

DOMESTIC  
VIOLENCE  
VICTORIA

Victoria State Budget Submission  
2020/21

December 2019

## Introduction

The three years since the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence (Royal Commission) have been an exciting time to be part of the family violence sector. Family Violence has firmly established itself as a social issue in the consciousness of Victorians. As a society, we are having more conversations about family violence and violence against women than ever before and asking tough questions about those who choose to use violence – primarily men - and how they should be held to account. The Victorian community is more invested in ending family violence than ever before, and the mantra that ‘family violence is everyone’s responsibility’ is increasingly being embraced across all levels of society. It has also been a period of unprecedented investment in family violence prevention and response, with the Victorian Government investing nearly \$3 billion already to implement the Royal Commission’s recommendations.

Victoria is experiencing an ever-increasing demand to respond to reports of family violence and requests for help, particularly from specialist family violence services (SFVSs). However, this is a positive development. It indicates that more victims-survivors of family violence are feeling able to come forward to seek help, and that more cases of family violence are being successfully identified by other sectors meaning more victim-survivors are being offered and are receiving support. It is also an indicator of increased and better identification of family violence and corresponding referrals to specialist family violence services as a result of larger systemic reforms such as the Multi-Agency Risk and Assessment Management (MARAM) Framework.<sup>1</sup>

However, the increase in demand at a time of rapid and extensive change is creating increased complexity and pressure within the system. The reforms have brought about rapid change not only for specialist family violence response services for victims-survivors, but also for the broader systems that intersect with family violence such as the civil and criminal justice systems, housing and homelessness, health, and child and family services. Many of the reforms require more time to be fully implemented and their outcomes realised. The challenge now is to sustain the momentum of the reform agenda in the face of new and emerging issues within the family violence response system and other compelling competing policy priorities.

The Victorian Government’s 10-year plan *Ending Family Violence: Victoria’s Plan for Change*<sup>2</sup> recognises that reforms of this magnitude take time. We are only three years into a 10-year reform agenda. In many instances the impact of the immediate reforms is only just starting to be felt as the reform agenda moves from design to implementation. As the initial funding commitment to implement the Royal Commission recommendations comes to an end, DV Vic is calling upon the Victorian Government to commit to continuing their investment in the work that is underway to reform Victoria’s family violence system in order to continue progress towards and sustain the vision set out by the Royal Commission.

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<sup>1</sup> Family Safety Victoria. (2018). *Family Violence Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework: A shared responsibility for assessing and managing family violence risk*. Melbourne: State of Victoria.

<sup>2</sup> Family Safety Victoria. (2016). *Ending Family Violence: Victoria’s Plan for Change*, Melbourne: The State of Victoria.

## About Domestic Violence Victoria

Domestic Violence Victoria (DV Vic) is the peak body for specialist victim-survivor family violence response services in Victoria. As such, DV Vic is recognised as the statewide voice of SFVSS responding to victims-survivors. DV Vic is a membership-based organisation and is accountable to its members, who also comprise its Board of Governance. However, the organisation is ultimately accountable to victims-survivors of family violence and works in their best interests. Its core membership comprises statewide and regional specialist agencies working with victims-survivors of family violence across Victoria. It is an independent, non-government organisation that leads, organises, advocates for, and acts on behalf of its members utilising an intersectional feminist approach.

DV Vic's work is focused on advocating for, supporting, and building capacity of specialist family violence practice and service delivery for victims-survivors; system reform; and research, policy development and law reform. DV Vic analyses the views and experiences of member organisations, the evidence on family violence, and the lived experience of victims-survivors, and translates this into innovative and contemporary policy, practice, and advocacy.

DV Vic holds a central position in the Victorian family violence system and its strategic governance and is one of the key agencies with responsibility for providing family violence subject matter expertise, technical assistance, capacity building, and policy and practice advice to the sector, government and other partners and stakeholders.

## The Family Violence Reform Landscape

Three years into the Royal Commission reform agenda, a significant amount of reform design and implementation is underway. The policy landscape for the reforms has been established within *Ending Family Violence: Victoria's Plan for Change*,<sup>3</sup> the Victorian Government's 10-year plan for how to achieve a Victoria free from family violence through implementing the 227 recommendations made by the Royal Commission. This is complemented by the *Family Violence Rolling Action Plan 2017 – 2020*<sup>4</sup> (*Rolling Action Plan*), which outlines the priority activities for the first three years of reform investment. Under the *Rolling Action Plan* & the 2016/17 budget, specialist family violence services received almost \$2.71 billion in funding to expand case management, counselling services & other response interventions for victims-survivors including the expansion of flexible support packages. The *Rolling Action Plan* also saw investment prioritised for the design and implementation of the Support and Safety Hubs, within which specialist family violence services for victims-survivors are a key partner. Specialist family violence refuges were also prioritised for initial investment to enable their transition from a communal to core and cluster model. Further investment specifically for SFVSS, or for reform specifically involving SFVSS, followed in subsequent budgets.

The Royal Commission recommendations set new expectations for family violence workforce capacity and capability, which have been captured in *Building From Strength: 10-Year Industry Plan for Family Violence*

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Family Safety Victoria. (2017a). *Family Violence Rolling Action Plan 2017 – 2020*, Melbourne: The State of Victoria.

*Prevention and Response*<sup>5</sup> (*Industry Plan*). At the core of the *Industry Plan* is a vision for a workforce that is equipped to prevent and respond to all forms of family violence and the individuals who experience or use it, particularly a ‘valued, skilled, diverse, safe, empowered and supported specialist family violence ... workforce.’<sup>6</sup> To this end, the *Responding to Family Violence Capability Framework*<sup>7</sup> has also been developed, setting the standard for family violence response capability across four tiers of workforces in Victoria. Tier one, referring to specialist family violence workforces, captures the complex knowledge and skills required to undertake specialist response practice and service delivery across four levels of the workforce (Entry, Mid, Senior, Expert).<sup>8</sup> DV Vic welcomed the release of *Strengthening the Foundations: First Rolling Action Plan 2019 – 2022*<sup>9</sup> in November 2019 and endorses the additional \$16 million investment into the expansion of several capability building initiatives involving the SFVS workforce. These are important ‘foundations’ upon which to begin the work towards achieving the ambitious yet important workforce outcomes described within the *Industry Plan*.

Cutting across the family violence policy landscape is *Everybody Matters: Inclusion and Equity Statement* (*Everybody Matters*), a ten-year commitment to a framework ‘for building a more inclusive system ... [and] a system that is responsive to all’ through embedding an intersectional approach.<sup>10</sup> Together with the *Diversity and Intersectionality Framework*<sup>11</sup> and the specialist family violence services intersectionality capacity building project, the ambitions of *Everybody Matters* demonstrates the scale of transformation underway within, and complexity of, the work of specialist family violence services for victims-survivors.

This policy landscape informs all reform activities and provides a roadmap for priority investment and activities. Significant areas of systemic reform underway include the design, implementation and evaluation of the Support and Safety Hubs model via the establishment of The Orange Door; the development and roll-out of the MARAM Framework, the Family Violence Information Sharing and Child Information Sharing Schemes; and for the specialist family violence services sector specifically, the revision of DV Vic’s Code of Practice for SFVSs for victims-survivors; development of a specialist family violence service model; and the overhaul of the statewide 24hr specialist family violence crisis response model. All these overlapping and coinciding activities have crucial repercussions for the specialist family violence sector. They signal the intention to embed consistent models of service delivery and standards of practice within SFVSs across the state, ultimately leading to better, more coordinated SFVS responses to victims-survivors. They allocate multiple responsibilities to, and call specifically on, the skills and expertise of the specialist family violence

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<sup>5</sup> Family Safety Victoria. (2017b). *Building From Strength: 10-Year Industry Plan for Family Violence Prevention and Response*, Melbourne: The State of Victoria.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p.1.

<sup>7</sup> Family Safety Victoria. (2017c). *Responding to Family Violence Capability Framework*, Melbourne: The State of Victoria.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. p.5.

<sup>9</sup> Family Safety Victoria. (2019). *Strengthening the Foundations: First Rolling Action Plan 2019 – 2022*. Melbourne: The State of Victoria.

<sup>10</sup> Family Safety Victoria. (2018). *Everybody Matters: Inclusion & Equity Statement*, Melbourne: The State of Victoria, p. 7.

<sup>11</sup> Family Safety Victoria. (nd). *Diversity and Intersectionality Framework*, Melbourne: The State of Victoria.

workforce, and their success relies on the central role specialist family violence services play in the overall systemic response to family violence in Victoria.<sup>12</sup>

## Investment Priorities: 2020-2022

DV Vic's submission to the Victorian State Budget outlines the case for the Victorian government to allocate budget according to two main themes. Firstly, the investment required to capitalise on the central role of SFVSs in the reform environment and achieve the best outcomes for victims-survivors. Secondly, other family violence investment priorities that best complement the core functions of the SFVSs and add the most value to the Victorian government's family violence reform agenda related to SFVS service delivery.

### *Capitalising on the Central Role of SFVSs*

Victoria's 60 SFVSs for victims-survivors are a central component of the newly constituted multi-agency, multi-disciplinary, coordinated, systemic response to family violence in Victoria and therefore require continuing and increasing investment in order to secure the vision of the Royal Commission and the government's family violence reform agenda. In addition to their unique service delivery to victims-survivors of family violence including children, the role, expertise, and intelligence of the SFVS sector is integral to the success of several major systemic reforms such as the Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme, the MARAM Framework, and The Orange Door. Therefore, SFVS sector sustainability and capacity building must be an essential investment for the Victorian government going forward if the goals set out in the family violence reform policy environment are to be realised.

Historically, SFVSs have been dramatically underfunded<sup>13</sup> and until relatively recently, largely ignored within the broader community services system. The Royal Commission acknowledged that investment in SFVS had been 'relatively static' in the ten year preceding the Royal

*WITHOUT FUNDING TO ASSIST WITH THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE FAMILY VIOLENCE REFORMS LIKE THE INFORMATION SHARING SCHEME, WE HAVE TO REDIRECT FUNDS AND RESOURCES AWAY FROM CLIENTS – LOCAL SFVS PROVIDER, METROPOLITAN*

Commission.<sup>14</sup> As a result, scaling up of SFVSs in response to demand has been ad hoc and inconsistent across the state. Service and governance models and standards have not been well-articulated, as the organisational architecture required to respond to ever-increasing demand has developed in the vacuum of statewide approach. Disparate funding models and a government-driven singular focus on service delivery outputs have resulted in SFVSs not being able to pay its workforce a fair salary that reflects the complexity of the work. Under further pressure from the current family violence reforms, the impact of previously invisible yet crucial operational costs that are critical to the delivery of SFVSs have become more acute. Even

<sup>12</sup> Royal Commission into Family Violence. (2016). *Report and Recommendations: Vol. II, Parl Paper No. 132 (2014 – 16)*, Melbourne: State of Victoria.

<sup>13</sup> Theobald, J. & Murray, S. (2017). *From the Margins to the Mainstream: The Domestic Violence Services Movement in Victoria, Australia, 1974-2016*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press.

<sup>14</sup> Royal Commission into Family Violence. (2016). p. 27.

despite recent increased funding, the lack of investment in the infrastructure and resources required to support service expansion & reform alignment – such as middle management roles, compliance and accreditation costs, and managing new as well as ongoing programs - are being felt in the rapidly changing and demanding reform environment.

*IN THE REGIONAL AND RURAL CONTEXT, THERE IS JUST SUCH A LIMITED POOL OF QUALIFIED STAFF. THERE ARE MORE JOBS OUT HERE THAN THERE ARE PEOPLE TO FILL THEM, PEOPLE HAVE A LOT OF CHOICE AND MOVE AROUND TO FIND THE BEST CONDITIONS. OUR CONDITIONS ARE OFTEN NOT THE BEST ON OFFER. THIS HAS A TERRIBLE IMPACT ON OUR SERVICE DELIVERY, MAKES THINGS VERY HARD – LOCAL SFVS PROVIDER, REGIONAL*

Compounding these complexities, the SFVS sector is experiencing severe workforce shortages. There are not enough qualified and experienced workers to fill existing and emerging roles, and member services face ongoing difficulties retaining existing staff due to institutional inequalities related to gender, pay and conditions, and role complexity. As a result, it

continues to be impossible to meet client demand in a timely way. Recruitment and retention issues place further pressures on operating costs and resources. This is particularly acute in rural and regional areas, where unfilled positions and the pressure of inducting inexperienced and sometimes unqualified staff has a greater impact on smaller organisations covering large geographic areas.

This is occurring at the same time as demand for services is increasing and the system is becoming more complex and services are expected to respond to constant change and systemic transformation. The Royal Commission recognised that ‘specialist family violence services are overwhelmed by high levels of demand’ which affects their ability to provide services to everyone who needs them.<sup>15</sup> This is as true today as it was in 2016 and the data suggests that demand for SFVSs is going to continue to increase, at least in the short to medium term.<sup>16</sup> Numbers of victims of family violence has steadily increased since 2015.<sup>17</sup> Crime Statistics Agency data shows that in the year ending June 2019, 82 652 family violence incidents were recorded, ranging between 6187 to 7849 incidents per month.<sup>18</sup> This is an increase of over 6500 incidents from the previous year, and an 11 751 increase in incidents since June 2015.<sup>19</sup> Of all unique victims of crime in the year ending June 2019, 15% were victims of at least one incident of family violence. These increases in reporting rates are, in part, a reflection of the success of the family violence reforms and government’s increased investment. They translate into continuously increasing demand for SFVSs and the case workers to deliver them within a progressively more complex coordinated and multiagency systemic environment.

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<sup>15</sup> State of Victoria. (2016). *Royal Commission into Family Violence: Report & Recommendations, Vol. II. Parl. Paper No 132 (2014 – 16)*, Melbourne: Victorian Government, p.27.

<sup>16</sup> The data reported here reflects only incidents reported to Victoria Police. Family violence is recognised as being under-reported, therefore this data is acknowledged as being an underrepresentation of the overall frequency of family violence.

<sup>17</sup> Crime Statistics Agency. (2019). *Unique Victims*. Retrieved from <https://www.crimestatistics.vic.gov.au/crime-statisticslatest-crime-data/unique-victims>

<sup>18</sup> Crime Statistics Agency. (2019). *Family Incidents*. Retrieved from <https://www.crimestatistics.vic.gov.au/crime-statisticslatest-crime-data/family-incidents>

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*

A number of pressure points have developed at the confluence of these current states, which detract from the capability of SFVSs and their governing Boards to effectively and efficiently scale up to meet demand and fully realise their central role in the systemic response:

- Case workers providing support to victims-survivors experiencing increasingly complex impacts of family violence, in an increasingly complex coordinated and multiagency service delivery environment.
- Significant and growing demand for SFVSs results in demand management strategies that prioritise the most complex and highest risk victims-survivors, resulting in all case workers requiring the technical skills and knowledge to work constantly with clients who are high risk, but whom are not remunerated at a level that reflects this.
- Decreasing capacity for early intervention & secondary prevention with victims-survivors assessed as low risk and low need, which anecdotal evidence suggests translates to higher longer-term demand when many of those clients re-present within the system at higher risk.
- Recruitment of newly qualified and/or inexperienced staff requiring additional & intensive support, training and supervision in order to meet client demand immediately.
- Increasingly obvious lack of pay parity between the SFVS sector and other sectors, and within the SFVS sector itself, leading to disenchantment within the workforce and workforce attrition.
- In the reform environment, family violence skills and experience have become highly sought after by other sectors (including the public sector) that can offer better wages and conditions
- More frequent short-term funding, translating into fixed-term contracts that make it difficult to retain experienced staff.
- Workforce attrition creating instability in organisational continuity & culture.
- Gaps in middle management roles and resources required to manage and lead larger teams, undertake capacity building of newly qualified and/or inexperienced staff, backfill gaps in workforce, lead change, and support senior leadership.
- Increasing compliance and accreditation costs, payment of which require budget to be redirected from other areas.
- Increasing demands on senior leadership to participate in reform activities and be stewards of large-scale change & alignment within their services/organisations.
- Salary and operational costs being subsidised by other income in larger community-based organisations, creating performance inequity and competition within the specialist family violence sector.

*I'VE NEVER SEEN CASES BEFORE THAT ARE AS COMPLEX AS THE ONES WE'RE DEALING WITH NOW – RAMP CO-ORDINATOR, REGIONAL*

If these pressure points are left to build as the result of insufficient further investment, there is unacceptable risk that SFVSs will flounder and the coordinated, multiagency systemic response to FV will falter. As a result, victims-survivors will continue to fall between old and new cracks in the systemic response.

## Investment Priorities

DV Vic supports government's intention to pilot more flexible case management funding arrangements for the specialist family violence and sexual assault sectors in 2020/21. This approach to funding will enable SFVSs to focus more specifically on client outcomes rather than outputs, and to deliver services that are agile and more dynamically responsive to their own organisational architecture and to the complexity of client risk and need. It will also assist the system to more accurately capture the nature and scope of support being provided by SFVSs.

However, within this framework, *the funding quantum must address the pressures described above* if the true operational costs of the organisational infrastructure mechanism required to sustain SFVSs in the newly emerging systemic response is to be sustained. Therefore, DV Vic makes the following recommendations related to the quantum of funding for SFVSs within the Victorian State budget allocations for 2020-2022:

### 1. Immediate and ongoing investment in the organisational architecture and administration costs required to sustain SFVSs in the increasingly complex family violence response environment.

- a. Unit costing to adequately account for operational costs so that funding does not have to be diverted from service delivery or salary to cover these.
- b. Funding recognises that SFVS operational costs include costs of participating and aligning with the reform; quality assurance, compliance and accreditation costs; the infrastructure to manage and supervise a higher number of staff and build capacity of new & existing staff; the operational burden of constant recruitment and induction; increased infrastructure to manage specialist intervention programs such as FSPs, RAMP, capacity building programs and secondary consults (for example, related to the MARAM Framework); and managing rising demand for SFVSs.
- c. Investment in modelling for management/supervisor to case worker ratios and caseload limits, and ongoing investment to implement these once established.

### 2. Investment in the SFVS workforce.

- a. Salary funding model and corresponding investment that enables SFVSs to pay its workforce at a classification/level that is congruent with the

*IN ORDER TO ATTRACT & RETAIN A SKILLED WORKFORCE, IT IS IMPERATIVE THAT FAMILY VIOLENCE SERVICES OFFER WAGES THAT ARE COMPETATIVE WITH OTHER SECTORS – LOCAL SFVS PROVIDER, METROPOLITAN*

qualifications, knowledge, and skills required to respond to the complexity and high risk nature of their work with clients and to the sophistication of the multiagency, multisectoral and multidisciplinary family violence systemic environment they are engaged in, and that commensurate with other similar roles/sectors, without having to divert budget from service delivery and operations.

- b. Investment in sector readiness to respond to new entrants to careers in the SFVS response sector, including newly qualified social work graduates and career changers.



### 3. Adequate funding to support rising demand for SFVSs that enable both early intervention and high-risk responses.

Prioritising the above investment will contribute to overall stabilisation and sustainability of the SFVS workforce, and therefore the role of SFVS in delivering the vision of the Royal Commission.

## Other Family Violence Sector Priorities

### Flexible Support Packages

*ACCESS TO FLEXIBLE SUPPORT PACKAGES HAS BECOME ABSOLUTELY ESSENTIAL FOR BOTH FV CRISIS WORK AS WELL AS LONGER-TERM SUPPORT. IN MY YEARS WORKING IN SPECIALIST FAMILY VIOLENCE SERVICES, I HAVE SEEN THE DIFFERENCE FLEXIBLE SUPPORT PACKAGES MAKE TO THE RECOVERY AND WELL-BEING OF SURVIVORS. THE SPECIALIST FAMILY VIOLENCE SECTOR WOULD BE LOST WITHOUT THEM.*  
– SFVS ACCOMMODATION PROVIDER, REGIONAL.

SFVSs who are DV Vic members *unanimously agree* that flexible support packages (FSPs) have revolutionised the nature of specialist family violence support. The inherently flexible nature of the packages mean that support is able to be tailored in a more responsive and agile way that addresses the unique risks, needs and impacts of family violence on each individual victim-survivor, including children. FSPs provide options for accessing

immediate safety for clients that were not available previously, such as facilitating access to alternative short- and long-term accommodation or being able to safely stay at home through the purchase of security measures via the Personal Safety Initiative, thus avoiding clients having to go into crisis accommodation and/or rely on insecure housing arrangements. FSPs also increase the dignity and choice of victims-survivors when they are rebuilding their lives as a result of family violence. They enable them to buy good quality material items to assist with their recovery, as well as purchase specialised counselling, training and education courses and materials, and pay off bills and debts that would have otherwise inhibited their recovery from family violence. FSPs assist victims-survivors to regain autonomy and independence in the face of family violence and have become an integral intervention option in the SFVS support model.

The introduction of FSPs has also improved efficiency within the system. Case workers no longer have to use valuable hours searching for charities and donated goods to fill gaps in service provision to victims-survivors, meaning they can dedicate more time to frontline, direct support for other clients. SFVSs

*IN THE SPECIALIST FAMILY VIOLENCE REFUGE SETTING, FLEXIBLE SUPPORT PACKAGES ARE KEY. THAT THEY ARE SO FLEXIBLE, IT MAKES SUCH A DIFFERENCE TO WHAT WE CAN DO TO SUPPORT WOMEN AND CHILDREN – SFVS ACCOMMODATION PROVIDER, METROPOLITAN.*

report that FSPs provide greater opportunities for stabilising a victim-survivor's situation earlier, thus preventing cases from escalating to more complex situations and minimising client churn through the system, retaining more whole of system resources.

DV Vic notes that Victorian SFVs are envied by our sister services in other states because of the provision of FSPs. FSPs were the one difference in recent advocacy around early access to superannuation for survivors of family violence to assist with the costs associated with their recovery – peak bodies and SFVs in all states recognised that it was unfair that victims-survivors of family violence should have to access their own retirement savings to cover costs that have been incurred upon them by someone else and argued that the state should cover these costs. It was also argued that early access to superannuation would increase the gender gap in retirement. Victoria was the only state where there was a viable alternative option to early access to superannuation, and DV Vic the only peak body in Australia who could confidently argue against this federal proposal. In this way, FSPs are also contributing to longer-term gender equity.

DV Vic urges the Victorian government to prioritise ongoing investment to ensure that FSPs continue as a permanent, core element of the response to family violence in Victoria. The loss of this flexible, individually tailored support option would be disastrous for the well-being of victims-survivors of family violence and lead to costs blowing out in other areas.

### *Housing*

Family violence remains the most common reason that women and children become homeless,<sup>20</sup> and homelessness resulting from family violence more often than not leads to a lifetime of disadvantage, discrimination, and poverty for victims-survivors.<sup>21</sup> Yet as other parts of the Royal Commission family violence reform are progressing, access to safe and affordable housing remains an obstacle in victims-survivors recovery from family violence. Approximately 47% of all the people who received homelessness assistance in Victoria listed family violence as their main reason for seeking support,<sup>22</sup> and 82,000 people (including 25,000 children), are on the social housing waiting list.<sup>23</sup> Many victims-survivors cannot afford the private rental market, and rental assistance packages are too short-term to address the social & economic disadvantages family violence creates for victims-survivors and therefore do not necessarily contribute to accessing long-term, stable housing. Short-term strategies such as the Family Violence Housing Blitz enabled a trial of innovative housing options for victim-survivors, but without a statewide scale up and ongoing investment, will not provide a sustainable solution to the problem of family violence and housing in itself.

The social housing shortage and lack of affordable housing options instils in victims-survivors of family violence a fear of becoming homeless if they leave the relationship in which they are experiencing family violence. As a result, the lack of viable housing alternatives is one of the primary barriers to victims-survivors of family violence seeking help and being able to leave the relationship. Becoming homeless is also one of

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<sup>20</sup> Spinney A. (2012). *Home and Safe? Policy and practice innovations to prevent women and children who have experienced domestic and family violence from becoming homeless. Final report no. 196*. Melbourne: Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute.

<sup>21</sup> Phillips, J. & Vandenbroek, P. (2014). Domestic, family and sexual violence in Australia: an overview of the issues, retrieved from

[https://www.aph.gov.au/About\\_Parliament/Parliamentary\\_Departments/Parliamentary\\_Library/pubs/rp/rp1415/ViolenceAust#\\_Toc401045316](https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/rp/rp1415/ViolenceAust#_Toc401045316)

<sup>22</sup> AIHW. (2019). *Specialist homelessness services 2017-18: Victoria*, retrieved from

<https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/46473685-40d3-471b-b28d-ae6aac81e84/aihw-hou-299-vic.pdf.aspx>

<sup>23</sup> Department of Health and Human Services cited in Legal and Social Issues Committee. (2018). *Inquiry into the Public Housing Renewal Program*, Melbourne: Parliament of Victoria, p. 202.

*IT'S CHALLENGING TO SUPPORT WOMEN WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED SO MUCH TRAUMA AND ARE FINALLY IN A PLACE WHERE THEY CAN START TO REBUILD AND MOVE ON, BUT PHYSICALLY, THEY ARE STUCK BECAUSE WE HAVE NOWHERE FOR THEM TO GO – SFVS ACCOMMODATION PROVIDER, REGIONAL*

the most common conditions under which victim-survivors including children are forced to return to relationships where they are experiencing family violence.

SFVSs, mainly SFVS accommodation providers, are consistently reporting to

DV Vic that women and children in particular are getting 'stuck' in motels, specialist family violence refuges, and transitional housing because there is nowhere for them to go. To reduce the number of victims-survivors becoming homeless or at risk of homelessness as a result of family violence, DV Vic joins other housing and homelessness providers calling for a sustainable, strategic commitment from the Victorian Government to address the chronic under investment in social and affordable housing infrastructure.

### *Multiagency Risk Assessment and Management Framework and Information Sharing*

The MARAM Framework and the Information Sharing Schemes are two whole-of-system pieces of family violence reform that are likely to have the greatest impact on how the social services system responds to family violence. A vast range of entities from housing and homelessness services, courts, police, child protection, drug and alcohol, mental health and youth services are required to align their policies, procedures, practice guidance, and tools to the MARAM Framework.

Likewise, the workforce numbers in scope for implementing the MARAM Framework are significant. A workforce of 37,500 personnel came into scope during Phase One of the Framework on 27 September 2018. Phase Two comes into effect in September 2020 and is expected to bring an additional 370,000 personnel into scope for implementation of the Framework.

This is vital reform on a hugely ambitious scale. Aligning to MARAM requires a significant cultural shift for workforces, particularly for those that have not previously understood responding to family violence as part of their role or function. Many non-family violence specialist organisations currently in scope for MARAM Framework implementation are still working to interpret and understand their responsibilities. Significant resourcing to develop and support workforce implementation strategies and capability building is required to ensure these organisations successfully align to the MARAM Framework. Resourcing should be directed to networks and services with existing family violence expertise within local areas, supported by a statewide coordination function. Examples of successful, cost-effective models for structuring such a program include the statewide coordination of RAMP and the Mental Health and Alcohol and Other Drugs Statewide Capacity Building Project.

*IF MARAM AND INFORMATION SHARING IS ACTUALLY GOING TO BE SYSTEMIC, IT HAS TO BE MATCHED BY INCREASED INVESTMENT FROM GOVERNMENT TO MEET DEMAND & ENSURE THAT EVERYONE IS SUPPORTED TO IMPLEMENT IT. FOR SERVICES WHO ARE NOT SPECIALIST FAMILY VIOLENCE, THEY ARE REALLY ANXIOUS ABOUT HOLDING THE RISK AND NEED SUPPORT AND TRAINING – LOCAL SFVS PROVIDER, METROPOLITAN*

The *Industry Plan* recognised that, 'Creating ongoing, systemic

opportunities for building and maintaining workforce capability will take time and careful consideration.<sup>24</sup> In the meantime, there's an urgent need to make sure that victims-survivors do not fall through the cracks, and that perpetrators are identified, held accountable and given opportunities to change their behaviour at the earliest possible point. Without adequate resourcing, the significant number of the broader workforce that interact with family violence will not have the capability to identify and assess family violence risk nor respond appropriately when family violence is identified, putting adult and children victim-survivors at risk. A commitment to continue to fund and resource the full implementation of the MARAM Framework and Information Sharing Schemes is required.

### *Investment Priorities*

DV Vic firmly believes that the above issues are priority areas for further investment that provide immediate and tangible complementary benefits to the support provided by the SFVS sector. Investment in these spaces will ensure the greatest traction of reforms arising from the Royal Commission. As such, DV Vic calls on the Victorian Government to:

- 1. Invest in FSPs as a permanent service offering within the integrated response to family violence.**
  - a. Guarantee funding for FSPs for the next three years at at least the same amount (\$64 million).
  - b. As the MARAM Framework and other family violence reform initiatives are implemented, demand for FSPs is anticipated to increase. Government should monitor this and be prepared to increase future investment in FSPs as demand increases.
- 2. Develop and invest in a 10-year social housing plan to address Victoria's housing and homelessness crisis.**
  - a. To simply maintain the current proportion of social housing at 3.2 per cent, we need 3,500 new units per year over the next 10 years.
  - b. We need 6,000 new units each year to increase social housing stock to 4.5 per cent of all housing in Victoria, keep up with population growth, house Victorians on the Victorian Housing Register and those living in extreme housing stress.
  - c. At least 300 of all new units built each year must be Aboriginal housing.
- 3. Renew investment in the MARAM Framework and Information Sharing reforms to ensure they are successfully implemented and embedded into practice.**
  - a. Increase investment for non-family violence specialist workforces to understand their roles and responsibilities under the MARAM Framework and Information Sharing Schemes.
  - b. Invest in networks with existing family violence expertise and enable technical support by a statewide coordination function to ensure consistency of practice.

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<sup>24</sup> Family Safety Victoria. (2017b), p. 60.

## Conclusion

The government's Royal Commission family violence reform agenda is ambitious but essential. The vision of the Royal Commission and that outlined in the family violence policy landscape of a Victoria free from family violence requires a focus on both immediate and long-term, whole of system transformation that is worthy of the investment required to achieve the outcomes that have been set. The Victorian Government must not turn its attention away from its family violence reform agenda as a result of competing and emerging issues such as those that will arise from the Royal Commission into Mental Health. Investment must continue to capitalise on the progress that is underway. DV Vic shares the views expressed in the most recent report produced by the Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor that 'the work on the reform remains ambitious and ground-breaking', yet much remains to be done in both the acquittal of the Royal Commission recommendations and the planning and governance of the reform agenda to ensure the benefits that are emerging are sustained.<sup>25</sup>

SFVSs sit at the centre of the systemic response and are the lynchpin in the success of several of the largest scale reforms underway. This submission has highlighted why investment in key priority issues related to SFVS sustainability and capacity must be addressed for that central role to be maintained and the contingent successes realised. The submission has also highlighted key complementary areas of investment that, if prioritised, will add the most value to the role SFVSs have in facilitating choice, safety and wellbeing for victims-survivors.

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<sup>25</sup> Family Violence reform Implementation Monitor. (2019). *Report of the Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor: As at 1 November 2018*, Melbourne: The State of Victoria, p. 39.