



**MONASH**  
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OF  
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# Monitoring the Family Violence Reforms

Submission to the  
Victorian Family Violence  
Reform Implementation  
Monitor, July 2020

Prepared by the Monash Gender and Family Violence  
Prevention Centre.

Submitted to: <https://engage.vic.gov.au/call-submissions-monitoring-family-violence-reforms>

## The Victorian Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor Submission: Monitoring the Family Violence Reforms

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the Victorian Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor to inform the final report Monitoring the Family Violence Reforms.

This submission has been prepared by members of the Monash Gender and Family Violence Prevention Centre (MGFVPC).

Our submission focuses on how the family violence service system has changed since the Royal Commission and what we believe is still required to ensure Victoria continues to lead the world in improving responses to, and the prevention of, all forms of family violence. In the final section of our submission we have outlined findings from our recent research examining the impact the COVID-19 pandemic on responses to women and children experiencing violence in Victoria.

The submission also provides summary details of Royal Commission research completed by MGFVPC researchers as well as current research that we are leading examining family violence and the COVID-19 global health pandemic.

Please find our submission attached to this letter.

We would welcome the opportunity to provide further detail to inform the work of the Victorian Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor

Kind regards,

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## 1. How the family violence service system, and users' experiences of it, has changed since the Royal Commission

The Victorian family violence reforms are world-leading and transformational. Since the Royal Commission into Family Violence released its Findings and Recommendations on 30 March 2016 the sustained level of government commitment and attention paid to reforming the family violence service system in Victoria has been commendable. This represents a significant change to prior periods when intimate partner violence was not deemed a 'serious' crime and was not worthy of political attention or justice system intervention.

We acknowledge that the changes that have occurred since the Royal Commission have been facilitated, implemented and operationalised by those working within the sector. The work of those in the Victorian family violence service system has been world leading, significant and undertaken during periods of intense demand. Building sustainability into the sector moving forward is essential if this level of change and reform is to be effectively supported long term.

Noting that our role and involvement in the work arising from the Royal Commission has been largely research, evaluation and advisory focused, we believe that some of the key changes to the family violence service system and users' experiences of it since the Royal Commission include:

- Enhanced understandings of the family violence risk assessment and management process,
- Enhanced recognition of the need to increase perpetrator accountability and visibility,
- Commitment to achieving specialist family violence policing through dedicated policing roles and a family violence education centre at Victoria Police,
- Commitment to fast-tracking family violence criminal matters across Magistrates' Courts Victoria to ensure timely responses to ensuring victim safety and perpetrator accountability,
- Dedicated state-wide focus on primary prevention driving the elimination of all forms of family violence, and
- Increasing recognition of the interrelationships between family violence, alcohol and other drugs, and mental health and the development of cross-sectorial responses in the light of this.

While it is as yet difficult to know how the family violence service system reforms have impacted users' experiences given the relatively short timeframe since implementation, we note that in the period since the Royal Commission there has been an increase in Victoria in the evidence-based understanding of:

- how diverse community groups experience family violence, including women with disability (Maher et al. 2018) and women (victims) who have or are experiencing family violence whose migration status is temporary (Segrave, 2017),
- Perpetrator interventions and the systems required to hold perpetrators to account (see, inter alia, Expert Advisory Committee on Perpetrator Interventions, 2018; Fitz-Gibbon et al. 2020),
- experiences of, and legal responses to, adolescent family violence (Campbell, Richter, Howard & Cockburn, 2020; Fitz-Gibbon, Elliott & Maher, 2018),
- how the fast-tracking of family violence criminal matters was implemented across Magistrates' Courts Victoria and addresses the needs of victim survivors and perpetrators, ensures family safety and supports police and courts in ensuring timely risk identification, management and ongoing monitoring (Meyer et al, 2019), and
- the development and implementation of combined interventions for men with comorbid problematic substance use and use of family violence (Meyer, Bartlett & Wong, 2020).

## 2. Looking forward: what is still required in the family violence reforms

### The need for ongoing independent monitoring

The impacts of the reforms implemented as a result of the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence are still largely unclear. While some short-term impacts are evident, the medium- and long-term impacts are yet to emerge. There is as yet limited evidence as to what the impact of reforms has been on service system and user experiences. This belies the need to extend the independent role of the Family Violence Implementation Monitor beyond its current five-year period for a further five-year period. This would allow the Independent Monitor role to continue to provide oversight of the realisation of the Royal Commission recommendations and to take into account the changing needs of the system as evidence of the impact of the recommendations in practice emerges from research and evaluations.

[We recommend that the independent role of the Family Violence Implementation Monitor in Victoria be extended beyond the current five-year period for a further five-year period.](#)

### The need to build a coordinated and data-led understanding of the impacts of the family violence reforms

Five years on from the Royal Commission we believe there is an important opportunity to ensure that Victoria builds the data necessary to monitor, measure and evaluate the impact of the reforms in practice. It is commendable that much research has accompanied policy reform yet to date the data generated through research and sector evaluations remains siloed, archived on a largely project by project basis, and has not been coordinated nor collated in any centralised way.

There is an ongoing risk is that this research data, needed to realise the impact of the significant government investment in reform, will not be accessible moving forward. Further, inefficiencies in research and evaluation arise where:

- research is not sequenced or clustered in the optimum way
- there is duplication of effort
- research datasets are not shared among or accessible for future researchers
- research data sets are/ cannot be linked across government departments.

The lack of a coordinated research agenda also adds to the burden on the family violence sector which has been asked to invest time in participating in multiple projects including, surveys, focus groups and interviews, that might have been delivered more efficiently through a carefully managed program of research. Having been involved in undertaking research directly related to five of the RCFV recommendations we are aware that the family violence sector is dealing with 'research fatigue' at a time when demands on service have increased and where reform is taking place at a rapid pace.

There is a need to develop a systematic and coordinated approach to family violence reform data collection, collation, and dissemination, that would have real benefits for facilitating future research, avoiding duplication of research effort and ensuring that participants time is used most efficiently and effectively.

[We recommend the Victorian Government establish a state-wide family violence research data archive. This data archive should facilitate data storing, linkage and sharing with the aim of building the long-term evidence base needed to understand the impacts of Victoria's family violence reforms.](#)



## The need to develop tailored responses and programs to address adolescent family violence

The Royal Commission into Family Violence found that there is a need to develop specialised service responses and programs for adolescent family violence. However, five years on and despite making dedicated recommendations to this effect, there remains few tailored responses and programs to address adolescent family violence across Victoria.

The complex needs of adolescents who use violence in the home and those caring for them require specialist service responses outside of the criminal justice system. Our research found that the dearth of targeted resources and specialist responses for adolescent family violence means that many parents are left on their own to manage and maintain their families' safety and security (Fitz-Gibbon, Elliott and Maher, 2018). There are no clear avenues for accessing effective support or responses, particularly in cases where the child using violence is under 12 years of age. Our research also noted the critical role that schools and other education institutions can play in operating as an interface between families and services, and providing support for families experiencing adolescent family violence.

We recommend the Victorian Government dedicate funding to the development of integrated service responses for vulnerable children and young people, including a coordinated response to adolescent family violence in Victoria between various sites, programs and services, including schools.

We recommend the development of interim and short-term respite models for families experiencing adolescent family violence, including care options for adolescents who use family violence beyond child protection or residential care.

## The need to consider the implications of State and Federal jurisdictions and responsibilities

The Royal Commission into Family Violence recognised that migrant and refugee women are more likely to face barriers to obtaining help for family violence, and that there is a severe and specific impact of family violence for those who hold temporary visas. The consistent challenge for Victoria is that the operation of Immigration law and regulation is the jurisdiction of the Commonwealth, and yet it is migration issues and the structure of the system that has been shown to specifically create leverage for perpetrators of violence to act with impunity (Segrave 2017). Nationally there is recognition that temporary migrants, and their children, who experience family violence have specific limitations regarding eligibility for services and government support. The Royal Commission also noted this. These limitations include access to financial support, health care and housing which compromises access to safety and protection (Segrave 2017, National Advocacy Group 2019).

The Royal Commission into Family Violence recommended that forced marriage be recognised as a "statutory example of family violence within the Family Violence Protection Act (2008) (Vic)" (Neave et al, 2016: 33). This change was enacted and brought into law in 2018. The Royal Commission recommendation did not make any reference to the existing Commonwealth legislation and the criminal justice and welfare infrastructure established at the federal level to respond to forced marriage. In 2010, S. 270 of the Commonwealth Criminal Code Act (1995) (Cth) defines forced marriage within the trafficking and slavery-like practices offences. The response to these offences are overseen by the Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Branch within the Department of Home Affairs. There are clear differences between the Victorian and Commonwealth responses which required review in relation to implementation, with a specific view to consider the implications for victims, as well as for policing personnel and the broader family violence sector.

We recommend that the Victorian Government support the development of a national model to ensure that visa status does not limit access to support in the short or medium term, building on the existing evidence base and support state and territory-led efforts to support all those who experience family violence equally.

We recommend that the Victorian Government dedicate a specific focus on the cases of forced marriage that come to the attention of Victoria Police and services across the state.

## The need to enhance integration of the family violence and disability service sectors

The Royal Commission into Family Violence highlighted the gaps that faced women with disability in seeking support and safety when they experienced family violence. There has been significant development in awareness of these gaps and work in both the family violence and disability sectors to create effective and secure pathways for women with disability.

Our ANROWS research in 2018 (Maher et al 2018) found that women with disability still experienced ongoing issues in navigating across and between family violence and disability services. Knowledge of available supports, such as the additional financial support available for women with disability leaving a situation of family violence, was uneven across sectors and organisations. Our research found that integrated approaches to training and responses for family violence and disability workforces with opportunities for shared skill building and enhancement of service approaches were required and should form part of an active and on-going workforce plan for both sectors. This is particularly critical as research consistently shows women with disability experience significant rates of intimate partner abuse and patterns of abuse which are distinctive and may not be well understood in mainstream family services.

We recommend that the Victorian government continue to support the development of integrated service responses for women with disability and consider enhanced opportunities for cross sector training and workforce deployment.

## The need to build the evidence base on effective perpetrator interventions

The Royal Commission into Family Violence highlighted the importance of keeping perpetrators 'in view' and of developing a suite of intervention options to more effectively engage with and hold perpetrators of family violence to account. In the intervening years Victoria has evidenced a welcomed breakdown in the siloed barriers between those who work with men and those who work with women and children, alongside a wider appreciation and recognition of the need to trial and introduce new men's behaviour change programs (MBCPs) for working with men who use family violence.

To date, there have been a significant number of MBCPs trialled, piloted and/or funded by the government, however, there remains a critical lack of evidence as to what works in engaging men in behaviour change. While our recently completed ANROWS project (Fitz-Gibbon et al 2020) found that timely and consistent consequences, early referral, and availability of perpetrator interventions were key elements of a best practice approach to the sentencing of family violence perpetrators, there is limited understanding (beyond the UK Project Mirabal findings, which was focused on men not necessarily engaged with the criminal justice system) as to what impact and effect MBCPs have on a man's use of violence and level of risk. Building this evidence base is critical to inform future reform activity and funding decisions.

A key challenge here remains the utilisation of many MBCPs as a one-size fits all approach, combining men from diverse backgrounds (including cultural and linguistic diversity, different perpetrator profiles, men with physical and/or cognitive disabilities) in mainstream programs. Evaluation of such programs often cannot account for the diversity of program participants in the breakdown of findings due to small participant numbers, rendering many evaluation findings inconclusive or non-significant. Further, the majority of existing program evaluations are funded to examine short-term outcomes, often limited to observable behaviour change at program exit and potentially short-term follow up, leaving questions around the longevity of any behaviour change and its long-term impact on family safety and wellbeing.

Further, while research evidence highlights the importance of a dedicated victim advocacy/ family safety worker component in each MBCP (Chung et al, 2020, Meyer et al, 2020), this component continues to vary across programs.

We recommend that the Victorian Government funds further trials of new perpetrator intervention models, along with long term evaluations (of at least 24 months). Such trials and evaluations should include programs specifically catering for the needs of:

- culturally and linguistically diverse men (this must consider shared language skills and the capacity of each group participant to engage with and process program content delivered in English or an alternative language that meets the needs of all program participants), and
- men with cognitive disabilities (including traumatic and acquired brain injuries) to ensure all group participants share a similar capacity to engage with and process delivered program content).

We recommend funding of a dedicated victim advocacy/ family safety worker component as part of all future funded MBCPs to ensure the voices of affected family members form part of each MBCP and all affected family members receive consistent support across MBCPs.

## The need for improved perpetrator accountability in court processes

Our recently completed ANROWS project examining the views of Australian judicial officers on domestic and family violence perpetrator interventions (Fitz-Gibbon et al 2020) found that:

1. There is still limited knowledge about how judicial officers view or understand perpetrator interventions, and how they use them in their practice.
2. There is limited knowledge about what judicial officers believe the appropriate role for courts in relation to using, facilitating access to, and monitoring compliance with these interventions is.

Our research found that judicial officers at all levels (Magistrates, County and Supreme Court) have limited access to information about histories of perpetrator interventions in domestic and family violence cases. While judges recognise that prior histories of perpetrator interventions can be used as an indicator of risk and can be a valuable guide as to what sentencing intervention might work best in the current circumstance, judicial officers noted that this information is rarely presented to the court (Fitz-Gibbon et al 2020). This was attributed to time pressures and inadequate provision of information.

We recommend that consideration be given to developing judicial guidance on seeking and making use of perpetrator intervention histories in all DFV matters, including in sentencing, to assist in judicial decision making.

We recommend that the Victorian Government develop and maintain a centralised online register of perpetrator intervention programs, to be coordinated through the relevant government departments, to ensure that information is readily available to support judicial decision-making and referral in DFV matter.

Our evaluation of the fast-tracking of family violence criminal matters in Magistrates' Courts Victoria showed that this initiative had been implemented effectively across selected court locations and was perceived to facilitate timely identification of risk along with subsequent risk management and monitoring between Victoria Police and Magistrates' Courts Victoria. However, the fast tracking of family violence criminal matters showed no effect on perpetrators' repeat offending behaviour in itself, raising questions around what other factors of perpetrator accountability in court processes may be relevant in order to generate specific deterrence of reoffending behaviour.

We recommend that the Victorian government commission future research into the effectiveness of court responses to family violence perpetrators in relation to future offending behaviour. We recommend this



research includes the voices of perpetrators and draws on linked administrative data that allows a comprehensive analysis of a range of different factors related to perpetrators, perpetrator behaviour and perpetrator interactions with regulatory service systems.

There is presently no specific or nationally consistent framework for the approach taken by judicial officers to monitoring or supervising family violence perpetrators post sentence. Our research found that there is considerable variation in how judicial officers understood the scope and extent of their role in facilitating perpetrator accountability. While some judicial officers believe it would be undesirable for active monitoring of high-risk perpetrators to become part of the judicial role, other judicial officers recognised the importance of the active judicial role in enhancing the effectiveness of, and compliance with a perpetrator intervention (Fitz-Gibbon et al 2020). There is an opportunity for Victoria to continue their leadership in the space of perpetrator interventions by developing clear judicial guidance.

We recommend that consideration be given by courts and judicial educational bodies to a broader discussion about the role of judicial officers in creating system accountability, to develop consistent outcomes across jurisdictions and national knowledge and practice about perpetrator intervention programs and outcomes.

## Workforce planning and qualifications

The Royal Commission into Family Violence made multiple recommendations on workforce capacity and development: the *Building from Strength 10 Year industry Plan for Family Violence Prevention and Response* was released in 2017 and outlined a high level approach to capacity building and development. More recent initiatives have included the Family Violence Workforce Census and the FSV Jobs Hub. There has been significant training development to support the family violence reforms focused on the introduction of FVISS, CISS and MARAM.

In the TAFE and higher education sector, there have been a range of initiatives that have seen the development of courses and units. These have included the redevelopment of existing offerings such as the Swinburne Graduate Certificate in Client and Case Assessment (Male Family Violence) and the emergence of new offerings (including the Monash Graduate Certificate/Diploma in Family Violence Prevention, RMIT Graduate Certificate in Domestic and Family Violence, Chisolm Certificate in Family Violence). These offerings are focused beyond training for specific aspects of the reforms and work towards educating a wide range of professionals to understand and respond to family violence in line with their professional standards and/or obligations.

However, there has been no systematic work to bring TAFE and higher education providers and stakeholders together to map the development and provision of these qualifications. There has also been no plan for the development of graduate pathways to support and enhance the provision and delivery of family violence knowledge to workforces, such as teachers, who have or will acquire new responsibilities under legislative initiatives arising from the Royal Commission.

We recommend that the Victorian Government urgently create a workforce taskforce that addresses training and education needs, pathways and funding models to support workforce development. This taskforce would need to address state and federal pathways and funding for training and education. Specific consideration must be given to training and education for First Nations peoples, with requisite funding support, to support family violence prevention within Aboriginal communities.

### 3. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

#### Impact on the nature, frequency and severity of violence

Our Victorian research demonstrates an increase in the prevalence, severity and complexity of violence against women (VAW) reported to practitioners since the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis (Pfitzner, Fitz-Gibbon, Meyer and True, 2020). Following the COVID-19 restrictions in Victoria, services working with perpetrators of family violence reported an increase in service use.

Findings from the first survey of 166 Victorian frontline practitioners supported to women experiencing violence during the COVID-19 shutdowns revealed the following:

- An increase in the frequency and severity of VAW
- 59% of Victorian practitioners surveyed reported that COVID-19 has increased the frequency of VAW
- 50% of Victorian practitioners surveyed reported it has increased the severity of VAW
- An increase in the complexity of women's needs noted by 86% of respondents
- An increase in first-time family violence reporting by women noted by 42% of respondents

Victorian practitioners reported new forms of violence that perpetrators are using during the COVID-19 restrictions (Pfitzner, Fitz-Gibbon and True, 2020). Survey respondents described the ways in which perpetrators were using the restrictions and threat of COVID-19 infection, purposeful or otherwise, to restrict women's movement, to gain access to women's residences and to coerce women into residing with them if they usually reside separately.

These findings demonstrate how perpetrators of intimate partner violence and other forms of violence against women have adapted their abusive behaviours, finding new opportunities to control and isolate their victims during the COVID-19 restrictions.

#### Impact on the safe housing shortage and women's risk of homelessness

In early April 2020, the Victorian State Government announced a multimillion-dollar funding package dedicated to ensuring additional resources to secure short-term accommodation, including motel rooms, for women and children escaping family violence during the pandemic (Lucas, 2020). Despite this funding announcement, findings from our Victorian survey of practitioners responding to women experiencing violence during the period of restrictions revealed a perceived lack of safe accommodation options for women who are unable to remain at home during the restrictions (Pfitzner, Fitz-Gibbon and True, 2020). Practitioners believed there is a need for the government to urgently address the significant safe-housing shortage that pre-existed in Victoria but has been heightened to critical levels during the COVID-19 pandemic. Numerous Victorian practitioners noted that securing safe-housing options and availability during the COVID-19 restriction period posed a significant challenge.

Relatedly, a major challenge is that there are gaps in support, including accommodation options for non-citizens without permanent residency who are often without a reliable or ongoing income, who cannot access ongoing social security benefits and who, for this reason, are unable to access longer-term subsidised accommodation options. This group of temporary migrants has been identified during this time as at significant risk of destitution and homelessness (Rushton, 2020).

These Victorian practitioner views support mounting evidence of the ways in which COVID-19 is exacerbating existing gender inequalities. The specific implications this will have on women in terms of housing, job and income insecurity, health and wellbeing are beginning to emerge.

There has been long-held recognition across Australia that there is a shortage of safe-housing options for women and children (see, for example, Flanagan, Blunden, Valentine and Henriette, 2019; RCFV, 2016; Special Taskforce on Domestic and Family Violence, 2015). Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, family violence was recognised as a key contributor to women and children's homelessness in Australia (Special Taskforce on Domestic and Family Violence, 2015; Tually et al., 2018) and our research has repeatedly shown that a lack of safe and sustainable housing solutions frequently forces women and children back into unsafe family and living arrangements (Meyer, 2014, 2015).

### Impact on service delivery and responses to women experiencing violence

Like many other service areas, family violence specialist services in Victoria have had to act quickly during the initial stages of the COVID-19 restrictions to support continued client engagement and safety. Since the third week of March 2020 in Victoria, social restrictions have largely prevented face-to-face service delivery with victim support and perpetrator intervention services reoriented to deliver many of their services via online and telephone counselling.

In our study (Pfitzner, Fitz-Gibbon and True, 2020), practitioners indicated that many services that have traditionally provided in-person responses to women experiencing violence were transitioning to voice-and-video call, email, webchat and messaging-based services during the COVID-19 pandemic. Given the timing of the survey, falling over a four-week period during the heaviest stage of physical-distancing restrictions in Victoria, practitioners were at different stages of their transition to remote-service delivery. Some of the remote-service practices that were reported in the survey had been developed specifically in response to the pandemic, while other organisations and agencies had utilised and expanded existing remote-service models.

Many Victorian practitioners reported that their organisations have sought to integrate family violence response into the essential services that have remained open during the shutdown, such as doctors' clinics, Centrelink and childcare services. Practitioners recognised that these service touchpoints offered potentially useful ways to access women and children who have experienced violence but who may otherwise be unable to seek help (see further Pfitzner, Fitz-Gibbon and True, 2020). Victorian practitioners also reported that their organisations had created new alert systems for women to signal when they need support. These alerts include the use of code words in telephone and text communication as well as physical signals.

### Impact on the wellbeing of practitioners responding to women experiencing violence

Our Victorian research has revealed the risk of losing the essential workers on the frontlines of our family violence response, as a result of overwhelming workloads and potential burn out. The change in service delivery to largely remote formats, has required frontline workers providing crisis counselling and conducting risk assessment and planning with women experiencing violence to do so from home.

Several survey respondents to our Victorian survey reported that changes to the mode of service delivery as a result of COVID-19 restrictions have increased clinician stress and raised new challenges associated with setting practitioners up to work from home (Pfitzner, Fitz-Gibbon and True, 2020). Acknowledging that these services have typically not been delivered solely remotely, nor have workers typically been based from home (either completely or partially), the move required at the start of the COVID-19 restriction period represented a significant adjustment and cost for many services and individual practitioners. In addition to the breakdown of barriers between work and home, practitioners identified the additional toll on their time during this period. One practitioner, for example, described the additional time now required to support a woman at court when taking out an intervention order (IVO), commenting that 'There are more hours involved in achieving safety'.

As Victoria navigates its response to the COVID-19 pandemic, there is a need to devote the funding and resources required to ensure the sector can meet the demands of the increasing number of women seeking help from violence while also ensuring the necessary health and wellbeing supports are available for family

violence practitioners (Pfitzner, True, Fitz-Gibbon and Meyer, 2020). The specific of what support packages are required should be determined in close consultation with the family violence sector.

### Impact on perpetrator accountability and holding perpetrators ‘in view’

Since the beginning of the Victorian restrictions, services delivering programs with perpetrators of family violence and practitioners offering face-to-face supports have had to reorient to deliver their services remotely. For instance, some men’s intervention programs are adapting their strategies to reach known perpetrators who otherwise would be unsupported (Fitz-Gibbon, Burley and Meyer, 2020).

While our Victorian research has not yet focused on responses to perpetrators, in our recent Queensland study practitioners responding to Survey Two commented on how restrictions around face-to-face service delivery affected their area of practice while also creating new opportunities for service engagement (Pfitzner, Fitz-Gibbon, Meyer and True, 2020). Queensland examples provided included the remote delivery of men’s behaviour change programs (MBCP) and (ex)partner contact to manage the safety of women and children linked to men in such programs. Practitioners reflected that when delivered remotely, these points of contact were not restricted by geographic and time challenges associated with face-to-face client meetings.

We believe these service innovations may lead to improvements in future service delivery in the men’s service and behaviour change space post COVID-19 restrictions, especially for clients in remote geographic areas. Given the heightened invisibility of perpetrators during the period of restrictions, it will be important to rigorously evaluate the benefits of any innovations which operate during this period to maintain contact with perpetrators and ensure ongoing engagement (see also Fitz-Gibbon, Burley and Meyer, 2020).

### Impact on women on temporary visas

Temporary migrants in Australia regardless of visa status, and before the pandemic, have long been disadvantaged by the system because they have no access to Centrelink, Medicare or housing. In the context of COVID-19, a significant financial burden has been carried by temporary workers who were refused access to the federal support packages (JobKeeper and JobSeeker) for those out of work, or those who could not work due to the lockdown. Financial stress and increased alcohol consumption, combined with the lockdown and myriad compounding stress factors in the context of COVID-19, have resulted in escalating reports of violence and severity of family violence for temporary migrants. Service providers in Victoria reported a 20% increase in temporary visa holders coming forward needing assistance in the context of family violence, while Domestic Violence NSW reported that 60% of women on temporary visas they were supporting had less access to income, food and essentials (Rushton, 2020). The conditions for this group of women are significant, not least because there are no safe options: leaving a violent partner is inherently risky because of the absence of any guarantees of ongoing support, yet remaining with a violent partner is also significantly risky in terms of the immediate and long-term safety of women and their children. These conditions have escalated during the pandemic.

## Summary of Recommendations

This submission has made 14 recommendations:

1. We recommend that the independent role of the Family Violence Implementation Monitor in Victoria be extended beyond the current five-year period for a further five-year period.
2. We recommend the Victorian Government establish a state-wide family violence research data archive. This data archive should facilitate data storing, linkage and sharing with the aim of building the long-term evidence base needed to understand the impacts of Victoria’s family violence reforms.

3. We recommend the Victorian Government dedicate funding to the development of integrated service responses for vulnerable children and young people, including a coordinated response to adolescent family violence in Victoria between various sites, programs and services, including schools.
4. We recommend the development of interim and short-term respite models for families experiencing adolescent family violence, including care options for adolescents who use family violence beyond child protection or residential care.
5. We recommend the Victorian Government support the development of a national model to ensure that visa status does not limit access to support in the short or medium term, building on the existing evidence base and support state and territory-led efforts to support all those who experience family violence equally.
6. We recommend the Victorian Government dedicate a specific focus on the cases of forced marriage that come to the attention of Victoria Police and services across the state.
7. We recommend the Victorian Government continue to support the development of integrated service responses for women with disability and consider enhanced opportunities for cross sector training and workforce deployment.
8. We recommend the Victorian Government funds further trials of new perpetrator intervention models, along with long term evaluations (of at least 24 months). Such trials and evaluations should include programs specifically catering for the needs of:
  - culturally and linguistically diverse men (this must consider shared language skills and the capacity of each group participant to engage with and process program content delivered in English or an alternative language that meets the needs of all program participants), and
  - men with cognitive disabilities (including traumatic and acquired brain injuries) to ensure all group participants share a similar capacity to engage with and process delivered program content).
9. We recommend funding of a dedicated victim advocacy/ family safety worker component as part of all future funded MBCPs to ensure the voices of affected family members form part of each MBCP and all affected family members receive consistent support across MBCPs.
10. We recommend that consideration be given to developing judicial guidance on seeking and making use of perpetrator intervention histories in all DFV matters, including in sentencing, to assist in judicial decision making.
11. We recommend the Victorian Government develop and maintain a centralised online register of perpetrator intervention programs, to be coordinated through the relevant government departments, to ensure that information is readily available to support judicial decision-making and referral in DFV matter.
12. We recommend the Victorian Government commission future research into the effectiveness of court responses to family violence perpetrators in relation to future offending behaviour. We recommend this research includes the voices of perpetrators and draws on linked administrative data that allows a comprehensive analysis of a range of different factors related to perpetrators, perpetrator behaviour and perpetrator interactions with regulatory service systems.
13. We recommend that consideration be given by courts and judicial educational bodies to a broader discussion about the role of judicial officers in creating system accountability, to develop consistent outcomes across jurisdictions and national knowledge and practice about perpetrator intervention programs and outcomes.



14. We recommend the Victorian Government urgently create a workforce taskforce that addresses training and education needs, pathways and funding models to support workforce development. This taskforce would need to address state and federal pathways and funding for training and education. Specific consideration must be given to training and education for First Nations peoples, with requisite funding support, to support family violence prevention within Aboriginal communities.

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## Appendix A: Monash Gender and Family Violence Prevention Centre

The Monash Gender and Family Violence Prevention Centre (MGFVPC) is at the forefront of research and education aimed at preventing family violence. The Centre is contributing to transformative social change by providing an evidence base for policy change that better supports and protects those experiencing family violence and addresses the cultural and economic drivers that underpin it. The Centre's track record includes ground-breaking research, engagement with government and civil society stakeholders, and innovative educational offerings.

The Centre's work has had a significant impact on the transformation of policy and practice and has a record of bringing together Monash and international researchers to collaborate with partners in government, social services, legal services, policing and health. Centre members have significant experience working with family violence and criminal justice stakeholders across the public sector and has advanced knowledge of the various processes involved in reviews and evaluations. The team has engaged or worked with a broad range of departments, and non-government organisations and statutory bodies.

The MGFVPC has extensive expertise and a strong track record in researching sensitive topics and engaging with hard-to-access or marginalised groups. Recently completed research projects have included Indigenous women, women from culturally and linguistically diverse communities, women with disabilities who have experienced family violence in all its forms, perpetrators of family violence, and key stakeholders from the family violence and criminal justice system service sectors. The Centre's distinctive approach engages with the full continuum of prevention, including primary prevention (preventing violence before it occurs), secondary prevention (early intervention to stop violence reoccurring), and tertiary intervention and response (to prevent long-term harm from violence). Our research is grounded in qualitative and quantitative methods, combined with a well-developed understanding of the contemporary policy landscape.

Members of the Monash Gender and Family Violence Prevention Centre are engaged in:

- **Australian Research Council funded research** – competitively awarded programs of research that provide independent, high-quality research to advance the national interest, with MGFVPC researchers undertaking major projects on intimate partner homicide and international students and sexual and intimate partner violence
- **Contract research and consultancy** – including on all aspects of family violence, family violence prevention and responses to family violence
- **Policy development** – including on perpetration interventions, risk assessment and risk management, mapping and developing linkages, and collaborations between sectors and between multiple intersecting reforms and reform agendas
- **Evaluations of programs and reforms** – including large-scale multi-sector reforms
- **Workforce capability building** – on family violence prevention for practitioners and policy makers from a wide range of sectors
- **Expert lectures, seminars, industry briefings and opinions on gender and family violence**

For further details about current and recently completed research projects, please visit the [Centre Research webpage](#).

## Appendix B: Completed Victorian Royal Commission related research

Members of the Monash Gender and Family Violence Prevention Centre have led and completed several key research projects related to realising the recommendations of the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence.

These projects are summarised here.

### Review of the Victorian Family Violence Risk Assessment and Risk Management Framework (CRAF), RCFV Recommendation 1.

Research team: Jude McCulloch, JaneMaree Maher, Kate Fitz-Gibbon, Marie Segrave, James Roffee.

Timeframe: Completed in 2016.

In 2016, the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) contracted with a team at Monash GFV to conduct a review of the Common Risk Assessment Framework (CRAF) as part of the DHHS response to the Victorian Royal Commission on Family Violence. The Review of the CRAF was the first recommendation of the RCVF. This cornerstone project was implemented within extremely tight timelines (1 April 2016 - 30 June 2016). The Review required multiple ethics approvals and engagement with stakeholders across Victoria. Participants included family violence victims/survivors, Victoria Police and key government and non-government stakeholders. Working collaboratively with networks and stakeholders across the Victorian family violence sector, the team secured the participation of over 1,100 people from over 125 organisations and relevant workforces.

The Final Report made 27 recommendations, providing a major platform for the redevelopment of risk assessment and management in Victoria.

For further details of this Review, visit the [project website](#).

### Redevelopment of the Minimum Standards for Men's Behaviour Change Programs (MBCPs), RCFV Recommendation 91.

Research team: Jude McCulloch, Kate Fitz-Gibbon, JaneMaree Maher, Marie Segrave and Kathryn Benier.

Timeframe: 2016-2017

In early 2017 the Department of Health and Human Services contracted with the team to conduct a consultation and review of the Minimum Standards for the effective delivery of MBCPs. This project entailed a review of existing minimum standards, an examination of all Australian states' MBCP minimum standards and a review of international best practice.

This work, with a complete set of newly drafted standards, was completed in August 2017. The revised Standards have received final approval and can be found at: <https://www.ntv.org.au/recently-released-minimum-standards/>.

For further details of this Review, visit the [project website](#).

## Review of the Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme, RCFV Recommendation 5.

Research team: Jude McCulloch, JaneMaree Maher, Kate Fitz-Gibbon, Marie Segrave, Kathryn Benier, Kate Burns, Jasmine McGowan and Naomi Pfitzner.

Timeframe: 2017-2020

It is well established that appropriate and timely sharing of information is critical in assessing, responding to and managing the risks of family violence. In Victoria, the Royal Commission into Family Violence (2016) and the Coronial Inquest into the killing of eleven- year-old Luke Batty by his father recommended the introduction of a family violence information sharing scheme. The Victorian Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme (FVISS) commenced in early 2018. The Scheme aims to better protect victim/survivors and enhance perpetrator accountability by facilitating, regularising and increasing the sharing of information about family violence risk. An independent Review of the Scheme was legislatively mandated to ensure that it meets its aims and avoids any adverse consequences.

Over the previous three years the Centre has been engaged in reviewing the Scheme. During this time, more than a thousand practitioners, managers, experts and women who have experienced family violence have participated in the Review.

The Review report is due to be tabled in Parliament later this year.

For further details of this Review, visit the [project website](#).

## Evaluation of a pilot for police Body Worn Cameras for family violence, RCFV Recommendation 58.

Research team: Jude McCulloch, Naomi Pfitzner, JaneMaree Maher, Kate Fitz-Gibbon, Marie Segrave, Jasmine McGowan.

Timeframe: 2019-2020

In early 2018 Victoria Police contracted the team to conduct a process and outcome evaluation of the Trial of Digitally Recorded Evidence in Chief - Family Violence. The evaluation assisted to ensure that the use of digitally recorded evidence in chief by police will improve the experience for victim/survivors, contribute to the more effective and efficient administration of justice in family violence proceedings and avoid adverse impacts for all stakeholders including victim/survivors and relevant workforces. The Evaluation will inform the future use of digitally recording family violence victim statements beyond the trial period.

The Final Report for this independent review will be tabled in Parliament in 2020.

For further details of this Evaluation, visit the [project website](#).

## Evaluation of a perpetrator intervention program for men using alcohol and other drug services, RCFV Recommendation 93.

Research team: Silke Meyer, Kate Fitz-Gibbon, Jude McCulloch, Jasmine McGowan

Timeframe: 2019 - ongoing

The RCFV recognised the need to develop a better evidence base for perpetrator interventions. Taskforce, a community drug and alcohol agency, is currently piloting a perpetrator intervention program for its service users with a history of family violence perpetration. The evaluation project is one of the most extensive MBCP independent evaluations nationally and internationally.



In 2019 members of the team conducted an evaluation of the Victorian early intervention for family violence program (the U-Turn program) run by Taskforce. The U-Turn program, developed by Victorian service provider Taskforce is an innovative early intervention for family violence targeted at family violence perpetrators who also have identified alcohol and/or other drug (AOD) issues. This research aims to produce a useful evaluation which provides insight as to whether this new program is effective in increasing victim safety and reducing repeat court contact for men subject to their first family violence intervention order and who have AOD issues. This evaluation provides evidence for the benefits and challenges associated with integrating family violence and AOD treatment for perpetrators to generate future directions for perpetrator interventions addressing the needs of family violence perpetrators who also display AOD misuse.

For further details of this Evaluation, visit the [project website](#).

## Appendix C: Current Victorian research on family violence and the COVID-19 pandemic

Members of the Monash Gender and Family Violence Prevention Centre are currently leading a range of research projects seeking to understand how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted on experiences of and responses to family violence.

These projects are summarised here.

### Gender-based violence and help-seeking behaviours during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Project leads: Naomi Pfitzner, Kate Fitz-Gibbon and Jacqui True

This project seeks to understand women's experiences of male violence as well as their help-seeking behaviours during the COVID-19 pandemic. The project aims to generate knowledge on service adaptations and innovations in response to the pandemic and identify service and resource gaps to ensure that women experiencing violence get the support they need. In order to achieve these aims, the project is framed by two key research questions:

1. What are the impacts of COVID-19 on gender-based violence in families and beyond?
2. What are the responses to gender-based violence during the health crisis and were women's help-seeking behaviours effectively responded to?

This project will generate new knowledge on effective crisis response and support for gender-based violence during the COVID-19 pandemic and provide an evidence base for service providers to reimagine service delivery during times of crisis.

The first phase of this project involved an online anonymous survey used to capture the voices and experiences of practitioners responding to women experiencing violence during the COVID-19 shutdown in Victoria, Australia. The survey ran for a four-week period from 23 April to 24 May 2020. The survey was administered through the survey development software Qualtrics. Survey responses were received from 166 Victorian practitioners. Univariate analyses were conducted to explore overall trends in the nature and frequency of violence against women during the COVID-19 shutdown, and the qualitative survey data was thematically analysed. The findings of this survey were presented in Pfitzner, Fitz-Gibbon and True (2020).

The research team has also published a second report presenting the findings from two surveys conducted by the Queensland Domestic Violence Services Network over a ten-day period in April 2020 (15 – 24 April) and a two-week period in May 2020 (8 – 22 May). The surveys sought to capture the professional views and experiences of practitioners responding to women experiencing violence during the period of COVID-19 restrictions in Queensland, Australia. Data collection for the second survey occurred during the Stage 1 easing of restrictions which began on 15 May 2020. Survey One provided a snapshot of DFV client and service needs in Queensland during the shutdown period and Survey Two explored emerging issues from the first survey. The findings of the Queensland surveys were presented in Pfitzner, Fitz-Gibbon, Meyer and True (2020).

This project is part of [The Melbourne Experiment](#), a Monash University research initiative. Further details about the project are available on the [project website](#).

### Family violence, help seeking and temporary migration during COVID-19

Project leads: Marie Segrave and Naomi Pfitzner

The project seeks to map the specific challenges of the pandemic and its flow-on effects to women who hold temporary visas, and their children, experiencing family violence in Victoria, Australia. This project will review

100 cases of women on temporary visas who became clients of inTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence during the predominant lockdown (from 22 March to 21 June) and will draw a cross-sectional sample of 100 clients across key visa types – including bridging, student and sponsored partner visas – as a basis for analysis. The research will seek to understand the specific impacts of lockdown for women on temporary visas experiencing family violence, including the financial stressors placed on temporary migrants who were excluded from the Commonwealth Government's COVID-19 financial support packages. It will build on previous work by Segrave (2017) that has mapped the specificity of temporary migration as contributing to women's insecurity in the context of experiencing, and seeking support or safety from, family violence. The research will utilise a mixed methods approach and provide a quantitative descriptive analysis of case files over this period. Utilising these files, and via consultation with inTouch case managers and their leadership team, specific case studies will be drawn out in more detail to offer more substantive accounts of women's efforts to find security and safety during this period.

## Family violence, legal needs and access to justice during COVID-19

Project leads: Naomi Pfitzner, Kate Fitz-Gibbon and Silke Meyer

In partnership with Women's Legal Services Victoria this project will investigate the impact of COVID-19 on access to justice and the legal needs of family violence victim/survivors with a particular focus on child protection and women's access to justice during periods of restrictions. The project will draw on the experiences and views of legal practitioners and clients during the pandemic as well as administrative service data.