



Enduring and Evolving: Five Years on from the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence

April 2021



Acknowledgements

Acknowledgement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

Domestic Violence Victoria and Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as Australia's First Nations and Traditional Owners of Country. We pay respects to Elders past, present and emerging. We acknowledge that sovereignty was never ceded and recognise the right to self-determination and continuing connection to land, waters and culture.

Acknowledgement of Victims and Survivors

Domestic Violence Victoria and Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria acknowledge the strength and resilience of adults, children and young people who have experienced family violence and recognise that it is essential that responses to family violence are informed by their expert knowledge and advocacy. We pay respects to those who did not survive and acknowledge friends and family members who have lost loved ones to this preventable and far-reaching issue.

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About Domestic Violence Victoria (DV Vic) and the Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria (DVRCV)

In 2021, Domestic Violence Victoria (DV Vic) and the Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria (DVRCV) are merging to form a new entity. The merger brings together the peak body for Victoria's specialist family violence services supporting victim survivors (DV Vic) and the state's only specialist family violence Registered Training Organisation (DVRCV). Under a new name and united vision, we are working towards a world beyond family and gender-based violence, where women, children and all marginalized communities are safe, thriving, and respected. To achieve this vision, we advocate on behalf of and represent the specialist family violence sector, build the capability of current and emerging workforces to prevent and respond to family violence and drive the social and cultural change required to end all forms of family violence and violence against women.

The Family Violence Philanthropy Collaboration Project

The 2016 Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence made it clear that improving family violence outcomes requires a coordinated response across government and the community. The Family Violence Philanthropy Collaboration Project (The Project) established in 2018, led by Domestic Violence Victoria (DV Vic) and funded by Gandel Philanthropy, the Ross Trust and the William Buckland Foundation, marks a new phase of cross-sector commitment to collaboration. The Project brings together philanthropic and corporate funders, government stakeholders and family violence sector representatives to 'grow the philanthropic pie' within a complex, world leading reform environment, with the aim to support systemic change and improved family violence outcomes for all Victorians. The Project established the FV Funders Network, open to any corporate or philanthropic funder with an interest in family violence prevention and response. Through the network, the Project promotes opportunities to co-design and co-fund collaborative funding projects, as well as promoting "stand alone" funding opportunities for family violence projects emerging from the community violence sector.

Report Audience, Focus and Approach

This report's primary audience are the philanthropic funders, government agencies and community sector organisations that engage in systems change. It seeks to progress conversation and action in developing shared understanding of the complex challenge of ending family violence in our community. This report aims to provide a snapshot of the family violence systems reforms implemented since the 2016 Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence and provide insights into strategic areas for philanthropic and corporate investment in the next phase of our work together. The insights offered may also be of relevance to philanthropic funders considering new approaches to collaborative funding and to government and social sector stakeholders who shape the broader funding ecosystem.

Enduring and Evolving: Five Years on from the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence

On the 29th of March 2016, the Royal Commission into Family Violence provided its report. The Victorian government committed to implementing all 227 recommendations outlined in the report for improving the family violence system, leading to an unprecedented period of investment and systemic change.

Five years on what has changed to improve outcomes for victim survivors in Victoria?

1. We are now witnessing a world leading reform agenda led by government and backed by approximately \$3 billion dollars of investment to date. This **period of change has had a significant impact on the specialist family violence sector, as well as the broader systems that intersect with family violence** such as civil and criminal justice, housing and homelessness, health, and child and family services. In many instances the impact of the immediate reforms is only just starting to be felt as the reforms move from design to implementation and measuring outcomes.
2. The reforms have **completely shifted the public conversation about family violence and awareness is at an all-time high**. This means that more victim survivors are recognizing their experiences of family violence and are seeking support. Now more than ever, Victorians — and indeed Australians — understand that family violence is everyone’s business. This was confirmed last year when we heard from our member organisations that there was an increase in third party reporting of family violence incidents during the pandemic.
3. **The family violence system has a sharpened focus on risk & safety, and we are seeing stronger collaboration between different parts of the system** – particularly at crisis and intake points. This is primarily due to the strength of the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management (MARAM) Framework and the Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme (FVISS), and the flow on effects this has had on system-wide collaboration and coordination. There is nothing like this in other parts of the world – and we know decision makers, researchers, and family violence specialists across the country and the world are watching to see the outcomes of the Victorian reforms.
4. **The family violence response system is more inclusive, and aware of the structural barriers certain groups of victim-survivors face to accessing family violence support**. This has been supported by MARAM, which is a more inclusive risk assessment framework. The courts have increased inclusion and access through the roll-out of 5 specialist family violence courts and by enabling online application of Family Violence Intervention Orders. There has also been targeted funding for increasing capability within family violence services for working with specific communities and client groups, and funding for organisations which specialise in working with specific cohorts experiencing family violence. Investment in the new ‘core and cluster’ model of specialist family violence refuge accommodation has strengthened the inclusive practices of refuge providers.
5. *Dhelk Dja: Safe Our Way – Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families*, is an Aboriginal led agreement with the Victorian government to address FV in Aboriginal Communities, and the

establishment of the Dhehk Dja Committees is a strong indication of the **government's commitment to Aboriginal self-determination in the implementation of the FV reforms.**

6. The reforms have led to **an expanded understanding of family violence** that recognises the many forms and tactics of family violence, the different contexts and types of relationships, and the different impacts of family violence on victim survivors at different ages and stages of life.

However, there is still much work to be done. Year on year increases in demand for family violence services and the the alarmingly high numbers of women killed by partners and ex-partners demonstrate how far we still have to go. Further to this, the disruption and increased isolation cause by the Covid-19 pandemic has amplified pre-existing structural issues and revealed a system under strain.

Critical areas for further work and investment

1. Since the Royal Commission, a significant amount of funding has been dedicated to specialist family violence service delivery. However, without changing the historically under-resourced funding model for the SFVS this has meant that demand for services has significantly outweighed capacity to respond, and discrepancies in funding levels between specialist family violence services and other community services have yet to be resolved. **The specialist family violence sector needs a new funding model from government, that recognises the value of our skilled workforce and sustains the critical role we play in the family violence response system.**
2. **The specialist family violence sector is experiencing severe workforce shortages, further exacerbated by the pandemic.** There are not enough qualified and experienced workers to fill existing and emerging roles, and specialist services report ongoing difficulties retaining existing staff due to institutional inequalities related to gender, pay and conditions, fixed term contracts and role complexity. As a result, it continues to be impossible to meet client demand in a timely way. This is occurring at the same time as demand for services is increasing, the system is becoming more complex, and services are expected to respond to constant change and systemic transformation.
3. **The family violence response system is yet to pivot towards the perpetrator, and to a large extent, the notion of perpetrator accountability has yet to fully move beyond a focus on the criminal justice response.** This is despite changes in MARAM and information sharing and efforts within police and justice system. There remain inadequate levels of service delivery for specialist family violence perpetrator services, limitations in current offerings and limited evidence base to inform what those alternative offerings should be. Despite recent increases in funding for Men's Referral Service to provide accommodation, there is need for further piloting and evaluation of perpetrator accommodation and support services.
4. There have also been significant efforts to improve the system's response to children, as victim survivors of family violence in their own right. Like the work happening around access and inclusion, there is still more to be done in this space – particularly around **increasing access for specialist family violence therapeutic support for children and young people impacted by and/or using family violence.**

5. **The full effect of the family violence reforms will never be achieved without long-term housing security for victim-survivors.** The Parliamentary Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria found that 'family violence is a leading cause of homelessness in Victoria', and that the homelessness sector is overwhelmed, and crisis oriented. We continue to work with our partners to ensure the **Safe at Home** approach, wherein victim survivors are supported to remain in the home and perpetrators are removed, is supported and strengthened. However, five years after the Royal Commission released its report, the **lack of affordable housing in Victoria** remains one aspect of the reform where there has been very little progress, creating a significant barrier to the effective implementation of many of the other family violence reforms and limiting the success of reform overall. The Big Housing Build is a welcome announcement but falls short of the need.
6. The establishment of the Orange Doors has one of the most significant and costly reforms and, while welcome, a major challenge in scale and complexity. **More authentic collaboration between government and the key peak bodies representing the sectors involved is required, as well as detailed planning, achievable milestones, and clear resource allocation if we are to see a real improvement in outcomes for victim-survivors. We are advocating with government for a consistent, state-wide approach to the development of a core model of practice for the Hubs Network which will ensure that victim-survivors receive safe a consistent support regardless of where they are in the state.** Seven hub sites have been implemented, and one more within the second tranche of hub sites is planned for rollout in 2020/2021. **It is imperative that the 10 remaining hub sites are not rushed to meet unrealistic timelines.**

The Next Steps for Ending Family Violence in our Community

Ending family violence in our community is legacy work that will require long term commitment and investment from government and all our community. We also know that new challenges will continue to emerge. Data has shown that Covid restrictions saw a rise in reporting of first time incidents of family violence and increasing risk in complexity and severity of violence. Just as we anticipate the country's recovery from Covid will take many years, we anticipate the pandemic will have a long term impact on family violence rates and impacts into the future.

1. **Victim-survivors and specialist family violence sector experts need to be involved at every step of policy development, lawmaking, and reform.** This means seats at the table at every discussion and a stake in every decision. There is no value in ticking off recommendations if it is done without the advice, warnings and insights of survivors and specialist family violence sector experts. While it is true that family violence is everyone's responsibility, the importance of specialisation must never be forgotten, and survivor voices must be always centered.
2. **Integrated investment and effort across the continuum from response and recovery to prevention and early intervention is required.** It is crucial that family violence and prevention initiatives are aligned and there is investment across the continuum - this means both assisting victim-survivors who have experienced violence and supporting their healing and recovery, as well as addressing the systemic and social drivers of violence across every facet of our society to ensure we stop such violence from happening in the first place. It is critical that governments and the sector hold firm to the evidence and continue to recognise that gender inequality is a

structural driver of violence against women and children — the most common form of family violence. This understanding must underpin all efforts across prevention and response.

3. The Family Violence Royal Commission gave Victorians a once in a lifetime opportunity to fundamentally change the family violence system and improve the safety and wellbeing of victim survivors across the state. The commission's work and recommendations were comprehensive and founded on robust evidence, it provided us with the information we need about the changes required, and a roadmap for achieving them. **As we endeavour to stay true to the Royal Commission's vision and intent** the work continues to evolve, and we should not **be constrained to line-by-line acquittal of recommendations**. To ensure these reforms really are increasing safety for victim survivors and accountability for perpetrators of family violence **we need improved family violence data collection, robust reforms outcomes measurement and evaluation to be put in place**, so we can know the impact we are making and adapt our efforts according to the evidence.

We commend the Victorian Government's commitment to these reforms, and we remain committed to staying the course, continuing to work in partnership with government and our membership to finish what has been started in increasing systems integration and a coordinated response that meets the needs of all victim survivors and holds perpetrators to account.

Let's work together to finish this.