

Domestic Violence Victoria

*Peak body for domestic violence
services for women & children*

Considerations for Governance of Family Violence in Victoria

*Domestic Violence Victoria Submission to the Victorian Royal Commission into
Family Violence*

19 June 2015

Acknowledgements

DV Vic would like to acknowledge the many women in Victoria who have experienced family violence, and whose courage and determination should be honoured. Enhancing the rights of these women and their children is at the heart of DV Vic's advocacy for an effective family violence system. DV Vic would also like to acknowledge the work of specialist family violence practitioners in general, and our members in particular. DV Vic members have been extremely generous in sharing their vast experience and thoughtful insights, all of which have informed our submissions and recommendations.

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About Domestic Violence Victoria (DV Vic)

As the peak body for family violence services in Victoria, DV Vic has a broad membership of over 60 state-wide and regional family violence agencies across Victoria, which provide a variety of responses to women and children who have experienced family violence, including every specialist family violence service in Victoria, community and women's health agencies, some Local Governments and other community service agencies. DV Vic holds a central position in the Victorian integrated family violence system and its governance structures.

Since our establishment in 2002, DV Vic has been a leader in driving innovative policy to strengthen sectoral and system responses to family violence as well as building workforce capacity and representing the family violence sector at all levels of government. DV Vic provides policy advice and advocacy to the Victorian Government about family violence prevention and response. DV Vic also plays a coordinating role in Victoria's work to prevent violence against women, particularly in our work through the media, though the former EVA media awards and the development of a framework for reporting on violence against women.

DV Vic represents the Victorian family violence sector on the current Ministerial Advisory Group on Family Violence and the Statewide Violence against Women and Children Forum; and has sat on numerous other advisory mechanisms with oversight of responses to family violence, violence against women, homelessness and community services of the state and federal governments over the past ten years.

List of Recommendations

Recommendation 1.

The original guiding principles that underpin the integrated family violence system should be reaffirmed and be re-established as the yardstick for all decision-making and policy development: the safety of women and children; the accountability of men who use violence; and the agency of women.

Recommendation 2.

That an independent statutory authority with oversight responsibilities for the family violence system be established as a key element of the statewide governance structure, to facilitate integration, best practice and quality assurance across the family violence system.

Recommendation 3.

That the Royal Commission considers models and functions of independent statutory bodies to recommend the best option for the Victorian family violence system.

Recommendation 4.

That the Royal Commission defines the role of peak bodies and their role in the integrated family violence system.

Recommendation 5.

That the work to build a functioning integrated family violence system (across government and non-government partners) – including a focus on effective risk assessment and management platforms, sustaining a skilled workforce, improved data collection, management and analysis - is prioritised and appropriately resourced.

Recommendation 6.

That the Royal Commission defines the portfolios relevant to the whole of government approach to family violence (under the purview of the Minister for the Prevention of Family Violence) including: Women's Affairs; Children, Youth and Families; Attorney General; Corrections; Community Services; Police; Local Government; Aboriginal Affairs and Housing. It should also define the roles and responsibilities of portfolios not historically included in the integrated family violence system such as Education and Health.

Recommendation 7.

That effective governance structures and processes at a statewide and regional level are defined and resourced to ensure that the systems issues are prioritised, and that there are clear lines of accountability for delivering them.

Recommendation 8.

That the governance structures for a fully effective and integrated family violence system are informed by specialist family violence knowledge and practice framework.

Recommendation 9.

That a review is conducted of the roles and responsibilities of the Family Violence Integration Committees and the Regional Family Violence Integration Coordinators with a view to strengthening consistency and alignment across regions.

Recommendation 10.

That the Regional Family Violence Integration Model is further developed to a Practice Framework for RICs to include protocols and practice standards on information sharing between RICS, community and agency engagement, recruitment and reporting.

Recommendation 11.

That the Practice Framework sets out specific objectives for family violence as it relates to other regional committees with overlapping stakes in the local family violence response including: Crime Prevention, Services Connect, Children's Partnerships and other relevant bodies, to ensure governance alignment.

Recommendation 12.

That professionals working in the integrated family violence system, including within government departments are mandated/supported to undertake 'introduction to family violence' training in order to ensure consistent levels of understanding of the issue.

Recommendation 13.

That gender literacy training is made compulsory for all public service positions, parliamentarian and their staff, to ensure that all policy, programs and legislation routinely subjected to a gender analysis.

Recommendation 14.

That the Victorian Government undertakes a comprehensive review of the Family Violence Risk Assessment and Risk Management Framework (CRAF) to include: mapping current use; addressing content gaps and providing additional guidance; establishment of an effective authorising environment to support consistent implementation.

Recommendation 15.

That the Family Violence Risk Assessment and Risk Management Framework is reviewed regularly to ensure currency and its use mandated for all core services in the family violence service system.

Recommendation 16.

That the Royal Commission analyses the current data challenges for the integrated family violence system in Victoria – including gaps in information – and provides solutions.

Recommendation 17.

That the Royal Commission provides solutions to better integrate existing data sources used by different parts of the family violence system

Recommendation 18.

Consider the creation of new data collection platforms that capture relevant information for family violence.

Recommendation 19.

That any new measures required to evaluate the effectiveness of the family violence system are developed in consultation with the sector to ensure they are appropriately targeted with matching data systems capability.

Introduction

DV Vic welcomes the opportunity created by the Royal Commission into Family Violence to interrogate and strengthen the family violence system in Victoria. We believe that a stronger, more effective system will improve the safety and well-being of women and children experiencing family violence and reduce the incidence of serious harm through more effective early interventions. It would also address the social and structural causes of violence against women through community prevention and policy and legislative reforms for gender inequality.

This submission, which focuses on the principles for governance of the Victorian family violence system, is one of four submissions focused on the key priority areas identified by our members: 1) Specialist Family Violence Services: the heart of an effective system; 2) the interface between family violence services and Police; 3) working with children.

This submission draws on evidence from national and international research and the experience of the DV Vic, its membership and the Regional Family Violence Integration Committees over the past decade. It recommends that the principles to underpin governance family violence policy and practice in Victoria should include:

- A shared vision
- A systems approach
- A partnership approach
- Clear roles and responsibilities
- Evidence and expertise.

Part 1: Background and context of family violence governance arrangements

What we have learnt

1.1 Reforming Family Violence Responses

Having recognised the imperative of improving responses to family violence in Victoria in the early 2000s, the Brumby government embarked on an ambitious process of systemic reforms. The family violence reform process was superseded in 2012 by the Baillieu Government's decision to apply the lens of violence against women and children to the issue of family violence, with the announcement of *Victoria's Action Plan to Address Violence Against Women and Children 2012-2015*.

- *Attachment A is the DHHS Regional Family Violence Integration Model*
- *Attachment B is a case study developed by the Australia and New Zealand School of Government (ANSZOG) Victoria's integrated family violence system: from stalling to renewal, which tells the story of the family violence reforms.*

The architects of the family violence reform processes had to answer the following questions:

- What was the vision?
- Who was responsible for implementing it?
- Who should be involved?
- How would people know what their role was?
- How would we know if it was working?

The role of governance structures was central to answering all of these questions and in implementing the reforms; we refer to 'governance' as the structures, processes, rules and traditions through which decision-making was exercised.¹

As family violence touches so many aspects of life, unravelling the answers to all of these questions delved into wide ranging fields – from criminology, to sociology, psychology, health and mental health, and so on. What was clear from the outset was that looking through the lens of traditional government governance approaches – discrete ministerial and departmental portfolios tackling discrete problems – was not going to work.

At each point of reform, a genuine whole of government approach has been critical – both at a statewide level, where vision, policy and budgets are decided, as well as at regional and local levels, where the intended impacts of those decisions were to be implemented and their intent realised.

¹ It is important to note that governance and systems accountability is not the same, though accountability can be manifested through governance processes.

For the reform process to deliver, it was recognised that shared leadership and responsibility at every level of action was needed – from ministerial leadership across portfolios, to shared and complementary risk assessment and management practice amongst frontline workers who come into contact with women experiencing family violence.

1.1.1 The Family Violence Reform Period

A governance structure was established that incorporated statewide leadership and collaboration in support of a whole of government approach, which had explicit two-way consultation with a regional governance structure.

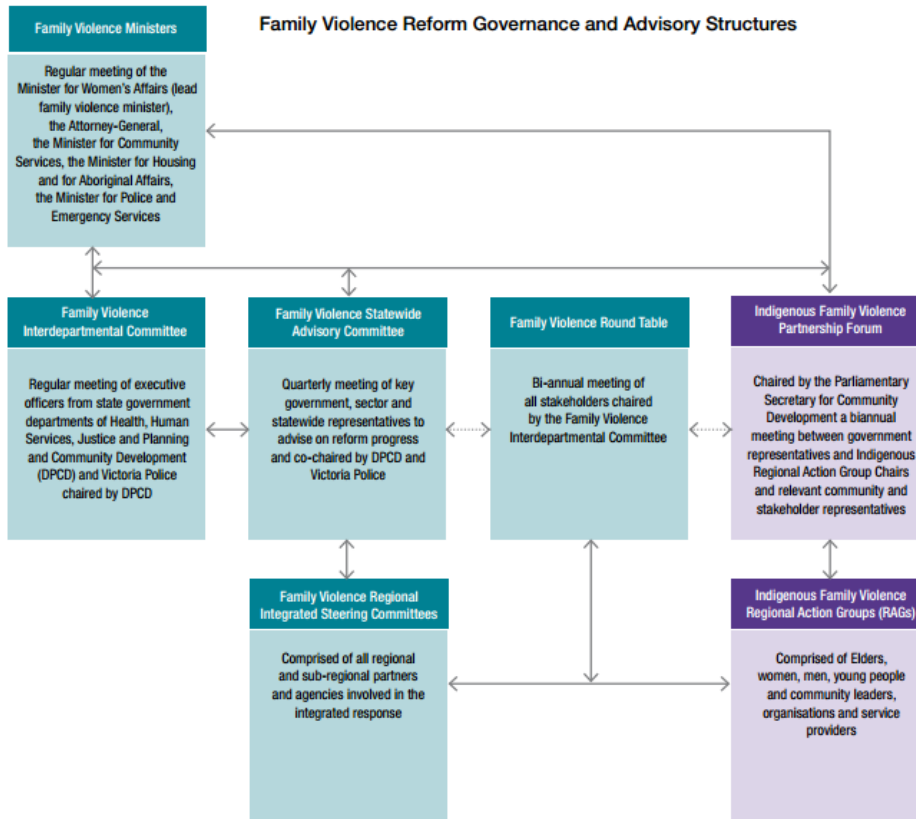


Figure 1: Governance and Advisory Structure – A Right to Safety and Justice 2010-2020

When the Victorian Family Violence Reform strategy was launched in 2005 'whole of government' leadership was driven by a group of five Ministers representing the portfolios of Police and emergency services; Attorney General; Community Services; Housing and Local Government; Aboriginal Affairs; Children; and Women. This group of five met quarterly to review progress against the reform objectives.

Supporting the Minister's group was a Family Violence Interdepartmental Committee, co-Chaired by the then Department of Community Development and Planning (DPCD) and Victoria Police, which was in turn supported by a Family Violence Coordination Unit (within the Office of Women's Policy, DPCD), with a mandate to drive integration. These structures also formally linked to the governance and advisory structures for the Indigenous ten-year plan.

1.1.2 The role of community – the early days

A critical aspect of the family violence reform was the collective effort by government and community sector leaders. At the request of government, community sector leaders who were part of Family Violence Statewide Advisory Committee (FVSAC) provided advice to government in the ground breaking report *Reforming the Family Violence System in Victoria* (2005). This document paved the way for the reforms. Key elements included: a guiding set of principles; a focus on integration across the three main systems – police, justice and the family violence service system, and developing common practices and processes to ensure consistent responses by individual agencies.

The Indigenous Family Violence Ten Year Plan *Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families: towards a safer future for Indigenous families and communities* was launched in June 2008 and was developed separately to the mainstream family violence reforms in recognition that family violence in Indigenous communities has unique dynamics and characteristics that intersect with the history of colonisation and dispossession, and in recognition of Indigenous family and kinship networks.

The Indigenous Family Violence Partnership Forum, established in 2005, continues to oversee implementation of the Ten Year Plan. It is a community–government partnership to address family violence in Indigenous communities and remains in operation.

“Indeed, it could be argued that whole of government processes are likely to be most effective where they involve the development of new values systems or the development of networks and partnerships that cross existing agency and service boundaries, allowing the development of political influence and policy consistency across what was previously a decentralised, autonomous but politically marginal and uncoordinated service sector.”

Ross, Stuart, Frere, Marion, Healey, Lucy & Humphreys, Cathy. (2011) ‘A whole of government strategy for family violence reform’. *Australian Journal of Public Administration* 70 (2): 131-142. doi:10.1111/j.1467-8500.2011.00717.x p. 141.

1.1.3 Statewide Governance

Having contributed to policy direction, the FVSAC became a key source of advice to the Victorian Government to shape, drive and evaluate the family violence reform program. It informed the Interdepartmental Committee on Family

Violence about identified gaps and challenges in the integrated system and worked in partnership with government to meet those challenges. FVSAC included representation from regions and the Indigenous Family Violence Partnership Forum, along with other key family violence stakeholders.

1.1.4 Regional Governance

At a regional level, Regional Integration Committees, bringing together local representatives of the sectors that made up the integrated family violence system, were established across Victoria. Each Regional Integrated Committee² was, and continues to be, overseen by a Regional Integration Chair³ and supported by a Family Violence Regional Integration Co-ordinator (RIC). These roles provide critical leadership to support continued development of

² In some regions there are sub-regional committees in operation.

³ The position of Chair may be elected or appointed.

the integrated system on the ground. They were responsible for developing regional plans based on family violence reform priorities. The Regional Integration Committees were represented on the Family Violence Statewide Advisory Committee to advise on regional perspectives and experience in implementation.

Composition of Regional Integration Committees varies across the state, but they seek to bring together expertise from women's, children's and men's family violence services, family services, women's health services, police, Corrections, child protection, court services, Aboriginal services, community legal services, sexual assault services, homelessness services, schools, youth services, disability, CALD services, local governments, health services and other services relevant to the regional response.

While there are differences across regions, they have provided a forum to innovate, develop and resource practical responses to local issues. For example, a number of regions in Victoria have trialled (and evaluated) different approaches to managing high-risk cases. Others have focused on issues such as improving responses to children experiencing family violence, through the adoption of Think Child Partnership Agreements and developing the Safe and Secure Framework for Working with Children. Depending on regional priorities and needs, others have undertaken considerable work in earlier intervention and primary prevention of violence against women.

1.1.5 Regional Integration Coordinators

The role of the Regional Integration Coordinator (RIC) is one of strategic leadership in steering integration initiatives and activities that support the achievement of the Regional Integration Committee priorities. RIC work is directed by the Regional Integration Committee's Strategic Plan. Broadly the role of the RICs is to facilitate the development of relationships that support integration between regional family violence services (women, children and men's services) and other key sectors and services, such as Child FIRST/Family Services, child protection, mental health services, homelessness services, housing services, Courts, Police and the Indigenous Family Violence Regional Action Group.

1.1.6 Indigenous Family Violence Regional Action Groups

Indigenous Family Violence Regional Action Groups (RAGs) were established in 2003 and have a leadership role in implementing community-led responses that educate, prevent, reduce and respond to family violence in Indigenous communities.

The Regional Integration Committees and RAGs work with each other to progress projects and initiatives to support responses to family violence in Indigenous communities. Whilst the mechanisms for these collaborations vary across the state, these relationships are critical for developing culturally competent practice⁴ across the system in responding to Aboriginal women, children and men affected by family violence.

⁴ Objective 1 of Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families: Towards a safer future for Indigenous families and communities 10-year Plan is cultural safety described as 'respects and empowers Indigenous communities to be involved in services which affect their health and wellbeing. It acknowledges the need of mainstream service providers and governments to analyse their culture and stop negative impacts this may have on the cultural rights of Indigenous communities' (35). Cultural safety is an underpinning of culturally competent practice and service.

1.1.7 State-wide coordination whole of government activity

The Family Violence Interdepartmental Committee had a broad membership, and was co-chaired by a Deputy Secretary of the Department of Planning and Community Development and senior police representation. It had senior and collective responsibility for driving the reform work across government.

Prior to the 2010 election, the then Family Violence Reform Co-ordination Unit was located in the Office of Women's Policy in the Department of Planning and Community Development (DPCD) – it was the coordinating body for the reform process. OWP had no direct service provision responsibility. This independence from service funding responsibility was regarded as a critical success factor. It has a clear mandate to drive the reform process without existing interests as a direct service provider.

It acted as an honest broker to get good whole of government outcomes and maintain a clear systems focus and was regarded as critical to the success of the reforms.⁵ It provided a platform to build trust to develop a successful whole of government Expenditure Review Committee (ERC) proposal in 2005-06 launch the long term reform process.

1.2 Policy Hiatus

Following the 2010 election, the incoming government considered policy and governance directions for family violence. Consultations about these directions took place in early 2012, with *Victoria's Action Plan to Address Violence Against Women and their Children 2012-2015* (Action Plan) being announced in September 2012.

The long silence from government about its intentions for family violence reform from the end of 2010 to September 2012, and the delays in establishing new governance processes, cost the reform process direction and momentum.

The Action Plan brought together the previous work areas – the family violence reforms, primary prevention work, and sexual assault reform into a single work plan. This, along with the loss of an overarching vision and focus on this work, resulted in the dilution of the work in all of these areas to support women's safety, recovery, justice and respect.

This was particularly reflected in the governance structures leading the Action Plan. From 2010 to 2014, the issue was overseen by the Minister for Community Affairs, with no formal involvement of ministerial colleagues. The Minister established a new level of governance – a Ministerial Advisory Group on Violence against Women and Children - which provided advice to ministers about issues relating to violence against women and their children, family violence and sexual assault. This group met biannually.

The Action Plan lacked an overarching social and justice policy framework. At a policy level, the Action Plan was not integrated with the other relevant social policy areas that were under review within DHS at the time, such as housing and homelessness reforms, mental health, alcohol and other drug and Child Protection. There were no linkages made at a governance or practice level.

⁵ Ross, Stuart, Frere, Marion, Healey, Lucy & Humphreys, Cathy. (2011) 'A whole of government strategy for family violence reform'. *Australian Journal of Public Administration* 70 (2): 131-142. doi:10.1111/j.1467-8500.2011.00717.x, p.139

In the meantime Services Connect models have been rolled out which aim to offer a 'one-stop-shop' for human services in a region, premised on the idea of breaking down silos of service delivery and dealing with the range of presenting issues for which a client or family group may seek help from DHHS funded services.

Services Connect models are currently being implemented and Children and Youth Area Partnerships have been established in some regions. DV Vic is aware that at the time of making this submission, our members across the state are experiencing the practical effects of these, which have been developed without any consistent understanding of, or indeed any requirement to have any regard for the nature and dynamics of family violence, in their work, nor the specialist role of family violence agencies. This puts women and children's safety at risk.

The vision and clarity of purpose to uphold women's safety must be reasserted. It is a fundamental human right which women across our state do not have.

Focusing government on women and children's safety to organise its work and its investments is the only way we will reach our objectives to reduce the harm and suffering of thousands of women in Victoria.

1.2.2 Reversion to Portfolio Interests

As part of the Action Plan, the Minister for Community Affairs established an independent Ministerial Advisory Group on Violence Against Women and Children in 2013. The promise of this forum to strengthen whole of government support and accountability from other ministers or their departments was not realised. At a departmental level, DHS and Victoria Police co-chaired the Ministerial Advisory Group on Violence Against Women and their Children which met to discuss issues but the group had no formal advisory role and had no influence on government policy.

The Action Plan included a number of initiatives that were welcomed. However, the sector was concerned that some initiatives were not supported by the evidence on responses to women and children experiencing family violence, or holding men accountable for their use of violence. While some departments undertook discrete consultations about those issues – such as the Failure to Protect legislation, Services Connect, the Vulnerable Children's Strategy – the consultation process did not engage existing whole of government governance and consultation mechanisms. This meant that the important conversations about the impact of one part of the system on others did not occur, and ministers and departments retreated to their 'home silo'.

In summary, the strong statewide governance arrangements that had led and supported the family violence reform withered in recent years, as did genuine community consultation at a statewide level.

1.2.3 Impact on Regional Governance and the work of integration

Consequently, the state has provided little leadership and shown limited ambition for regional governance arrangements on family violence systems issues in recent years. The connection between statewide and regional governance processes has all but disappeared.

The decentralised approach, while allowing for local variance and differentiation also created significant inconsistency in practice between the regions. This remains the situation today. There are significant differences in

roles and approaches to family violence from region to region. This has also translated to a marked difference in the roles and responsibilities of Regional Integration Coordinators between regions.

In 2013, The Department of Human Services issued the Regional Family Violence Integration Governance Model [Attachment A] which was welcomed by the regions. Following a consultation process supported by DHS, this document provided guidance about the internal functioning of the Regional Family Violence Committees, roles and responsibilities – drawing on good practice that had emerged across the State, and seeking to build more consistency in the model. This was welcomed by the regions as an important step to build an integrated family violence system that provides consistent, evidence- based responses to women and children experiencing family violence. However, without statewide leadership – it is unlikely that this consistency and standardisation will be achieved.

Moreover, there has been a proliferation of place-based initiatives in regions, most notably Services Connect. These have been developed without consideration of family violence at a policy or practice level at a statewide level. The implications of this are now rippling through the regions – where women and children live and where justice and services are accessed.

At the same time, a number of family violence Regional Integration Committees have continued to build on the evidence on the need for systems approaches to address family violence in their regions. Regional Integration Committees are involved in planning, developing and implementing a range of innovative programs with potential for replication across the state.

For example, one metropolitan region has developed the following initiatives: in evidence and practice through initiatives such as these examples from the one metropolitan region:

- **Counselling and Support Alliance:** A coordinated regional framework for the planning, implementation and evaluation of family violence counselling and group work via community health services and key family violence services.
- **Mental Health and Family Violence Partnership Project:** Over a 10 year period, brought mental health (both clinical and community services), family violence and sexual assault services together to work towards better cross-sector collaboration.
- **Families@Home:** A multidisciplinary, early intervention initiative to keep women and their children safe and secure in their homes.
- **Whittlesea Community Connections:** An integrated place-based family violence prevention and response model, tailored to the multicultural community of City of Whittlesea.
- **Costing case study:** Research by Dr Kristin Diemer and factsheet highlight that the long-term cost of a crisis-driven model is almost twice that of a best-practice service response.

Tools for integration:

- **Family Violence Help Cards:** Business card sized resources with information to help a woman who is experiencing family violence (women's help card) or a man who is perpetrating violence (men's help card). The help cards have been translated into 14 community languages and have been adapted for the Aboriginal community.

Regional induction: Bi-annual induction sessions for workers who are new to the region or to the family violence sector.

- **Integration forums:** Quarterly forums to explore and strengthen integrated responses in a range of priority areas (eg children, responding to men)
- **Intake pathways and governance mapping:** Documentation of pathways into the family violence system for women, children and men and mapping of regional governance arrangements.
- **Identifying family violence training:** For generalist workers to increase their understanding and recognition of family violence, gain strategies to respond to disclosures and learn about appropriate referrals.
- **Week Without Violence:** A worldwide campaign which aims to raise community awareness of family violence. Services in Melbourne's northern metropolitan region are resourced to facilitate events for women, children, men and their communities in the third week of October.
- **Website:** A hub of information for workers supporting women's and children's safety in Melbourne's northern metropolitan region. The website features a service, events and training, intake pathways and resources for working with particular client groups.

Reflections

Victoria has had the benefit of a concerted, collaborative reform process. Where it worked well, it was effective in driving substantial and constructive change in Victoria. At the same time, it was substantially reliant on a collaborative good will. At departmental level, whole of government coordination to implement the government agenda was dependent on the capacity and mandate of the Office of Women's Policy to negotiate across portfolios.

In 2005-6, a successful whole of government budget bid was submitted which underpinned substantial aspects of the family violence reforms. Other important aspects of reform were undertaken by individual portfolios in consultation with the whole of government approach.

Ultimately however, there was a need for a single point of accountability for this work. The term 'accountability' is used here to reflect the pressures or parameters within which decisions must be made, requiring that there is a holding to account (compliance), giving an account (transparency) and taking account of prescribed issues or incidents (responsiveness).

There are a range of models and approaches that might be considered to create a single point of accountability for family violence responses in Victoria. These might include legislative and statutory approaches that set out clear expectations, roles and accountabilities for all portfolios. It would be important to any model to embed accountability carefully to ensure that the intended accountability would not be eroded.

The recent appointment of Australia's first Minister for the Prevention of Family Violence in Victoria is a very welcome first step in building a more robust accountability structure. This new Ministerial role however requires clear authority in respect to the whole of government approach to family violence including a decision-making role in funding services and programs that fall within the family violence remit.

Part 2: Considerations for governance

Based on the experience of DV Vic’s members and engagement throughout the family violence reform period, this submission proposes the following:

2.1 A shared vision – The need for clarity at all levels of governance

In essence, the aim of the reform process, as first proposed by the Family Violence Statewide Advisory Committee in Reforming the Family Violence System in Victoria 2005 was to increase safety for women and children; to improve accountability for those who use violence; and to uphold the agency of women.

The system’s first accountability is to the women and children of Victoria who have and are experiencing family violence. Political will and funding must back that accountability.

The way in which this was to be achieved was to build a system of multi-agency and integrated response to family violence – in Victoria, this has become known as the integrated family violence system. These aims remain as relevant today as they were a decade ago.

We are at a point where the Victorian Government and partners must re-commit to building the integrity of responses to family violence in Victoria. Over recent years, work to provide seamless responses has been diluted through a lack of government focus and leadership. At the same time, lack of attention to this system in recent years, combined with high levels of family violence incidents are currently overwhelming the family violence system. This has dire consequences for the ways we manage the risks facing women and children living in danger, and dangerous men.

A clear and unequivocal statement about family violence including its gendered nature, and its causes, is critical to informing how we address it. To address and ultimately reduce family violence, we must maintain a disciplined focus on its determinants and a singular emphasis on managing risk to enhance safety.

A driving purpose and vision is needed to guide strong ministerial leadership and accountability. The accountability must extend beyond human services and traditional justice responses. The recent experience in Service Connect pilots provides convincing evidence that individual portfolios must be accountable to uphold and promote this vision. Tinkering with specific services or programs without regard for their implications for the wider system cannot happen. Too much is at stake.

This vision and the need for accountability should inform the structure and role of statewide and regional governance arrangements.

Recommendation 1.

The original guiding principles that underpin the integrated family violence system should be reaffirmed and be re-established as the yardstick for all decision-making and policy development: the safety of women and children; the accountability of men who use violence; and the agency of women.

2.2 An Independent Authority

Oversight and monitoring of the family violence system is an issue of perennial consideration for those involved in the system's governance. In the early days of family violence reform, this responsibility was established to sit with the relevant Ministers with responsibility for whole-of-government coordination provided by the Office for Women's Policy. However, more recently and largely due to the policy hiatus since 2010, this function has fallen away and resulted in ambiguous lines of accountability and a lack of system oversight.

In context of this year's Royal Commission ideas about an independent statutory authority responsible for the oversight of the family violence system have been proposed. Critically, this independent body would be protected through legislation from changing governments and their relative prioritization of family violence.

From DV Vic's perspective the purpose of establishing an independent authorising body would be to set the standards and key performance indicators by which all aspects of family violence prevention and response would be measured. It would monitor and evaluate the operation and effectiveness of the system and advise the government and other stakeholders accordingly. Having such an authority in place would also serve to introduce specialist and evidence-based family violence expertise into decision-making processes, build in long-term sustainability and guard against the vagaries of shifting political agendas and administrations.

In the current system, peak bodies including DV Vic provide some of this function, through leadership, advocacy and representation and ensuring a continued focus on the best interests of women and children in decision-making. Peak bodies set the practice standards by which their respective members should adhere, however they do not have a regulatory or compliance monitoring relationship with member agencies and no capacity to formally monitor or oversee practice nor collect data. An independent body would be able to establish a regulatory function that is currently not present in the family violence system.

DV Vic supports the need for such an independent statutory body. We are aware of two suggested models for such a body: a Women's Safety Commission and an independently funded statutory authority similar to the Victorian Traffic Accident Commission (TAC) and believe that both merit consideration.

However, we strongly believe that it is important that the establishment of an independent family violence oversight body, irrespective of form does not obviate government's role in adequately funding services across the system and its responsibility to keep women and children safe and hold perpetrators accountable for their use of violence. It should not replace, but complement the role of peak bodies whose role it is to represent and advocate for the best interests of women and children experiencing family violence and the agencies that support them.

Importantly the establishment of any such entity should be informed by broad consultation with the family violence sector, as its role should be to enhance and support quality practice - not to police the system.

Recommendation 2.

That an independent statutory authority with oversight responsibilities for the family violence system be established as a key element of the statewide governance structure, to facilitate integration, best practice and quality assurance across the family violence system.

Recommendation 3.

That the Royal Commission considers models and functions of independent statutory bodies to recommend the best option for the Victorian family violence system.

Recommendation 4.

That the Royal Commission defines the role of peaks bodies and their role in the integrated family violence system.

2.3 A Systems Approach

In Victoria, the family violence reform aimed, over time, to make “any door the right door” for a woman experiencing family violence to seek support, whatever her situation and wherever she lives.

The intention of the reform process was to build an integrated system so that the woman did not need to navigate her way around a service and justice system, to retell her story to each service provider, but that a client focused, wrap around service supported her to live a safer life.

Early in reform efforts, work began to build what became known as the integrated family violence system. This system had three broad key entry points for women to report their experience of family violence.

Justice and Statutory Services	Specialist Family Violence Services	Mainstream Services
Police intervention	Case management	Education
Court	Practical support and counselling	Health care and mental health services
Correctional services	Housing	Drug and alcohol services
Child Protection services	Peer support	Family services
Legal services	Healing centres/Indigenous family violence initiatives	Disability services
Victims’ support services	Men’s Referral Service	Centrelink
	Men’s Behaviour Change	Immigration services

During the reforms, the integrated family violence sector predominately comprised Victoria Police, Courts, specialist family violence sector, housing, family services, and Child Protection. Other allied agencies such as Aboriginal services, community legal, and homelessness services were also involved.

Participating in designing and implementing the new system, at a state and regional level, reform brought together

“Integrated systems build jurisdiction-wide models that encompass multiple tiers of management, changes to core agency practice, diverse aspects of service delivery, shared protocols and, often, integrated courts and a legislative base. Integrated systems are exemplified by the state-wide strategies established in Victoria...”

Understanding Domestic Violence and Integration in the NSW Context: A Literature Review, prepared on behalf of UNSW Global Pty Limited by the Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse

justice and human services.⁶ These ranged from women’s services, men’s services, CALD agencies, children’s and young people’s services, and service provided for Aboriginal communities by Indigenous organisations and agencies. Police and the Courts have been central players in the integrated system at a state and regional level.

Whichever agency or service a woman reported to, it was expected that it would have an appropriate understanding of family violence, knowledge of risk assessment and management, and make referral decisions based on an accurate

understanding of the risk she faced.

DV Vic’s submission on family violence specialisation discusses the role of specialist services working in partnership with universal services to develop effective early intervention approaches. This involves ensuring that universal services such as community health, hospitals, schools, Centrelink and ambulance services, are working from a specialist knowledge and practice framework.). Work is needed to develop a strategic statewide framework for early intervention that encompasses knowledge, systems, capacity and accountabilities across all sectors that work with women and children experiencing family violence.

In building a systems approach, responsibility for integration must be held by all involved and at all levels – from ministers to front line workers – individually and collectively.

During the family violence reform period, this saw legislative changes, policy, standards and protocols, practice and funding models. In simple terms, these changes were the beginning of a reform process to make it everyone’s ‘job’ to integrate. From the perspective of government and community organisations providing responses to women experiencing family violence, ‘integration’ is a critical concept.

“Integration of services is more than co-ordinated service delivery – it is a whole new service. Co-location of agencies, agreed protocols and codes of practice, joint service delivery, agencies reconstituting or realigning their core business to confront the challenges posed by a broadened conception of the problem: these are the key indicators of an integrated response.”

Family Violence Statewide Advisory Group, Reforming the Family Violence System in Victoria 2005

⁶ A range of policies and guidance documents have been developed to support this implementation. In particular, the document Guiding Integrated Family Violence Service Reform 2006-2009 effectively served to guide and support the work of the regional partnerships as they implemented the new approach to family violence over the previous three years. It provided a statewide framework within which local changes to services were planned, developed and implemented.

In its report for the NSW Government, UNSW Global said “A final barrier to effective integrated responses is a lack of additional resourcing. Although agencies drawn into initiatives are in general already involved in responding to domestic violence, collaboration takes time and requires support. Furthermore, although in the long-term the incidence of abuse and, therefore, demand for services declines, in the short-term the provision of improved responses should, and in general does, increase detection, reporting and responses to domestic violence, which puts additional demand on services. Even initiatives such as multi-agency risk assessment strategies which operate through regular meetings between existing services draw heavily on resources and flounder without additional resources (Robinson 2006; Marshall, Ziersch et al. 2008). It has been noted that even relatively modest injections of resources can make the difference to a strategy’s ability to achieve real gains (Gondolf 2009).”

Understanding Domestic Violence and Integration in the NSW Context: A Literature Review, prepared on behalf of UNSW Global Pty Limited by the Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse 19 October 2010, p.18

Building an integrated system is critically dependent on policy, legislation, guidelines and practice across the service system agreeing on what that means, how to implement it, and who was responsible for what to achieve safety and accountability outcomes.

It is important to get the balance and timing between the changes to the overall policy and legislative environment, and practice reform on the other. Both are needed and interdependent.

The experience from previous family violence reforms showed that system integration requires resourcing committed and continuous leadership time.

These are prerequisites to develop relationships and build shared vision, shared work and shared responsibility, collect and share data, and continuously re-focus people on the system, rather than their piece of it. This is work is time consuming as it cuts across people’s ‘day jobs’. This is true at every level of activity, from senior statewide whole of government engagement to the everyday work of Regional Family Violence Integration Coordinators. To build a sustainable system, this vision cannot rely on good will alone.

Recommendation 5.

That the work to build a functioning integrated family violence system (across government and non-government partners) – including a focus on effective risk assessment and management platforms, sustaining a skilled workforce, improved data collection, management and analysis - is prioritised and appropriately resourced.

Recommendation 6.

That the Royal Commission defines the portfolios relevant to the whole of government approach to family violence (under the purview of the Minister for the Prevention of Family Violence) including: Women’s Affairs; Children, Youth and Families; Attorney General; Corrections; Community Services;

Police; Local Government; Aboriginal Affairs and Housing. It should also define the roles and responsibilities of portfolios not historically included in the integrated family violence system such as Education and Health.

Recommendation 7.

That effective governance structures and processes at a statewide and regional level are defined and resourced to ensure that the systems issues are prioritised, and that there are clear lines of accountability for delivering them.

2.4 A Partnership approach built on expertise and evidence

At a systems level, the role of specialist family violence expertise is critical in the wider system and governance structures alike. Their expertise on family violence, as well as their experience of ‘what works’, is critical to realised fully integrated and effective family violence system. Risk and crisis situations are not the same but are often easily confused by non-specialist service providers – this has implications for where specialisation sits in at the statewide level, and how it is engaged at the regional level in both governance and practice.

Bringing together diverse sectors and government agencies to prioritise the safety of women and children has been a significant achievement has been the core business for the specialist family violence sector.

The specialist sector has a role to maintain a critical watch over the system, to monitor its gaps, themes and challenges, and to push for continuous improvement. This requires enormous energy and commitment.

In particular, women’s services exist because they support traditionally neglected, marginalised groups. It takes time and resources for specialist organisations, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and CALD services and programs, to build trust within communities and support women to engage with these services despite significant barriers and often generations of traumatic experiences with the services and justice system. It is due to this advocacy for women and children experiencing family violence that specialist services influence systems-level thinking.

Collaborative forms of government and shared accountability need different decision making processes, different levels of consultation, negotiation of shared understandings at all levels of policy deliberations. These reforms must be resourced and prioritised through clear accountability and performance management at every level.

Recommendation 8.

That the governance structures for a fully effective and integrated family violence system are informed by specialist family violence knowledge and practice framework.

2.5 Clear roles and Responsibilities

In addition to the need for a single point of accountability, DV Vic offers the following reflections on the levels at which responsibilities have been assumed.

2.5.1 Systems Accountability

Clear roles and responsibilities for governance at the statewide and regional levels are critical. This is equally important for cross portfolio issues including data collection and analysis, information sharing to manage risk, workforce development and so on. Throughout the reform process, no one 'owned' these issues. There have been collaborative attempts to address them, such as the Department of Justice support for the Victorian Family Violence Database, contributions to the SAFER Research Program, amongst others, but there is no single point of accountability for addressing them in Victoria.

In the absence of state government focus on systems issues in recent years, Regional Integration Committees have continued to work on these issues at a local and regional level, however, many of them are beyond the influence of regions.

Without the state assuming responsibility for shared issues, inconsistencies across regions will be inevitable and ensuring the uptake of good practice will be ad hoc. This in turn, will undermine consistent risk management practice across the state.

2.5.2 Regional Accountabilities

Strong partnership at a regional level has been a critical factor in building integrated family violence systems. It is at the regional level that integration is made a reality in the front line of services and justice provision. Regional innovation driven by the Regional Family Violence Integration Committees has been critical in building evidence and practice throughout the reform process.

It is DV Vic's view that the focus must now be on building statewide consistency to ensure that risks for women and children are identified and managed effectively where ever they live.

Regional Integration Committees across the state have brought together expertise from women's and men's family violence services, family services, women's health services, police, Corrections, court services, Aboriginal health services, community legal services, homelessness services, youth services, disability, CALD services, and local governments. Some have worked more strategically than others and achieved more; but all have been affected by the 'drift' in government focus on a strong systems approach to family violence.

Regional Integration Committees have overseen the development of information sharing, cross sectoral professional development, referral pathways, innovated and developed joint and complementary practices – all with the aim of improving the safety of women who live in their regions.

DV Vic believes it would be strategically sound to use these existing structures to build consistency of risk management across the state. We can leverage off the current governance bodies to strengthen place based service provision and provide the right platforms to consider the next steps for the state-wide high risk models under development, or indeed any initiative that has implications for any aspect of risk management.

It cannot be left to the persuasiveness of various RICs or other individuals in regions as to how engaged other players are in the region on systems issues. Integrated state endorsed platforms to support women and children's safety and perpetrator accountability, require articulated standards for agencies and regional groups to act and be accountable within the integrated family violence system. These must be clearly stated in policy, guidelines and protocols for service providers. Responsibility at a regional level must be shared. Funding and commissioning of services must be managed with clear performance measures that produce the collaborative systems outcomes needed.

Recommendation 9.

That a review is conducted of the roles and responsibilities of the Family Violence Integration Committees and the Regional Family Violence Integration Coordinators with a view to strengthening consistency and alignment across regions.

Recommendation 10.

That the Regional Family Violence Integration Model is further developed to a Practice Framework for RICs to include protocols and practice standards on information sharing between RICS, community and agency engagement, recruitment and reporting.

Recommendation 11.

That the Practice Framework sets out specific objectives for family violence as it relates to other regional committees with overlapping stakes in the local family violence response including: Crime Prevention, Services Connect, Children's Partnerships and other relevant bodies, to ensure governance alignment.

2.5.3 Portfolio Accountabilities

Learning from the family violence reform process, integration cannot be left to chance if we are to have consistent approaches across the state.

In recent years, the State has stepped back from driving the family violence reform process. At the same time, there has been a decentralisation of a wide range of government services and decision making. In the family violence area, this has been accompanied by a reversion from whole of government to individual portfolio approaches – most notably by the then Department of Human Services and the Department of Justice. Decentralisation of key portfolios has not always been accompanied by expertise or understanding of family violence issues. This has been further exacerbated by the rationing of the public sector over recent years and which has resulted in a significant loss of relevant corporate knowledge.

The Royal Commission provides an opportunity to consider building in accountability mechanisms to funding and commissioning models to support good safety outcomes for women. Government commissioning of services through Funding and Service Agreements should proscribe adherence to minimum standards and build in sustainable levels of specialist expertise in responding to family violence, as well as clear and specific requirement

for systems wide collaboration (please see Section 4.6 of DV Vic's submission – *Specialist Family Violence Services: the heart of an effective system* for our recommendations on standards and quality assurance).

Moreover, the accountability structure for funding and commissioning decisions must accommodate the diverse needs of women and children experiencing family violence, in particular those cohorts of women known to experience higher rates of family violence.

Recommendation 12.

That professionals working in the integrated family violence system, including within government departments are mandated/supported to undertake 'introduction to family violence' training in order to ensure consistent levels of understanding of the issue.

Recommendation 13.

That gender literacy training is made compulsory for all public service positions, parliamentarian and their staff, to ensure that all policy, programs and legislation routinely subjected to a gender analysis.

2.6 Risk as an organising principle

More than a practice tool, the Family Violence Risk Assessment and Risk Management Framework (CRAF) has provided a solid platform for integration across the various sectors comprising the integrated family violence system in Victoria. It is underpinned by a strong evidence base and robust consultation process. It has provided the basis for a shared understanding and approach to assessing levels risk across a diverse range of sectors that address risk factors associated with family violence.⁷

The CRAF has been regarded as a practice tool rather than the Framework it was initially designed as. The Framework elements of it underpinned the development of the 10 Year Strategy A Right to Safety and Justice 2010-2020 which merits revisiting.

While the CRAF is frequently upheld as one of key successes of the family violence reform, seven years after its introduction in Victoria there are concerns about the patchiness of its implementation across the sector, with many services adapting CRAF and/or using alternative risk assessment tools. This risks the original intention of CRAF: to guide consistent approaches to family violence risk assessment and risk management, as well as supporting the process of integration. It is our view that this cannot be left to go unchecked; the occasion of a Royal Commission provides opportunity to reaffirm CRAF as the common framework for Victoria and to indeed mandate and embed its use.

⁷ In Victoria, the integrated family violence system is comprised of Specialist services including, but not limited to family violence case management, practical support and counselling services, homelessness and housing (SHS), peer support, healing centres/Indigenous services, children's services, sexual assault services and men's referral service. Mainstream or universal services include, but are not limited to, education, healthcare, mental health services, drug and alcohol services, legal services, family services, disability services. Refer to the Common Risk Assessment and Risk Management Framework for more detail.

However, it is critical that CRAF is reviewed to remain current and relevant to emerging trends and changing environments. DV Vic frequently hears that content gaps and lack of up-to-date evidence risk CRAF's relevance and currency. We therefore support calls for a comprehensive review of the CRAF, with focus on both content gaps and implementation across the state. This needs to start with mapping its implementation – to establish which sectors and agencies are using CRAF; the extent to which CRAF has been embedded into those areas; and to consider whether the CRAF's three levels of risk assessment are appropriately pitched at different professional groups.

Further, DV Vic supports the recommendations of Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria (DVRCV) for the development of family violence risk assessment benchmarks and core competencies across relevant sectors and professional groups. By building these measures into accreditation systems it will over time ensure greater quality, consistency and accountability for all professionals engaged in family violence service delivery.

Recommendation 14.

That the Victorian Government undertakes a comprehensive review of the Family Violence Risk Assessment and Risk Management Framework (CRAF) to include: mapping current use; addressing content gaps and providing additional guidance; establishment of an effective authorising environment to support consistent implementation.

Recommendation 15.

That the Family Violence Risk Assessment and Risk Management Framework is reviewed regularly to ensure currency and its use mandated for all core services in the family violence service system.

2.7 Data Collection and Sharing

Data collection and sharing is a key issue for governance of the family violence system. The capabilities of the present data collection and data sharing arrangements across the family violence field in Victoria are extremely limited. This is widely recognized as a significant shortcoming in the state's response to family violence and requires urgent attention. It is difficult to achieve a comprehensive picture, or cross-sectoral view of family violence in Victoria, both at a systemic level and for individual clients.

At a systems level, the current approach means that there is lack of access to real time, meaningful and comparable data about how the integrated family violence system is working, where the bottlenecks, gaps and greatest needs are, and how this compares across regions.

Different sectors utilise different data collection systems and reporting mechanisms; for example, specialist family violence services are required to use the SHIP, a homelessness platform, which fails to capture critical information about family violence risk. There are compatibility issues between the system's respective databases where data cannot be shared across Police, Courts, and DHHS funded services. This results in silos of isolated data that are not able to be shared easily, if at all, for the purpose of protecting women and children's safety and monitoring perpetrators.

The Victorian Family Violence Database Trend Analyses undertaken by the Department of Justice attempts to broach these data divides and it has been a very welcome resources in the absence of a unified data collection system. However the deficits in the current system have restricted its scope as well. Victoria’s Minister for the Prevention of Family Violence has also sought to tackle this issue by commissioning work on the development of a Family Violence Index, which aims to bring together existing data sources to establish a cohesive picture of family violence. DV Vic commends the intention of the Family Violence Index, however, the mechanisms for the collection of data by services at a local level and how this data will inform the Index and vice versa, will need to be examined.

While it is critically important to investigate mechanisms to make existing data system compatible, the development of a universal data system that has information about family violence risk as its operational centre and can be utilized by all parts of the family violence system, would be a ground breaking. The Royal Commission provides an excellent opportunity to drive the development of such a family violence data system.

Recommendation 16.

That the Royal Commission analyses the current data challenges for the integrated family violence system in Victoria – including gaps in information – and provides solutions.

Recommendation 17.

That the Royal Commission provides solutions to better integrate existing data sources used by different parts of the family violence system

Recommendation 18.

Consider the creation of new data collection platforms that capture relevant information for family violence.

Recommendation 19.

That any new measures required to evaluate the effectiveness of the family violence system are developed in consultation with the sector to ensure they are appropriately targeted with matching data systems capability.

Attachment A – DHS Regional Family Violence Integration Governance Model

Attachment B – ANZSOG Case Study
