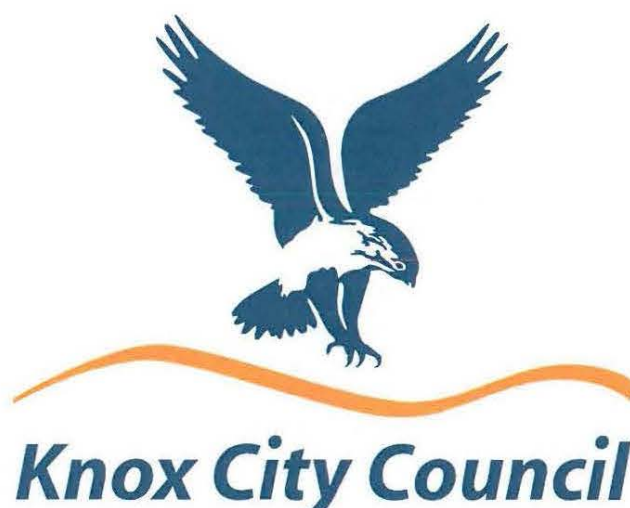


Royal Commission into Family Violence



Submission

May 2015

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Knox City Council recommends that the Royal Commission:

1. Enhance its goals to include:
 - Foster a *gender equitable* violence free society;
 - Build respectful *interpersonal* relationships *between men and women*; and,
 - Increase awareness of the *cause, types of*, extent and effects of family violence. (Pg. 2)
2. Recommend bipartisan support for the development of a long-term State Government preventing violence against women policy and action plan that promotes action from a broad range of sectors, is evidence based and accompanied by an evaluation framework. (Pg. 3)
3. Propose bipartisan commitment to the provision of ongoing, dedicated State Government funding to establish a primary prevention peak body for Victoria, including funding Regional Prevention of Violence Before it Occurs Integration Coordinators. (Pg. 4)
4. Recommend bipartisan support for dedicated, ongoing State Government funding to the primary prevention sector, including all local governments to ensure activities can be developed across and in partnership with the community. (Pg. 7)
5. Consider the findings and recommendations made by the Australian Institute of Criminology in the Victorian Office of Women's Affairs funded *Preventing Violence against Women in our Community* program evaluation completed in late 2014. (Pg. 7)
6. Recognise that outcome measures identified in local and regional primary prevention evaluation plans focus on short-term change, such as an increase in community awareness of the causes of violence against women or improvements to organisational policies and plans. (Pg. 7)
7. Recommend that longitudinal evaluation plans need to be committed to and managed at a state or federal government level to best capture the long-term impacts of delivering multiple ongoing prevention initiatives across a range of key settings. (Pg. 8)
8. Recommend that further consideration of the outcomes of the evaluation conducted in relation to the Baby Makes 3 Program is undertaken and based on this, early prevention programs of this nature are resourced and delivered as an integral part of first-time parents groups through the universal service platform of Maternal and Child Health Services across Victoria
9. Recommend that the Municipal Association of Victoria receive long-term funding to continue the resourcing and supporting of local governments to prevent violence against women in their communities. (Pg. 8)
10. Recognise that gender inequity is a fundamental determinant of violence against women, as articulated by VicHealth. (Pg. 11)
11. Recognise that primary prevention initiatives coordinated and funded at a State Government level need to include a significant focus on promoting 'systems' change. (Pg. 11)

12. Acknowledge the broad range of sectors that can and should play a key role in promoting gender equity to prevent violence against women, such as the sport and recreation, media, local government, education and employment sectors. (Pg. 11)
13. Recognise the unique contribution and expertise associated with the emerging workforce of prevention practitioners who have particular skill in promoting gender equity within organisations and the broader community. (Pg. 11)
14. Consider the findings of the Victorian Coroner in the case of Nicole Joy Millar to facilitate the development of an effective mechanism for bystanders to bring suspected family violence to the attention of an authority empowered and equipped to respond in a timely manner. (Pg. 12)
15. Recommends providing further training and tools to better assist Maternal and Child Health Services to identify and respond to women and children subjected to family violence.
16. Recommends providing Identifying Family Violence and Crisis Risk Assessment Framework (CRAF) training to all professionals working with children.
17. Consider the development of processes to allow the flow of information between governments and relevant agencies to allow improved targeting of prevention and support resources, and to reduce the risk of at risk individuals "falling through the cracks". (Pg. 13)
18. Recommend that improved access to family violence data is enabled to support improved monitoring, evaluation and benchmarking in order to strategically address the particular circumstances of family violence in their local community. (Pg. 13)
19. Consider the need for state level elder abuse legislation similar to the existing mandatory child protection reporting system to provide clarity for service providers regarding their role and procedures. (Pg. 13)
20. Recommends that funding is increased for Enhanced Maternal and Child Health Services to enable them to meet the increased demand placed on the service due to the high incidence of Child Protection Service family violence notifications.

FAMILY VIOLENCE TODAY

What is family violence, what we know today and what has been done so far

Q1. Are there other goals the Royal Commission should consider?

Following a review of the Royal Commission goals outlined in the Issues Paper, Knox City Council recommends:

Foster a violence-free society

The Royal Commission goals be extended to include recognition that fostering a violence-free society cannot be achieved without simultaneously fostering gender equity. The gendered nature and cause of violence must be explicitly recognised *in* the goal, in order to *achieve* the goal of eradicating violence.

Build respectful family relationships

The Royal Commission goals need to extend to recognise and respond to a range of interpersonal relationships other than just familial.

Unequal power relations between men and women are a key determinant of violence against women. These relations exist in the workplace, sports clubs, friendship circles, places of worship and so on. Equity needs to be created between men and women in all the settings and ways they relate with one another in order to redress this power imbalance and achieve respectful family relationships. This includes increasing the numbers of women in leadership positions within companies, organisations and community groups to first-time parents negotiating their roles and responsibilities in caring for a baby.

Increase awareness of the extent and effects of family violence

The cause of violence against women is a complex and multifaceted social phenomenon. The Royal Commission goals need to extend to increase awareness in the community of both the *causes* and *types* of violence against women, along with the extent and the effects.

Violence against women exists along a spectrum from anecdotal generalisations, gender based discrimination, through to family violence and murder. Outlined in the Family Violence Protection Act 2008, it takes many forms including, physical, sexual, financial, spiritual, emotional and psychological. The relationship between high rates of violence against women and high levels of gender inequity between women and men is well established (VicHealth, 2007).

Violence against women in the public sphere directly influences and reinforces attitudes about the vulnerability and objectivity of women within society as a whole. These attitudes are taken into the home and enacted in personal relationships in the private context.

Simultaneously, violence against women in the private sphere (the home) creates a set of norms for male-female relations in public. Thus, women are more wary and afraid in public space due to their and other women's experiences of violence at home. Violence against women in public is also perceived by men and women and the community, as normal and deserved when there is continued violence in the home.

Community awareness of the impact that family violence has on children also needs to be increased. As the evidence shows, family violence can have a significant detrimental impact

on a child's development (including the brain development of unborn infants)¹, sense of safety, mental health, quality of relationships and propensity to become a perpetrator of family violence as an adult. It is therefore critical that recognition of these impacts are widely accepted and addressed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

R1. The Royal Commission Goals are enhanced to include:

- Foster a **gender equitable** violence free society
- Build respectful **interpersonal** relationships **between men and women**
- Increase awareness of the **causes, various types of**, extent and effects of family violence.

Q2. The Royal Commission wants to hear about the extent to which recent reforms and developments have improved responses to family violence, and where they need to be expanded or altered.

The launch of the VicHealth paper in 2007 *Preventing violence before it occurs – A framework and background paper to guide the primary prevention of violence against women in Victoria* was seminal in terms of orienting and supporting effort aimed at preventing family violence. The research paper identified the underlying causes of violence against women, along with the contributing factors and key population groups, and pointed toward evidence-informed approaches to action.

The significance of the VicHealth framework cannot be underestimated and could certainly be described as a key reform and development in the field of preventing violence against women. The framework helped to coordinate effort across a range of sectors previously not engaged in prevention, such as the sport and recreation and education fields. Alongside identifying where action should be directed, the framework consolidated previously fragmented attempts to prevent violence against women through outlining how key partners might contribute to addressing the determinants.

The research conducted by VicHealth was given further primacy when it became the foundation upon which the previous Labor Government's *A Right to Respect: Victoria's plan to prevent violence against women 2010-2020* was developed. This plan outlined a whole-of-community approach to preventing violence against women, detailing the role of key partners, from a diverse range of sectors – all supported by a clear State Government commitment to the issue.

A Right to Respect was the first plan developed in Australia which solely focused on the prevention of violence against women. The government directed funding to support the implementation of the plan, in addition to funding already allocated to services responsible for responding to family violence survivors and holding perpetrators to account. It gave the prevention work the necessary platform required, identifying key stakeholders independent from and not ordinarily engaged with the issue and the family violence service sector.

The previous Liberal Government's *Action Plan to Address Violence against Women and Children: Everybody has a Responsibility to Act* includes a relatively small focus on prevention, particularly when compared to *A Right to Respect*. Furthermore, the majority of activities identified as current and future prevention initiatives actually focus on early

¹ Perry, B.D. *The neurodevelopmental impact of violence in childhood*. Chapter 18: In Textbook of Child and Adolescent Forensic Psychiatry, (Eds., D. Schetky and E.P. Benedek) American Psychiatric Press, Inc., Washington, D.C. pp. 221-238, 2001

intervention – that is, to addressing those already affected by or at risk of experiencing/perpetrating family violence.

The absence of a dedicated Victorian preventing violence against women plan is noticeable and requires attention. A State Government endorsed plan would play a crucial role in directing, resourcing and elevating the issue and action that can be taken across Victoria to prevent violence against women. It would serve to enable collaboration and partnerships across a range of sectors all focused on opportunities to undertake targeted, evidence-informed action.

While regional prevention action plans and partnerships also play an important role in driving social, cultural and behavioural shifts, State Government support for these initiatives is essential to ensuring long-term sustainability and consistency across Victoria.

RECOMMENDATION

- R2. The Royal Commission recommend bipartisan support for the development of a long-term State Government preventing violence against women policy and action plan that promotes action from a broad range of sectors, is evidence based and accompanied by an evaluation framework.

Q3. Which of the reforms to the family violence system introduced in the last ten years do you consider most effective? Why? How could they be improved?

As mentioned in response to Question 2, the development and implementation of the previous Labor Government's *A Right to Respect: Victoria's plan to prevent violence against women 2010-2020* has been a notable reform to the family violence prevention sector in Victoria.

As also stated in response to the previous question, the re-establishment of a State level primary prevention plan would be welcomed and valued. The value of having a State primary prevention plan could be further enhanced through the establishment of a funded peak body to oversee and guide a collaborative, coordinated approach to undertaking the work. Both mechanisms (a state-wide plan and peak body) are essential to ensuring that primary prevention work is given the public primacy it requires and that work increasingly occurs across a diverse range of sectors in an evidence-informed, systematic way.

To maintain Victoria's role as a leader in this work, a funded peak body is required to coordinate primary prevention action and strategy. This coordination needs to bring together local, regional and state work across the sector. It needs to engage with and expand partnerships and link up with national organisations such as Our Watch and Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety. This would need to be a well-regarded, reputable organisation that would have the respect of key partners and an ability to influence a range of sectors to take action.

It is also recommended that State funded coordinator roles similar to the Family Violence Regional Integration Coordinators model (currently funded by the State Government) are implemented. These coordinators would act as an advocate and conduit between local work, the peak body and state-wide initiatives.

RECOMMENDATION

- R3. The Royal Commission propose bipartisan commitment to the provision of ongoing, dedicated State Government funding to establish a primary prevention peak body for Victoria, including funding Regional Prevention of Violence Before it Occurs Integration Coordinators.

IMPROVING OUR RESPONSE TO FAMILY VIOLENCE

Reducing/preventing family violence, ensuring the safety of people affected by family violence, family violence and particular groups and communities

Q4. If you or your organisation have been involved in programs, campaigns or initiatives about family violence for the general community, tell us what these involved and how they have been evaluated.

Preventing Violence against Women in Our Community (PVAWC) Project

In 2011 Knox City Council, together with Maroondah and Yarra Ranges Councils received funding from the State Government for the *Preventing Violence against Women in Our Community* (PVAWC) project.

The PVAWC project ran from September 2011 until December 2014 and aimed to prevent violence against women *before it occurs* through addressing its underlying causes: the unequal distribution of power and resources between women and men, and an adherence to rigidly defined gender roles.² The focus of the project was to contribute to building communities, organisations, and cultures where violence against women does not occur due to women being equally valued, respected, heard and included.

The PVAWC project prompted significant change across Knox City Council: senior leaders are seeking to take a strong stand on the issue both within their organisations and in the community, staff increasingly understand the seriousness of violence against women and how they can contribute to preventing it, changes have been made to Council policy and processes, and momentum encouraging action continues.

These changes to policy and practice would not have occurred without the PVAWC project funding. The funding received was not only critical to delivering key project initiatives, but most importantly, to resourcing a dedicated position to lead preventing violence against women activity across the three councils.

While each Council is working to integrate and sustain the changes made as part of the PVAWC project, this is proving challenging due to limited resources. Without a dedicated position, Council is unable to sustain the momentum built, truly capitalise on the positive initiatives undertaken, or look to commence new activities. And while Council is committed to working to prevent violence against women into the future, its capacity to do so without further funding is limited.

Council's experience delivering a funded preventing violence against women initiative demonstrates the benefit of, and the need for well-resourced primary prevention activities. The gains made far exceeded what success might have occurred had the councils attempted to progress preventing violence against women activities independently and without a dedicated position to support the work.

PVAWC Project Key Successes

The key approach to delivering the PVAWC project was to work within each of the three councils to build their capacity to better consider and respond to the needs of women and men across policy, programs, infrastructure and services. The premise of this approach was that any changes to core council business would enable impact in the community due to the

² Pg. 1, VicHealth, 2011. *Preventing Violence against Women in Australia: Research Summary*. VicHealth, Carlton.

influential role local government plays within the social, economic, built and natural environments.

The project has been integral in generating community awareness of violence against women and the need to promote the equal inclusion and respect of women in everyday life:

- Over 1000 community members have signed the 'Maroondah Pledge' to commit their support to end violence against women.
- A large number of men wearing "Real men don't hit chicks" campaign t-shirts congregated in a major Knox shopping precinct over lunchtime to spread the message that violence against women is unacceptable.
- A Gender Equity Committee has been established at Yarra Ranges Council to influence and coordinate positive change across the organisation. This initiative means that over time, women and girls will have a greater opportunity to access council services, provide input into planning and infrastructure development and express how they want their local community to be.
- Community members from Knox, Maroondah, Yarra Ranges and beyond have joined a social marketing campaign to challenge harmful gender stereotyping through viewing and promoting the #SeePastTheStereotype films created as part of the project.
- The outer east will be seeing an increase in female participation and inclusion in sporting club leadership roles as a result of the *Gender Lens for Leisure Project* which provided recommendations to the three councils on how they can promote the greater inclusion and respect of women and girls in sport and recreation activities;
- Over 1,100 employees within Knox City Council are now covered by a Family Violence Clause which provides necessary conditions for workers experiencing family violence so that they can maintain their safety at work and employment.
- A range of gender awareness training was delivered to teams across the three Councils. This professional development prompted staff to integrate gender equity actions into their work.
- Over 350 local community members have seen *The Locker Room*, a mixed-media art installation inspired by a survivor's story that sheds light on the covert gender labels and buried attitudes that typically accompany family violence.

PVAWC Project Evaluation

As part of the PVAWC project funding, the State Government commissioned the Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) to conduct an evaluation of all three cluster projects. This meta-evaluation report has more detailed findings on the changes which occurred as part of the project, including to council business and staff attitudes to violence against women. This report could be viewed by requesting a copy from the Office of Women's Affairs.

At a local level the three councils developed detailed evaluation plans to measure the success of the initiatives that were put into action. Given the focus of the project, Council sought to measure change through improvements to policy, plans, and practice within each council.

It is important to note that given the length of the project and nature of primary prevention work Council was not in the position to reliably see a reduction in instances of violence against women. This is only something that could be measured after multiple long-term, coordinated, and multi-faceted prevention initiatives have been delivered.

Baby Makes 3

Knox Council was a key partner in the *Baby Makes 3* Program- a short-term program funded through the Department of Justice (DOJ) and coordinated by Carrington Health across the

eastern metropolitan region. The primary prevention program is designed to be delivered through the universal service platform of Maternal and Child Health Services (MCHS). The program aims to promote equal and respectful relationships between women and men during the transition to parenthood – at a time when gender stereotypes and roles can become most rigid.

Knox MCHS experienced a high level of interest and participation in the sessions from first-time parents due to the *Baby Makes 3* sessions being promoted and integrated as a standard part of the regular first-time parent groups ordinarily offered to new parents.

With the DOJ funded program due to conclude in mid-2015, Carrington Health have progressed plans to deliver training to all eastern metropolitan region MCHS to support them to integrate the key messages of the *Baby Makes 3* program around promoting respectful, gender equitable relationships when communicating with all parents.

Critical role of local government

Local government is uniquely placed to play a key role in the primary prevention of violence against women. This is because councils:

- Are responsible for creating safe and healthy environments;
- Have the capacity to facilitate and lead community responses;
- Are visible, accessible and engaged with local communities;
- Can role-model and promote gender equitable workplace practices;
- Provide a range of community services, safe public spaces and community facilities; and,
- Can use existing structures, relationships and infrastructure to drive change.

Local governments can lead change across policy, planning, programming, service delivery, partnerships, social marketing, apply political influence and advocacy, and integrate gender, respect and equity through all council business.

Council has demonstrated this as part of the PVAWC project, driving changes both internally and externally to Council. For example, changes to workplace conditions with the introduction of a Family Violence Clause in each council's Enterprise Bargaining Agreement and drew on a partnership with Victoria Police to deliver a community event to raise awareness about violence against women.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Knox City Council recommends that the Royal Commission:

- R4. Recommend bipartisan support for dedicated, ongoing State Government funding to the primary prevention sector, including all local governments to ensure activities can be developed across and in partnership with the community.
- R5. Consider the findings and recommendations made by the Australian Institute of Criminology in the Victorian Office of Women's Affairs funded *Preventing Violence against Women in our Community* program evaluation completed in late 2014.
- R6. Recognise that outcome measures identified in local and regional primary prevention evaluation plans focus on short-term change, such as an increase in community awareness of the causes of violence against women or improvements to organisational policies and plans.

- R7. Recommend that longitudinal evaluation plans need to be committed to and managed at a state or federal level to best capture the long-term impacts of delivering multiple ongoing prevention initiatives across a range of key settings.
- R8. Recommend that further consideration of the outcomes of the evaluation conducted in relation to the Baby Makes 3 Program is undertaken and based on this, early prevention programs of this nature are resourced and delivered as an integral part of first-time parents groups through the universal service platform of Maternal and Child Health Services across Victoria.

Q5. If you or your organisation have been involved in observing or assessing programs, campaigns or initiatives of this kind, we are interested in your conclusions about their effectiveness in reducing and preventing family violence.

Local governments in Victoria have demonstrated leadership in undertaking preventing violence against women work. This is in no small part due to the role of the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) and their commitment to the issue. The MAV have been responsible for leading, supporting, resourcing and providing networking opportunities for Victorian local governments to develop their expertise in delivering preventing violence against women initiatives. The Preventing Violence Against Women Policy Advisor role at the MAV is critical to the success local governments have had in integrating prevention work within their organisations, and promoting the issue within their communities.

Continued, long-term investment in local government and the MAV will enable consistency in sector development and capacity building. It will also foster greater awareness and understanding of evidence based impacts and innovation in local government. Knox City Council is a member of the MAV.

RECOMMENDATION

Knox City Council recommends that the Royal Commission:

- R9. Recommend that the Municipal Association of Victoria receives long-term funding to continue the resourcing and supporting of local governments to prevent violence against women in their communities.

Q6. What circumstances, conditions, situations or events, within relationships, families, institutions and whole communities, are associated with the occurrence or persistence of family violence? AND

Q7. What circumstances and conditions are associated with the reduced occurrence of family violence?

VicHealth Framework

Knox City Council has drawn on VicHealth's *Preventing violence before it occurs – A framework and background paper to guide the primary prevention of violence against women in Victoria* to understand its role in addressing the issue and identify the best approach to take. As for many other local governments and organisations in Victoria, this paper was foundational in terms of naming the key underlying causes of violence against women and in identifying evidence-informed action.

Gender Equity

International research suggests that the most significant determinants of violence are related to gender equity. An index of six social outcomes that can indicate gender inequity has been compiled, allowing local government areas to be compared with one another.

The indicators used in the index are:

- The ratio of the proportion of females to males, aged 30-39, who had left school before completing year 11;
- The average number of children born to women aged 20-24 years;
- The ratio of hours worked without payment at home, by females and males, who were aged 30-39 years and engaged in 37-43 hours paid employment per week;
- The ratio of hours paid work performed each week by males and females;
- The ratio of the proportion of males in paid work, who were engaged in managerial or professional occupations, to females in these occupations; and,
- The ratio of the median income of males and of females aged 30-39 and in 38-42 hours paid work per week.

Council's analysis found that when the top ten least equitable LGAs are compared with the top ten LGAs for the number of family violence callouts, the results are quite striking.

Rank	Gender Inequity	Family violence callouts (per 100,000)
1.	Greater Dandenong	Frankston
2.	Frankston	Hume
3.	Casey	Greater Dandenong
4.	Bayside	Cardinia
5.	Hume	Casey
6.	Melton	Melton
7.	Whittlesea	Whittlesea
8.	Wyndham	Wyndham
9.	Cardinia	Mornington Peninsula
10.	Brimbank	Darebin
		(11. Brimbank)

Figure 1. LGA Gender Inequity Rating Comparison to Family Violence Callouts³

Primary prevention approaches to reducing the occurrence of family violence must tackle gendered issues of power and control in cultural and community norms, as these societal level factors flow through to families and relationships.

Socio-Economic Disadvantage

Knox Council monitors rates of family violence by postcode across the municipality. Council has consistently identified higher rates of family violence in areas of socioeconomic disadvantage (based on SEIFA scores). This is generally consistent with research that suggests an association (not a causal link) between poverty and higher rates of reported family violence. Unemployment and financial difficulties have been noted as situational

³ Based on statistics compiled by Hayden Brown, City of Greater Dandenong, available at <http://www.greaterdandenong.com/document/26506/statistics-gender-differences-in-social-outcomes-by-municipality-and-birthplace>

factors that may increase the risk of family violence.⁴ Alcohol has also been noted as a contributing factor to family violence, with reasonable evidence that alcohol outlet density is related to rates of domestic violence at the postcode level in Melbourne. This relationship persists when socio-economic disadvantage is controlled for, and packaged liquor appears to be particularly problematic.⁵ Our own research suggests that the suburbs in Knox with the highest rates of family violence also have the highest rates of packaged liquor licenses.

Systemic Change

Initiatives that build community awareness of the prevalence and seriousness of violence against women are fundamental to reducing the culture of silence, shame and stigma which persist in relation to family violence. Initiatives which focus on building community awareness about the need to challenge harmful gender stereotypes and gendered labelling and judgements are also highly important – such campaigns are essential to addressing the underlying causes of violence against women.

While it is important to promote attitudinal change and a culture shift around family violence and the conditions which enable it to continue, it is equally important that effort is directed systemically.

Changes to organisational policy and practice, increasing the numbers of women on company boards and in positions of leadership, promoting gender inclusive education and the provision of affordable, accessible and secure housing and childcare are all fundamental to prompting a shift in culture that values women equally.

Attention, action and resourcing therefore needs to be committed to supporting government, business and organisations to improve their systems so that they are gender equitable. This is essential to bringing about a sustainable, integrated cultural shift that will further prompt and reinforce attitude change toward family violence and the role of women in society.

Primary prevention expertise

Promoting gender equity to prevent violence against women requires an expanded and different set of stakeholders and partners to those involved in the family violence service sector. Sectors identified by VicHealth as having a key role to play in primary prevention include: education, arts, sport and recreation, media and popular culture and the military and similar institutions.

The role and focus of these sectors in the addressing the issue is oriented toward encouraging equal and respectful relationships between women and men, breaking down gender stereotypes and promoting gender equity. This is a different focus to that of the family violence services and authorities who support survivors and work to hold victims to account. While there are overlaps and opportunities for collaboration across all sectors to both respond to and prevent violence against women, it is still critical to differentiate the key stakeholders involved in prevention along with the type of contribution that they can make to the issue.

Similarly, it is also important to recognise that 'prevention practitioners' (i.e. those undertaking preventing violence against women work) have specific expertise that differs from those who work in the family violence service sector. This is an emerging specialist

⁴ Morgan A & Chadwick H (2009) *Key Issues in Domestic Violence*, Research in Practice No. 7, Australian Institute of Criminology, Canberra <http://www.aic.gov.au/publications/current%20series/rip/1-10/07.html>

⁵ Livingston M (2011) *Association between increased density of alcohol outlets and harmful outcomes*, Young people, risk and resilience: The challenges of alcohol, drugs and violence conference, 7-8 March 2011, Australian Institute of Criminology http://aic.gov.au/media_library/conferences/2011-vscn/presentations/livingston.pdf

workforce which has gained traction since the release of the VicHealth Primary Prevention Framework in 2007.

Prevention practitioners also benefit from having an understanding of gender equity issues and how to apply a 'gender lens'. This is a specific skill-set which differentiates prevention practitioners from their colleagues in the family violence service sector.

Given the imperative to promote gender equity to end family violence, prevention practitioners benefit from having skills in promoting organisational/systems change and undertaking health promotion and public health initiatives. This is because effective primary prevention strategy relies upon influencing public and organisational policy, targeting community engagement and action, and reorienting systems.

This must be factored in when looking to resource and systematise primary prevention at a state level.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Knox City Council recommends that the Royal Commission:

- R10. Recognise that gender inequity is a fundamental determinant of violence against women, as articulated by VicHealth.
- R11. Recognise that primary prevention initiatives coordinated and funded at a state level need to include a significant focus on promoting 'systems' change.
- R12. Acknowledge the broad range of sectors that can and should play a key role in promoting gender equity to prevent violence against women, such as sport and recreation, media, local government, education and employment sectors.
- R13. Recognise the unique contribution and expertise associated with the emerging workforce of prevention practitioners who have particular skill in promoting gender equity within organisations and the broader community.

Q11. What are some of the most promising and successful ways of supporting the ongoing safety and wellbeing of people affected by violence? Are there gaps or deficiencies in our approach to supporting ongoing safety and wellbeing? How could measures to reduce the impact of family violence be improved?

The Knox community was shocked by the very public killing of local woman Nicole Millar by her partner in 2010 at a Bayswater petrol station. The Coroner's recent finding regarding her death⁶ (part of the Victorian Systemic Review of Family Violence Deaths) highlighted the confluence of risk factors that were not acted upon in this case, including previous violence witnessed by work colleagues and contact with child protection authorities. The Coroner noted that "family, friends, colleagues and neighbours need an effective mechanism to bring suspected family violence to the attention of an authority empowered and equipped to respond in a timely manner". He further recommended that Victoria Police and CrimeStoppers work to extend the 'Say Something' campaign (online tools aimed at assisting young people to report crime and violence) to family violence. It is our submission that making such a tool available would encourage bystanders to easily and anonymously report their concerns, potentially saving lives.

⁶ <http://www.coronerscourt.vic.gov.au/home/coroners+written+findings/findings+-+finding+without+inquest+into+the+death+of+nicole+joy+millar>

Children's Services

All Maternal and Child Health Service (MCHS) nurses in Victoria are provided with Family Violence Crisis Risk Assessment Framework (CRAF) training as part of their initial training.

The guidelines for Victorian MCHS nurses also stipulate that they should ask a question about a mother's safety at the four week visit.

These are both positive initiatives, however could be built upon with further training, tools and resources to prompt MCHS nurses to remain skilled, comfortable and confident to engage mothers in conversations about their safety and respond appropriately in an informed, consistent way.

MCHS are very well placed to engage with women and children subjected to family violence – a nurse's ability to build strong, trusting rapport with a mother and develop knowledge of a family over time increases the likelihood of women disclosing an experience of family violence.

There is also great value in extending the Family Violence CRAF training currently provided to MCHS to all professionals who work with children of any age, including childcare providers, preschools, primary and secondary teachers. This would enable better identification of and response to those children at risk.

RECOMMENDATION

Knox City Council recommends that the Royal Commission:

- R14. Give consideration to the findings of the Victorian Coroner in the case of Nicole Joy Millar to facilitate the development of an effective mechanism for bystanders to bring suspected family violence to the attention of an authority empowered and equipped to respond in a timely manner.
- R15. Recommends providing further training and tools to better assist Maternal and Child Health Services to identify and respond to women and children subjected to family violence.
- R16. Recommends providing Identifying Family Violence and Crisis Risk Assessment Framework (CRAF) training to all professionals working with children.
- Q17. Are there specific cultural, social, economic, geographical or other factors in particular groups and communities in Victoria which tend to make family violence more likely to occur, or to exacerbate its effects? If so, what are they?**

Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Communities

Council is aware that research indicates that family violence may be more prevalent and its effects multiplied for some cultural groups. Council is unable to present any information on whether this is the case within emerging communities in Knox due to a lack of statistics with sufficient detail to draw any conclusions. Information sharing between relevant agencies, particularly police, and local governments is almost non-existent. Failure to share relevant information means Council's particular expertise and access to programs and services remains untargeted, potentially directing scarce resources to where they are less critically needed while failing to assist those who would benefit the most.

Elder Abuse

There is growing concern in the community about the prevalence of violence perpetrated against older people, particularly as our population ages. Elder abuse can include physical, sexual, emotional and financial abuse, as well as neglect. It can be perpetrated by partners, spouses, children, other family members or fellow residents. Elder abuse often goes unrecognised by other family members and workers. There are many factors that contribute to the secrecy around the issue, including family dynamics, poor health of victims and/or abusers, and a sense of shame when older people consider accessing support services (due to strong traditions of dealing with things privately or simply putting up with them).

Knox Council's Housing Support Officer has many older (60+) clients who seek support for homelessness due to physical or financial abuse perpetrated by their children or grandchildren. Anecdotal evidence suggests that around 50% of the housing support clients in that age group are experiencing family violence to such an extent that they require emergency housing.

Council's community support staff perform many roles for ageing and disability clients including domestic assistance, personal care, in-home respite, transport and Meals on Wheels. While these staff and volunteers are becoming more aware of warning signs of elder abuse in their clients, there is no state-wide legislative or procedural framework or mechanism to guide the reporting and follow-up of suspected abuse. A lack of clarity around the duty of care held by service support staff and volunteers has hampered the robust collection of accurate information relating to the prevalence and nature of elder abuse in Knox. A state level framework similar to the child protection reporting system would assist Councils to respond strategically to the issue and greatly enhance the safety of older residents experiencing abuse.

Family Violence and Children

Children's exposure to family violence entails more than simply witnessing violence against a family member. The research literature demonstrates that witnessing can involve a much broader range of occurrences, including the child:

- hearing the violence;
- being used as a physical weapon;
- being forced to watch or participate in assaults;
- being forced to spy on a parent;
- being informed that they are to blame for the violence because of their behaviour;
- being used as a hostage;
- defending a parent against the violence; and/or
- intervening to stop the violence.⁷

In the aftermath of a violent incident, children's exposure to domestic violence can involve:

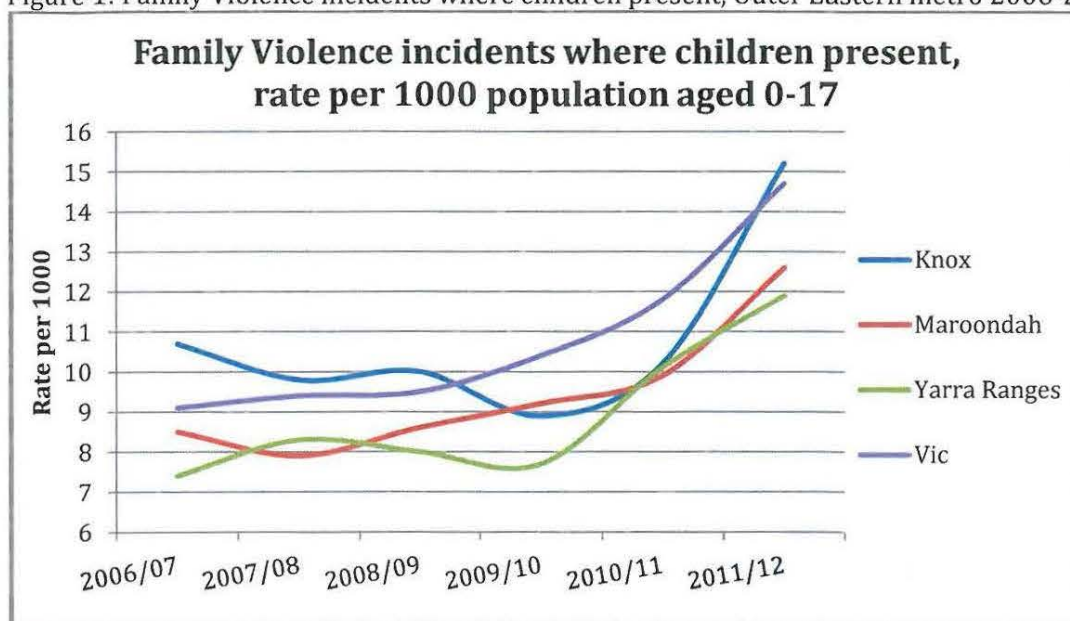
- having to telephone for emergency assistance;
- seeing a parent's injuries after the violence and having to assist in 'patching up' a parent;
- having their own injuries and/or trauma to cope with;
- dealing with a parent who alternates between violence and a caring role;
- seeing the parents being arrested; and
- having to leave home with a parent and/or dislocation from family, friends and school.⁸

⁷ Richards 2011, *Children's exposure to domestic violence in Australia*, Trends and Issues in Criminal Justice No. 419, Australian Institute of Criminology, Canberra. <http://www.aic.gov.au/publications/current%20series/tandi/401-420/tandi419.html>

⁸ *ibid.*

The rate of such incidents in Knox where children are present is slightly higher than the Victorian rate and significantly higher than the rate for the other Outer Eastern LGAs. Boronia and Ferntree Gully are the Knox suburbs with the highest rate of incidents where children are present. These suburbs are known by Maternal and Child Health Services (MCHS) to have high incidences of family violence and vulnerability, when compared with other suburbs within Knox. Having this knowledge means that support and education resources can be directed to those places with the greatest need.

Figure 1: Family Violence incidents where children present, Outer Eastern metro 2006-2012



MCHS is the first port of call for Child Protection Services when responding to notifications they receive regarding any child under 6 years of age who is present within a household where authorities have concerns. The number of enquiries the Knox MCHS has received in relation to these notifications has risen significantly from twenty-five in November 2014 to forty-four in April 2015. These notifications are primarily related to incidences of family violence.

It is important to acknowledge that children living in out of home care (a term used to describe the placement of children away from their parents, due to a concern that they are at risk of significant harm) are still subjected to family violence. Data that Knox City Council has access to shows that out of 937 ChildFIRST referrals in the Outer East of Melbourne received regarding children in out of home care, 330 referrals (35%) flagged a concern around a child's exposure to family violence.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Knox City Council recommends that the Royal Commission:

- R17. Consider the development of processes to allow the flow of information between governments and relevant agencies to allow improved targeting of prevention and support resources, and to reduce the risk of at risk individuals "falling through the cracks".
- R18. Recommend that improved access to family violence data is enabled to support improved monitoring, evaluation and benchmarking in order to strategically address the particular circumstances of family violence in their local community.

- R19. Consider the need for state level elder abuse legislation similar to the existing mandatory child protection reporting system that provides clarity for service providers regarding their role and procedures.
- R20. Recommends that funding is increased for Enhanced Maternal and Child Health Services to enable them to meet the increased demand placed on the service due to the high incidence of Child Protection Service family violence notifications.