case or if she is happy to obtain the order while the defendant is able to deny his violent behaviour. (Australian Domestic & Family Violence Clearinghouse, 2000, p. 5)

This situation continues, today. Perhaps, at the very least, information about what behaviour constitutes DFV and information on Men’s Behaviour Change programs could be sent to recipients of an aggrieved family member’s statement, so that even when an intervention order is agreed to ‘without admissions’ some attempt by courts to provide information and education is made. Too often poorly run or underfunded programmes ostensibly designed to change violent men’s behaviour can simply compound the problem by failing to sufficiently challenge beliefs that men are not to blame, not responsible and to lay partial responsibility, misguidedly on the victim/survivor.

The Victoria Police Code of Practice has been useful in creating a more responsive Police presence in homes where violence may have occurred, however, the effectiveness of the Code of Practice is highly dependent on the individual police men and women involved their attitudes, facial expressions, tone of voice and physical presence in a home. Women and children are often unable to articulate their fears and concerns to police due to, for example:

- the social negativity associated with women acting as independent persons with legal rights to safety,
- issues of language and cultural differences,
- a generalised fear of police due to previous experiences in Australia or other countries,
- Fear of death in custody among Indigenous groups.

When women and children feel unable to actively participate in police interventions in DFV incidents the affect over time can be a reduction of the quality of service provided by individual police members, or the development of fatalistic attitudes towards victims of DFV among police members. WLHH supports all service providers involved with people affected by DFV having regular DFV refreshers and updates about current research, sessions where reflection on service providers’ views about victims of DFV can be unpacked and discussed to ensure continuous improve to maintain effectiveness of interventions.

WLHH does not believe these publicity campaigns have yet reduced the occurrence of DFV. If, by public education campaigns the Commission includes advertisements on television WLHH believes these advertisements have been too general in nature. They do not cover the range of behaviours included in DFV legislation, the campaigns are short lived and need to be repeated and enhanced to promote new knowledge gained through research on the underlying attitudes and means by which men as a sex exercise control within families and society more broadly. Some areas yet to be addressed in public campaigns include;

- Explanations of how the use of the imperative voice by men within families to control women, and children can constitute an abuse of power. This abuse may be rationalised by men who use violence as part of their religion's tenets,
- Examples demonstrating abuse of economic power over women, children. Such abuse can habituate women to inequality in broader society such as unequal pay for the same or similar work and result in further economic abuse due to fear of losing work by standing up for labour rights,
- Examples demonstrating the continued privileging of men and the masculine and the needs and ambitions of male children over female children in the same family. This can create intergenerational discriminatory practises,
- Examples of women and their children who have successfully left violent families and have flourished by becoming independent and living safer lives,
- Examples of how the DFV refuge system can support women and children to end abuse at the hand of men who use violence
- Examples of other forms of DFV such as the devastating effects of emotional, psychological and social abuse and the effects of DFV on other family members rather than a singular focus on physical violence.

WLHH also notes the scarcity of targeted funding specifically directed towards feminist individuals and organisations to be involved in producing public education campaigns or to produce products that promote positive advocacy on behalf of women such as DFV community advertisements showing stories based on women's and children's experience after leaving DFV situations, and civics education in schools about the specific rights of girls and women in Victoria and Australia. Such educational programmes must be ongoing and built into the structure of educational institutions so that not only those who are learning at these institutions are taught but so too are the teachers and other staff. In the history of WLHH two films about DFV were produced for public consumption and

on request WLHH will speak to community groups about DFV and the work we do with women and children even if we are not specifically funded for this work.

Court ordered interventions mean there is a continuing need for men's behaviour change in the context of violence having already occurred. However if information about these services was provided for example, by courts or police with, for example, a Family Violence Safety Notice this could be part of an educative approach to DFV interventions. The postponement of men's intervention programs until violence against a woman has already occurred makes the work of preventing a reoccurrence within a family much more difficult. Perhaps a version of Behaviour change and No to Violence programs could be most effective in an educational setting where critical discussions about the privileging of the masculine as part of Australia's current linguistic, social and cultural norms could occur. A conscious identification of the dominance of men within social and religious institutions and as breadwinners and 'heads' of two parent families may be a critical of preventing DFV in Australia in the future. The current programs are also subject to long waiting lists and pressure from governments departments dominated by economic rationalist thinking to amalgamate and/or reduce their cost to government.

5. Looking forward: the continued importance of independent, feminist women's services

Responding to question 11

Respect for the ongoing existence of feminist services run by women for women is variable and continued funding is constantly under threat. WLHH has been told time and time again that we should amalgamate with other service types such as large homelessness services. WLHH does not believe such service types are philosophically compatible and we note anecdotal evidence suggests where amalgamation occurs a commitment to feminist oriented practice may be compromised.

Experience in NSW

Elsie's the first feminist refuge in Australia below is a short description by Anne Summers about the DFV refuge experience in NSW

"A woman from Nowra seeking refuge at Bega recently was turned away, Gabrielle Powell from Bega Women's Resource Centre told me. She had also heard of another woman who had rung the Domestic Violence Hotline only to be told that she might be able to find a bed in Darwin. Such is the sad and chaotic state of affairs following the "reforms" to homelessness funding and services that have had the (unintended?) consequence of dismantling the 40-year-old women's refuge services sector. A few weeks ago in this newspaper, in response to my previous column on this subject, Gabrielle Upton, the Minister

for Family and Community Services, accused me of making “false” claims that refuges and women’s only services were set to close. Well, Minister, in case your staff has kept you in the dark about this, you need to be aware that a number of services have closed (Eden, Erin’s Place in Lane Cove, Killara in Randwick, Innari Housing in Marrickville, Katakuku Women’s Housing, Wyong and Lotus House Indo-Chinese Young Women’s refuge to name those I have been able to confirm) while others are being transformed beyond recognition and with the likelihood they will no longer be able to deliver the specialist and sensitive services needed by women (and children) in crisis. (Asking refuge workers to fill in a 20-page referral form for women seeking emergency help, as happened this week with one of the large faith-based organisations that have “won” control of most of the refuges, is not the way to do it.) In the past fortnight, the staff of Elsie Women’s Refuge, Sydney’s oldest and the first feminist refuge, have all been made redundant in anticipation of Elsie being handed over to St Vincent de Paul on September 1. So too have the staff of Delores Single Women’s Refuge at Bondi Junction. These dedicated inner-city workers were all offered the chance to apply for positions at Blacktown and/or Wilcannia and when they declined, they were to quote one of them, “given their marching orders”. They will all finish up on August 29. I have spoken to a number of women who have had past or present involvement in the women’s refuge movement and, like me, everyone is reeling in shock at what has happened.” (<http://www.annesummers.com.au/2014/07/nsw-government-closes-doors-to-women-fleeing-violence/> viewed 19/5/2015)

Why independent feminist services are important

WLHH is run by a culturally diverse Board of Management and provides support to women and children from a wide variety of cultural backgrounds. Women from other countries are often unaware of the DFV provision in the Immigration Act and believe their partner can have them sent back to their country of origin if they are not compliant.

WLHH recommends education for all new immigrants about DFV and services is vital to reduce violence in the community. Any form of overt discrimination against a particular ethnic or cultural group within the wider community tends to keep women and children isolated and reduce help seeking behaviour in relation to DFV.

WLHH has made a range of suggestions throughout this submission and we welcome the opportunity to contribute in person to the Commission into Domestic/Family Violence,