

DOMESTIC
VIOLENCE
VICTORIA

Submission to the Victorian Youth
Strategy

January 2021

Domestic Violence Victoria

January 2021

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Acknowledgments

Acknowledgement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

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

Acknowledgment of victim-survivors

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

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Executive Summary

DV Vic warmly welcomes the commitment of the Victorian government to develop a coordinated strategy to prioritise the voices and needs of young Victorians. DV Vic believes young people are incredibly resilient, resourceful and creative, and we support the proposed vision statement that young Victorians should be supported to participate and contribute fully and safely in the community with equitable opportunity to do so. We submit however, that the capacity for young Victorians to live freely and reach their potential now, and into the future is vastly impacted by experiences of family violence and the community attitudes that underpin and drive patriarchal, gendered violence.

This submission points to the imperative that the new Victorian Youth Strategy reflects an understanding of the true diversity in experiences of family violence among young people. Without a well-informed and nuanced approach, young people will continue to fall through the gaps of the service system. We suggest that addressing systemic barriers to young people escaping family violence accessing the support they need, through system collaboration, is a key priority for Victoria. While the youth service system remains largely siloed, young people with multiple or intersecting support needs will continue to be disadvantaged. While we understand these issues better than ever before, a significant gap remains in data and knowledge when it comes to young people and family violence¹, and the development of the new Victorian Youth Strategy provides a critical opportunity to build nuanced policy platforms that recognise and reflect the diversity of the young people in our state.

Summary of Recommendations

Commitment to addressing knowledge and research gaps.

Recommendation: The Victorian Youth Strategy embed a commitment to funding further research to better understand the dynamics and underlying complexities of adolescent family violence.

Recommendation: The Victorian Youth Strategy drives an agenda that “invest(s) significant policy attention and inquiry into the disproportionate rates of adolescents with disability coming into contact with justice system settings,” as recommended by the PIPA project.²

Recommendation: The Victorian Youth Strategy reflects a commitment to consistent state-wide data collection in order to better understand the drivers for the significant over-representation of young people with disabilities who experience family violence.

Recommendation: The Victorian Youth Strategy reflects a commitment to funding further research to better understand the experiences of LGBTQI+ young people who are impacted by family violence.

¹ Australian Institute for Health and Welfare (2019a) *Family, domestic and sexual violence in Australia: continuing the national story*. Cat. no: FDV 3. Canberra: AIHW. (p.42)

² Campbell, E., Richter, J., Howard, J., & Cockburn, H. (2020a). *The PIPA project: Positive interventions for perpetrators of adolescent violence in the home (AVITH) - Key findings and future directions*. Sydney, NSW: ANROWS. (p.1)

A commitment to build a Victorian service system that is coordinated and resourced for collaboration.

Recommendation: The Victorian Youth Strategy includes outcomes related to multi-disciplinary youth services that respond to the needs of young people experiencing family violence including programs across the spectrum of primary prevention, early intervention, and tertiary intervention.

Recommendation: The Victorian strategy recognises family violence experienced by young people in all its forms, throughout each outcome area.

Recommendation: The new Victorian Youth Strategy should have explicit reference to strengthening the response to family violence in all its forms in all parts of the community and service sector by:

- Supporting a policy landscape that elevates and supports all young people impacted by family violence.
- Creating an enabling environment for all parts of the community service sector to have capacity and training to meaningfully engage with the MARAMIS reforms.
- Outlining an agenda that supports integrative and collaborative frameworks of practice between the SFVS and the other sectors that work with young Victorians experiencing family violence, with adequate resourcing.

Equity of access to safety and support for all young people experiencing family violence.

Recommendation: The Victorian Youth Strategy results in ongoing, targeted funding for gender inclusive family violence crisis accommodation for young people.

Recommendation: The Victorian Youth Strategy enable implementation of Recommendation 124 of the RCFV, which calls for funding and resourcing for crisis and respite accommodation for young people using adolescent violence, with concurrent therapeutic support for the young person and their family.

Recommendation: The Victorian Youth Strategy reflects the need to address the gap in youth focussed, family violence and trauma-informed, mental health services, particularly for young people experiencing or using family violence.

About Domestic Violence Victoria (DV Vic)

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

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

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

Family violence and the use of language

DV Vic defines family violence as a pattern of violent and abusive behaviour that occurs in family, family-like and intimate relationships. Family violence is primarily the result of patriarchal and gendered power structures and oppression, and as the peak body for specialist family violence services we understand that family violence impacts people from a diverse range of gender identities, cultural backgrounds, and diverse communities. Binary gendered terms (ie. man/woman and he/she) have not widely been used in this submission in recognition of fact that family violence affects a diverse range of communities and identities. The use of inclusive language in the conversation about family violence is critical because it means that every young person who is experiencing family violence is able to see themselves reflected and represented. Where gendered language is used in this submission, we refer to data or experiences specifically relating to that group of people.

This submission also points to the diversity of experiences of family violence for young people, and who subsequently come into contact with the SFVS and broader community sector. Throughout, we use victim-survivor as an inclusive term to encompass any adult, child or young person who has experienced family violence. DV Vic uses this term in recognition that "the person has been subjected to family violence is both a victim of a crime and a human rights violation, and they are also a survivor with respect to their autonomy, strength and resilience." Perpetrator is widely used across the SFVS and community sectors to refer to an adult person perpetrating family violence. We use this term throughout only in contexts where the person being referred to is an adult. DV Vic does not support the use of this term to refer to a child or young person choosing to use violence, particularly given the likelihood that they may also be a victim-survivor of adult perpetrated family violence. In the context of young people, the term perpetrator also implies a fixed identity and forecloses the

potential for personal change; as well as failing to consider the impact of developmental and trauma related impacts on young people.

Adolescent family violence (AFV) is currently an under-researched and largely poorly understood element of the broader picture of family violence, and for this reason a standardised definition is not readily agreed upon at present. DV Vic currently defines AFV as the use of violence by a young person in their family context, most commonly with parents/carers, siblings, and immediate family. AFV does not refer to a single act of aggression or violence, but rather occurs in the context of repeated or patterned use of controlling tactics and intimidation and aggression. AFV is discussed further later in this submission.

Introduction

DV Vic warmly welcomes the commitment of the Victorian government to develop a coordinated strategy to prioritise the voices and needs of young Victorians. Young people are incredibly resilient, resourceful, and creative, and DV Vic supports the proposed vision statement that young Victorians should be supported to participate and contribute fully and safely in the community with equitable opportunity to do so. We submit however, that the capacity for young Victorians to live freely and contribute fully now and into the future is vastly impacted by experiences of family violence and the community attitudes that underpin and drive patriarchal, gendered violence. We know that earlier intervention and support for people experiencing family violence is more effective, and therefore placing priority on supporting young people offers an opportunity to ‘break the cycle of violence’ which may otherwise continue for much longer in the person’s life.³ For this reason, failure to address family violence collaboratively with young people has far-reaching impact on the Victorian community as a whole.

This submission will firstly outline the different types of FV a young person in Victoria might experience and their impact, highlighting the reality that no two young people experience family violence in the same way. It is DV Vic’s view that each type of family violence must be considered when developing the Victorian Youth Strategy. This is followed by a discussion of the importance the strategy employing an intersectional approach to best represent young people’s experiences more broadly, but particularly in relation to family violence. This will support our understanding of young people’s experiences and demonstrate the lack of safety and appropriateness of a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach to policy and practice. This submission highlights the ways in which young people in Victoria experience family violence, and the aspects of their lives and identities that interact and impact this trauma. This is followed by a discussion about ‘the common thread of family violence’ across the service system. We provide examples of the intersection between young people’s experiences of family violence and the homelessness, disability and mental health systems and make recommendations for improving those systems response to young people experiencing family violence.

³ DiNicola, K. Liyanarachchi, D. Plummer, J. (2019). *Out of the Shadows, Domestic and Family Violence: A leading cause of homelessness in Australia*. Sydney: Mission Australia (p.25)

The six key outcome areas nominated in the *Victorian Youth Strategy Discussion Paper*⁴ represent an important cross-section of high-level developmental and strategic goals. Addressing the crucial issue of family violence sits naturally within the outcome stating, “Victorian young people are safe, experience equality of opportunity and are treated fairly”. We suggest however, the success of every other strategic outcome, including good physical and mental health, participation in civil life, education, employment, and the availability and accessibility of safe and appropriate services, is vastly impeded by the risk and presence of family violence. Explicit recognition of the common thread of family violence that is so often present for young people who access services and supports such as specialist homelessness services (SHS), alcohol and other drug supports (AOD), mental health support, and moreover contact with the justice system and disconnection from education, is essential to the success of each of the six key outcome areas of this strategy. It is also the first step towards developing a roadmap for a more coordinated, equitable and accessible system for all young people in Victoria.

Diversity in young people’s experiences of family violence

The original conceptualisation of family violence began in the feminist movement and was understood through the lens of patriarchal and male violence as it manifests in heterosexual, cis-gendered relationships. At this time, it was the high rates of family violence perpetrated by men against women and children primarily in intimate partner relationships that came under scrutiny. The roots of this violence were attributed to the gender inequality between men and women resulting from patriarchal social structures and systems of privilege and oppression.

A gendered lens continues to be the cornerstone of understanding the dynamics of family violence. Due to the history of this work, and the undeniably high rates of violence being perpetrated by men against women and children, an explicitly gendered lens has been, and continues to be an integral cornerstone. This understanding has evolved to also account for the gendered and patriarchal nature of violence in a broader range of familial relationships and those aside from the heteronormative, ageist and white frames of reference of family violence. Thus, violence experienced and perpetrated by young people within their own intimate relationship, families and family-like relationship is now more systematically recognised as family violence.

There is still work to be done in order to ensure that the service system is safe and accessible for every person, in addition to employing an intersectional lens that illuminates family violence as a “‘multi-axis’ intersectional abuse of power that is simultaneously misogynist, homophobic, ageist, ableist, etc.”.⁵ In order for young people to identify their experiences of trauma as family violence and to be able to seek support from appropriate services, they must first see themselves reflected in the public and community narrative. It is essential that the new Victorian Youth Strategy creates an enabling environment for the spectrum of family violence experienced by young people to be part of the public conversation about family violence. To this end, we draw attention to the following contexts in which young people experience or use family violence for consideration in development of

⁴ Department of Premier and Cabinet, (2020). *What matters to young people in Victoria: Victorian youth strategy discussion paper*. Melbourne, Australia: Victorian Government.

⁵ Domestic Violence Victoria (2020). *Code of Practice: Principles and Standards for Specialist Family Violence Services for Victim-Survivors. 2nd Edition*. Melbourne: DV Vic. (p.30)

the Youth Strategy. This is by no means an exhaustive account of the diversity of experiences young Victorians have, but rather illustrate a cross-section of key areas of concern.

Young people witness to and victim of family violence between parents

The most commonly perceived experience of family violence experienced by young people is being witness to and directly impacted by family violence being perpetrated by one parent or carer against another. Data from the Crime Statistics Agency (Victoria) indicate that in the preceding year, a child or young person was present at 29.8% of police call outs to family violence incidents.⁶ This concerning statistic is also likely to be an underrepresentation of the actual exposure of young Victorians to family violence. Research has found that early experiences of trauma and violence can deeply disrupt young people's connection to their parents, other family members and their community. Young people at times are unable to continue going to their own school and may need to move out of their family home to seek safety, which can cause significant loss. Homelessness as a result of family violence might occur as a young person leaves the family home with their non-violent parent, or alternatively where the young person independently seeks homelessness support (if they are over 16 years of age). Family violence has also significantly contributed to the rising number of notifications to statutory child protection across Australia have received in the past ten years.⁷

In Victoria, by law a young person is a victim of violence if they bear witness to family violence regardless of whether they are also physically impacted.⁸ The RCFV referred to these young people as 'silent victims' because historically the focus on meeting the needs of the adult-victim survivor and non-violent parent (usually the mother) was considered to simultaneously meet the needs of children experiencing family violence. DV Vic maintains that children and young people's wellbeing and support needs are closely interdependent to parents and carers, and also that an explicit focus on safety and wellbeing of children and young people as distinct from their parent or carer, and a tailored support response to their support needs at each stage of service provision, is required. This is reflected in Principle 6 of the *Code of Practice: Principles and Standards for Specialist Family Violence Services for Victim-Survivors* (the Code).⁹ DV Vic believes this should also be reflected in the Victorian Youth Strategy.

Adolescent family violence

There is growing recognition of the need better understand and support young people and their family groups where the young person is using family violence. However, it is documented in various research projects in the past few years, that classifying AFV in terms of scope and definition is challenging due to the field being almost entirely made up of 'grey areas'.¹⁰ As a result, there is

⁶ Crime Statistics Agency. (2020). *Police reported family violence incidents occurring in all Victoria (1st July 2019 to 1st July 2020)*. Melbourne: Family Violence Database 2019-2020.
<https://www.crimestatistics.vic.gov.au/family-violence-data-portal/family-violence-infographics/victoria-police-family-violence-incidents>

⁷ Australian Childhood Foundation, (2013). *Safe and Secure: A trauma informed practice framework for understanding and responding to children and young people affected by family violence*. Ringwood, VIC: Eastern Metropolitan Region Family Violence Partnership

⁸ Family Violence Protection Act, (2008).

⁹ Domestic Violence Victoria (2020). Op. Cit.

¹⁰ Fitz-Gibbon, K., Elliott, K. and Maher, J. (2018). *Investigating Adolescent Family Violence in Victoria: Understanding Experiences and Practitioner Perspectives*. Melbourne, VIC: Monash Gender and Family Violence Research Program, Faculty of Arts, Monash University

currently no widespread consensus on a definition for AFV in Victoria.¹¹ For the purposes of this submission, AFV refers to a continuum of violence and controlling behaviour used by young people towards their family members (parents, carers, siblings, extended family, or family of choice). AFV encompasses a pattern of physical, emotional, psychological, verbal, financial and/or sexual abuse used to gain coercive control.¹²

Although AFV accounts for less than one in ten of the total family violence incidents responded to by Victoria Police, there has been an 11.8% increase of police reports over the past 5 years.¹³ It has been suggested however, these statistics are an underrepresentation of the number of young people using aggression and violence against their family members. Recent research and anecdotal evidence have consistently demonstrated that parents avoid calling emergency services for fear of criminalising their child. Additionally, the *Positive Interventions for Perpetrators of Adolescent Violence in the Home* research (the PIPA project) identified that due to AFV being relatively under-researched and not yet well understood, families are not able to access appropriate community and systemic support. For example, young people and families sometimes look for a ‘circuit-breaker’ or period of respite to allow for tensions to reduce while supports are being sought. Case files analysed in the PIPA project indicated that due to a lack of appropriate accommodation and respite options for young people who are using family violence, it is commonplace for those young people to need to stay with relatives or friends to avoid the risk of homelessness.¹⁴

Despite the identified gaps in knowledge, some key points of understanding about this complex form of family violence have become apparent in recent years. There is growing recognition of the link between historical family violence and intergenerational trauma, and young people starting to use family violence at home.¹⁵ Witnessing and experiencing family violence as a young child has been linked in some research to ‘social learning’ and can contribute in the future to a young person’s behavioural choices to ‘mimic’ those of a violent parent who may not live at home anymore. Practitioners who contributed to the PIPA project referred to the use of AFV being “just one part of a continuum of the fallout from children’s exposure to family violence”.¹⁶ There is also mounting statistical and qualitative evidence to suggest the co-occurrence of a disability diagnosis in cases of AFV.¹⁷ This is discussed further in a later section of this submission. Furthermore, co-occurrence of school disengagement, mental health challenges and substance use are have also been demonstrated to have recurrent presence in AFV case file reviews, reflecting the need for an intersectional and multidisciplinary systems approach to supporting young people and their families in these contexts.

It is critical to acknowledge that none of the aforementioned complex experiences and support needs directly cause or necessarily result in young people using violence. Rather we highlight these as additional risk factors which illustrate emerging research and policy concerns in this space. There is significant risk to taking a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach that erases the complexity and diversity of

¹¹ Fitz-Gibbon, K., Elliott, K. and Maher, J. (2018). Op. Cit.

¹² Fitz-Gibbon, K., Elliott, K. and Maher, J. (2018). Op. Cit.

¹³ Phillips, B., McGuinness, C. (2020). *Police reported adolescent family violence in Victoria*. Melbourne: Crime Statistics Agency. (p.11)

¹⁴ Campbell, E., Richter, J., Howard, J., & Cockburn, H. (2020a). Op. Cit.

¹⁵ Phillips, B., McGuinness, C. (2020). Op. Cit.

¹⁶ Campbell, E., Richter, J., Howard, J., & Cockburn, H. (2020b). *The PIPA project: Positive interventions for perpetrators of adolescent violence in the home (AVITH)*. Sydney, NSW: ANROWS. (p.64)

¹⁷ Campbell, E., Richter, J., Howard, J., & Cockburn, H. (2020b). Op. Cit.

support needs of young people and their families.¹⁸ The PIPA project highlighted the lack of appropriate and diverse support options for AFV, and the ‘blunt’ nature of the justice system as one of the main system responses available to families experiencing AFV risk.¹⁹ The role and limitations of the justice and intervention order systems is discussed further in a later section of this submission. It is therefore the responsibility of government, researchers, policy makers, and the service system to prioritise diversifying the service system’s capacity to understand, recognise and safely work with AFV.

Intimate partner violence

Young people also experience family violence in their formative intimate partner relationships, both as victim-survivors and as users of violence. These early experiences of intimate relationships coincide with an intense period of personal growth and development for young people, including the formation of gender and sexual identity, roles in the community, and understandings of respectful relationships and active consent. Historically violence between young people in relationships has been treated as less serious, or as needing less of a systemic response than family violence in adult relationships, which is exemplified in the use of terminology such as ‘dating violence’ that minimises adolescent intimate partner violence and undermines the need for specialised and targeted intervention. Encouragingly however, the most recent data from the National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey (NCAS) in 2017 indicated that there are positive indications that the majority of young people “support gender equality, reject attitudes supportive of violence against women, and say they would act or like to act if they witnessed abuse or disrespect of women”.²⁰ The expansion of primary prevention and early intervention programs targeting young people at school and in community settings are essential to continuing the work to address the drivers of gendered, patriarchal views that underpin the perpetuation of family violence.

Forced marriage

Forced marriage can occur in the context of family violence and is defined by a lack of free will and consent to marry, and as a result of recommendations made by the RCFV, is specifically recognised as a type of family violence under the *Family Violence Protection Act 2008*.²¹ For young people (most commonly women and girls) from culturally and linguistically diverse communities, there are also specific risk factors and specialised interventions required in response to the risk of forced marriage as a distinct form of family violence. As noted by Lyneham and Bricknell (2018), the lack of data and research on forced marriage mirrors a similar gap around other forms of abuse and violence that occur in private settings.²²

¹⁸ Campbell, E. and McCann, B. (2020c). *Behind closed doors: Adolescent Violence in the Home (AVITH) during COVID & challenges to come*. Melbourne, VIC: Centre for Innovative Justice, RMIT University and Centre for Family Research & Evaluation, drummond street services. (p.4)

¹⁹ Campbell, E., Richter, J., Howard, J., & Cockburn, H. (2020b). Op. Cit. Fitz-Gibbon, K., Elliott, K. and Maher, J. (2018). Op. Cit.

²⁰ Politoff, V., Crabbe, M., Honey, N., Mannix, S., Mickle, J., Morgan, J., Parkes, A., Powell, A., Stubbs, J., Ward, A., & Webster, K., (2019). *Young Australians’ attitudes to violence against women and gender equality: Findings from the 2017 National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey (NCAS)* (ANROWS Insights, Issue 01/2019). Sydney: ANROWS., p.6

²¹ AIHW (2019a). op. Cit.; Family Violence Protection Act 2008 (Vic) s. 5..

²² Lyneham, S. Bricknell, S. (2018) *When saying no is not an option: Forced marriage in Australia and New Zealand*. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology

Family violence experienced by LGBTQI+ young people

The recent release of the Private Lives 3 report (2020)²³ by La Trobe referred to specific risk factors relating to experiences of family violence in the LGBTQI+, including (but not limited to) in circumstances where people have recently come out their family and community, having hormones and medication withheld, and being subjected to threats to have sexuality or HIV status communicated without consent²⁴. Of the 6,835 respondents in this research, 31.3% were aged between 18-25 years old (younger than 18 were not included). Research has also indicated that concerningly, young people in the LGBTQI+ community avoid calling or interacting with the police due to their gender identity and lack of trust that the police will respond safely and appropriately.²⁵ It has been noted that another critical risk factor for this cohort of young people is that they are particularly at risk of homelessness as a result of family violence and rejection after coming out, and are more likely than their cis-gendered and heterosexual counterparts to have an episode of homelessness before 16 years old.²⁶

Recommendation: The Victorian Youth Strategy embed a commitment to funding further research to better understand the dynamics and underlying complexities of adolescent family violence.

Recommendation: The Victorian Youth Strategy drives an agenda that “invest(s) significant policy attention and inquiry into the disproportionate rates of adolescents with disability coming into contact with justice system settings,” as recommended by the PIPA project.²⁷

Recommendation: The Victorian Youth Strategy enable implementation of Recommendation 124 of the RCFV, which calls for funding and resourcing for crisis and respite accommodation for young people using adolescent violence, with concurrent therapeutic support for the young person and their family.

Recommendation: The Victorian Youth Strategy reflects a commitment to funding further research to better understand the experiences of LGBTQI+ young people who are impacted by family violence.

Young people and family violence in the Victorian context

2020 presented new challenges for SFVS and all human services in ensuring that young people’s safety and support needs are visible and prioritised, due to the impact of the global pandemic and the shift to remote service delivery. Young people have been physically cut off from many of their usual

²³ Hill, A. O., Bourne, A., McNair, R., Carman, M. & Lyons, A. (2020). *Private Lives 3: The health and wellbeing of LGBTIQ people in Australia*. ARCSHS Monograph Series No. 122. Melbourne: Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University.

²⁴ Hill, A. O., Bourne, A., McNair, R., Carman, M. & Lyons, A. (2020). Op. Cit.

²⁵ Smith, E., Jones, T., Ward, R., Dixon, J., Mitchell, A., & Hillier L. (2014). *From Blues to Rainbows: Mental Health and Wellbeing of gender diverse and transgender young people in Australia*. Melbourne: The Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society

²⁶ McNair, R., Andrews, C., Parkinson, S., Dempsey, D. (2017). *LGBTQ Homelessness: Risks, Resilience, and Access to Services in Victoria*. Melbourne, VIC: University of Melbourne

²⁷ Campbell, E., Richter, J., Howard, J., & Cockburn, H. (2020a). *The PIPA project: Positive interventions for perpetrators of adolescent violence in the home (AVITH) - Key findings and future directions*. Sydney, NSW: ANROWS. (p.1)

supports and safety nets such as schools, community groups and broader social circles which is isolating at the best of times and potentially catastrophic if the young person is unsafe at home.²⁸ The findings of the Royal Commission into Family Violence (RCFV)²⁹ and the (the Code) both point to the importance of recognising and engaging with young people individually, in recognition of their unique experiences and support needs. The impact of the reform environment in Victoria will be discussed later in this submission, with a focus on how the MARAMIS will change the practice of organisations who work with young people state-wide. However, it is worth noting here that the RCFV pointed to the historical ‘invisibility’ of young people’s experiences of family violence and noted at the time a lack of sufficiently targeted responses to young people as victim-survivors in their own right.³⁰

Every young person has the right to access safe and tailored system responses that meet their diverse needs. Young people who experience family violence are impacted by multiple axes of discrimination, therefore the response system must work to address systems of oppression and exclusion to ensure that all young people experiencing family violence are able to access support that meets their needs and rights. Specifically, DV Vic is concerned that a lack of an intersectional approach to understanding young people’s experience of family violence has resulted in them falling into service gaps due to ‘ineligibility’ for the available services, or lack of appropriate service options existing. Research conducted by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare in 2019 listed young women and children among other identity groups as being most impacted by family violence.³¹ Other community groups nominated as being at most risk of the impact of family violence included people with a disability, people from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds, LGBTIQ+ people, people in remote and rural areas, people experiencing mental ill-health and/or substance use, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.³² From this perspective, it is critical that any consideration of supporting young Indigenous people in the family violence space ensures that concepts of patriarchy and gendered oppression sit alongside and are contextualised by a deep understanding of the ongoing trauma caused by colonisation and the intergenerational harm. This trauma has been perpetuated by historical and current government policies such as the disproportionate removal of Indigenous children from their families.³³ Of course, many young people also identify with one or multiple of these other groups, highlighting the need for the Victorian Youth Strategy to employ an intersectional approach to conceptualising and developing a more responsive and supportive service sector for young people.

Recommendation: The Victorian Youth Strategy includes outcomes related to multi-disciplinary youth services that respond to the needs of young people experiencing family violence including programs across the spectrum of primary prevention, early intervention, and tertiary intervention.

Recommendation: The Victorian strategy recognises family violence experienced by young people in all its forms, throughout each outcome area.

²⁸ Domestic Violence Victoria. (2020). *Practice note: Child-Centred Practice during COVID-19*. Melbourne, VIC: DV Vic.

²⁹ Family Safety Victoria (2016). *Royal Commission into Family Violence: Summary and Recommendations*. Melbourne, VIC: State of Victoria.

³⁰ Family Safety Victoria (2016). *Op. Cit.* (p.8)

³¹ AIHW (2019a). *Op. Cit.*

³² AIHW (2019a). *Op. Cit.*

³³ Blagg, H., Williams, E., Cummings, Eileen., Hovane, V., Torres, M., Woodley, K. N., (2018). *Innovative models in addressing violence against Indigenous women: Key findings and future directions*. Sydney: Australia’s National Research Organisation for Women’s Safety Limited (ANROWS)

Recommendation: The new Victorian Youth Strategy should have explicit reference to strengthening the response to family violence in all its forms in all parts of the community and service sector by:

- Supporting a policy landscape that elevates and supports all young people impacted by family violence.
- Creating an enabling environment for all parts of the community service sector to have capacity and training to meaningfully engage with the MARAMIS reforms.
- Outlining an agenda that supports integrative and collaborative frameworks of practice between the SFVS and the other sectors that work with young Victorians experiencing family violence, with adequate resourcing.

A common thread of family violence

Being at risk of family violence while also experiencing other intersecting and related support needs is a challenging and exhausting reality for many young Victorians. DV Vic believes that young people are resilient and creative in their capacity to advocate for themselves and to seek the support they need. We also believe that the Victorian Government needs to match the efforts of young people by developing a more integrated system that reflects the reality of intersecting life experiences with a responsive and coordinated practice approach system wide. For these young people requiring multiple and intersecting service responses from various parts of the sector, the system can be very difficult to navigate. This problem is illustrated by one in three young people responding to the NCAS survey in 2017, stated that they would not know where to go for support if they were experiencing family violence.³⁴ Ensuring safe and best practice in response to young people experiencing or using family violence is not and should not be solely the remit of SFVS and youth services. This is in part because other specialised services or parts of the service sector may be (and often are) the first to encounter these young people, and as such must be adequately trained and resourced to identify risk, respond to disclosures and to actively make use of cross-organisational secondary-consultation and collaboration to manage ongoing family violence related support needs. With all of this in mind, it is important to conceptualise these systems as complex, rather than the young people who access them.

Since the completion of the RCFV, the roll-out of the Family Violence Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework and the associated Information Sharing Schemes (MARAMIS) have already substantially reshaped the way in which not only SFVS, but all human services organisations are required to engage with family violence risk. The benefits of the framework are clear, as it legislates a mutual and consistent approach to agencies' risk assessments and response to family violence. There is no doubt that the MARAMIS will support a broad cross-section of the human services sector to more confidently and safely support young people who are experiencing or using family violence in any of its forms. The first tranche of services to be implementing the new framework were those with the comprehensive level of responsibility, providing specialist family violence services. The second tranche will cover many other services who interact with young people

³⁴ Politoff, V., Crabbe, M., Honey, N., Mannix, S., Mickle, J., Morgan, J., Parkes, A., Powell, A., Stubbs, J., Ward, A., & Webster, K., (2019). Op. Cit.

impacted by family violence, but for whom family violence is not their core practice. These will include, but are not limited to homelessness services, youth services, AOD services, and mental health services.

It would be remiss to assume that the roll-out of these reforms will automatically translate to seamless coordination and collaboration across specialisation divides. Much of the research and literature on the subject of facilitating multi-disciplinary practice points strongly to the imperative of adequate resourcing, due to a range of direct and indirect costs to organisations who are working to change and develop their work practices. Although the call for greater collaboration across the services that support young people may seem to be a clear and practical goal, facilitating effective multi-disciplinary collaboration can place further strain on already stretched resources.³⁵ In the Victorian youth sector where there are waitlists for crisis accommodation and housing, counselling and specialist family violence support, it is difficult for practitioners and organisations to prioritise their limited time and physical resources. Investing time addressing service silos and developing collaborative practice models requires significant time and resourcing which might otherwise be invested in working directly with the young people themselves. It should also be considered that more specialised and nuanced assessment of risk and unmet needs due to the MARAMIS rollout, may lead to an increase on service demand and require an increase in resources and funding.

Collaborative practice across the entirety of the system that responds to young people that experience co-occurring family violence risk with other support needs is of course a valuable long-term goal. However, for the purposes of this submission we refer to three sectors here that present an opportunity for collaborative and multi-disciplinary support to be provided to young people. In so doing, we also want to highlight the risks associated with failing to acknowledge and actively work to mitigate the compounding negative effects of multiple and intersecting support needs. One such risk is 'secondary victimisation', which refers to the harmful impacts on a person when they disclose experiences of family violence and receive an inappropriate or unsafe response from those from whom they have sought help.³⁶ These kinds of negative experiences act as disincentives for young people to seek help in the future and push young people to remain in unsafe circumstances.³⁷

Homelessness services

It is well documented that there is significant statistical cross-over between the young people who are experiencing family violence in any of its forms and an elevated risk of needing to access specialist housing services for homelessness support.³⁸ Between 2017-2018, nearly 65,600 children and young people were counted as having accessed specialist homelessness services (SHS) and of those, 45% reported the main reason for needing housing support as 'interpersonal reasons' (category covering

³⁵ Breckenridge, J., Rees, S., valentine, k., & Murray, S. (2016). *Meta-evaluation of existing interagency partnerships, collaboration, coordination and/or integrated interventions and service responses to violence against women: Final report* (ANROWS Horizons, 04/2016). Sydney: ANROWS.

³⁶ Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety. (2020). *Working across sectors to meet the needs of clients experiencing domestic and family violence* (ANROWS Insights, 05/2020). Sydney: ANROWS

³⁷ Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety. (2020). Op. Cit.

³⁸ DiNicola, K. Liyanarachchi, D. Plummer, J. (2019). *Out of the Shadows, Domestic and Family Violence: A leading cause of homelessness in Australia*. Sydney: Mission Australia; AIHW (2019a). Op. Cit.

family breakdown and violence)³⁹. The AIHW also noted that “young children and women are the most likely to seek specialist homelessness services as a result of family or domestic violence” Australia-wide.⁴⁰ The figures quoted here are also likely to be an underrepresentation of the young people who are experiencing homelessness in the form of couch surfing, over-crowded dwellings and those who may be rough-sleeping but have not presented to a SHS for support. Family violence can be a contributing or predominant causal factor for young people becoming homeless in a variety of contexts. These include but are not limited to needing to leave home due to parental or carer violence, leaving a property due to intimate partner violence and being excluded from home due to exclusion conditions associated with a FVIO. Anecdotal evidence also points to a prevalence of intimate partner violence occurring while homeless.

The RCFV found that in some cases, young people experiencing family violence at home who are older than 15, but younger than 18 are not prioritised by Child Protection because they are “considered to be old enough to look after themselves”.⁴¹ Where this occurs, there is a complex interplay between the roles of the homelessness, youth and SFVS systems where it becomes unclear which part of the system is responsible and best resourced to meet the needs of young people at risk of family violence. Young people may be too young to access SFVS or family violence crisis accommodation in their own right, yet the available youth refuges are not able to respond safely to the young person due to lack of building security, and a lack of training to adequately understand and recognise family violence risk and dynamics. Despite these systemic challenges, effective support for young people at risk of both homelessness and violence constitutes earlier intervention given it can support the disruption of cycles of violence.⁴² As such, as political and policy focus on a more effective and integrated response should be a priority.

For young people who are from the LGBTQ+ community, there is a manifest lack of safe and gender-inclusive crisis accommodation that can respond to imminent family violence risk. Young LGBTQ+ people are particularly at risk of homelessness as a result of family violence and rejection after coming out, and are more likely than their cis-gendered and heterosexual counterparts to have an episode of homelessness before 16 years old.⁴³

Disability services

The work to design and implement safer and more responsive systems and programs for young people with disabilities who are impacted by family violence has been historically hampered by a lack of detailed data about these young people’s experiences. The RCFV noted that this gap in data that illustrates the relationship between disability, violence (and family violence) and gender has been a consistent theme across a number of governmental inquiries.⁴⁴ For this reason, interpreting current evidence and data relating to the intersection between family violence and disability (particularly as it relates to young people) is challenging, particularly while efforts are underway to diversify and develop the available data.

³⁹ AIHW (2019a). Op. Cit.

⁴⁰ AIHW (2019a). Op. Cit. p.37

⁴¹ Family Safety Victoria (2016). Op. Cit. (p.130)

⁴² DiNicola, K. Liyanarachchi, D. Plummer, J. (2019).

⁴³ McNair, R., Andrews, C., Parkinson, S., Dempsey, D. (2017). Op. Cit.

⁴⁴ Family Safety Victoria, (2016). Op. Cit.

Current expertise indicates several key considerations for disability service providers who work with young people who may be at risk of family violence. Firstly, young people with a disability often face significant barriers to disclosing family violence, which are further compounded in situations where the perpetrator of violence is also their primary carer.⁴⁵ For people with a disability, the definition of family violence incorporates non-related carers and those who might share supported accommodation. Secondly, if a young person is able to safely disclose risk of family violence, they may then be limited crisis accommodation or refuge options which are safe and accessible.⁴⁶

As has been briefly mentioned in the discussion about AFV, there is a growing recognition of the over-representation of young people with a formally diagnosed, or apparent disability who experience a family violence legal response such as a family violence intervention order (FVIO).⁴⁷ The RCFV identified that AFV can be a manifestation of disability, including adolescent mental ill-health,⁴⁸ however as the PIPA project found, it is essential “not to promote the notion of a causal link between any form of disability and use of violence”.⁴⁹ Rather, if we are to develop a systemic and community response to family violence and AFV for young people with disabilities and their families, then it is essential that we invest time and resources in an effort understand how best to support them. Failure to do so, runs the risk of inflicting further trauma and unjust legal outcomes including criminalisation.⁵⁰

Mental health services

The negative and far-reaching impacts of family violence on young people is well-documented, as is the cumulative nature of trauma on children and young people’s development without specialised and phased support the capacity for young people to heal is vastly impacted.⁵¹ Young people who have experienced family violence have also suffered numerous losses, not least of which is the destabilising or fracturing of foundational relationships in their lives. This is a confusing and traumatising experience which must be met with specialised and safe responses that help young people understand the psychological, mental, and physical impacts that repeated exposure to violence can have on the body and general wellbeing. Young people are particularly at risk of family violence trauma related mental health challenges because they are in a critical phase of development and growth.⁵² The manifestation of trauma can present in young people as increased anxiety, withdrawal from social interaction, reactivity to particular conditions that are reminiscent of past experiences and difficulty in developing trusting relationships.⁵³ As such, mental health services for young people who may also have experienced family violence related trauma need to be age

⁴⁵ State of Victoria. (2018). *Family Violence Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework*. Melbourne, VIC: Family Safety Victoria

⁴⁶ Family Safety Victoria, (2016). *Royal Commission into Family Violence: Summary and Recommendations*. Melbourne, VIC: State of Victoria.

⁴⁷ Campbell, E., Richter, J., Howard, J., & Cockburn, H. (2020b). Op. Cit.

⁴⁸ Family Safety Victoria, (2016). Op. Cit. (p.31)

⁴⁹ Campbell, E., Richter, J., Howard, J., & Cockburn, H. (2020b). Op. Cit. (p.95)

⁵⁰ Campbell, E., Richter, J., Howard, J., & Cockburn, H. (2020b). Op. Cit.

⁵¹ Australian Childhood Foundation, (2013). *Safe and Secure: A trauma informed practice framework for understanding and responding to children and young people affected by family violence*. Ringwood, VIC: Eastern Metropolitan Region Family Violence Partnership

⁵² Australian Childhood Foundation, (2013). Op. Cit.

⁵³ Australian Childhood Foundation, (2013). Op. Cit.

appropriate and to have the capacity to identify and respond to family violence risk where it might be present but undisclosed.

Research suggests a service provision cross-over for young people between mental health services and AFV. The PIPA project indicated case file examples of young people who were hospitalised for mental health crisis assessment as a result of, or during a police call out, for AFV. Of the Victorian case files audited by the PIPA project, 10% noted the young person's hospitalisation for the purposes of mental health assessment at the point of family violence crisis.⁵⁴

DV Vic is also concerned about the chronic shortage of youth focussed specialist mental health supports that address the needs of young people in Victoria. This submission echoes research recommendations that there is "urgent need to address the serious service gap in mental health services for children and young people living with domestic and family violence".⁵⁵ Many mainstream youth mental health care providers such as Headspace and others continue to provide generalist youth mental health support, however currently in Victoria there is a dearth of services which are targeted to meet the therapeutic needs of young people living with family violence.⁵⁶

Recommendation: The Victorian Youth Strategy results in ongoing, targeted funding for gender inclusive family violence crisis accommodation for young people.

Recommendation: The Victorian Youth Strategy reflects a commitment to consistent state-wide data collection in order to better understand the drivers for the significant over-representation of young people with disabilities who experience family violence.

Recommendation: The Victorian Youth Strategy reflects the need to address the gap in youth focussed, family violence and trauma-informed, mental health services, particularly for young people experiencing or using family violence.

Conclusion

DV Vic's hope for the Victorian Youth Strategy is that it will support the creation of an enabling environment for family violence to be elevated and prioritised as an issue which significantly affects young people, and which impedes them from living safely and confidently, and reaching their potential. This submission points to the imperative of understanding the true diversity in experiences of family violence among young people. Without a well-informed and nuanced approach, young people will continue to fall through the gaps of the service system. We suggest that addressing systemic barriers to young people escaping family violence accessing the support they need is a key priority for Victoria. While the youth service system remains largely siloed, young people with multiple or intersecting support needs will continue to be disadvantaged.

⁵⁴ Campbell, E., Richter, J., Howard, J., & Cockburn, H. (2020b). Op. Cit.

⁵⁵ Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety. (2020). *Safe & Together Addressing Complexity for Children (STACY for Children): Key findings and future directions* (Research to policy and practice, 22/2020). Sydney: ANROWS.

⁵⁶ Campbell, E., Richter, J., Howard, J., & Cockburn, H. (2020b). Op. Cit.

This submission has made several references to significant gaps in knowledge and the current service system that works with young people at risk of family violence. A commitment to support research and inquiry which centres the voices and experiences of young people is one of the first steps towards the Victorian government demonstrating a genuine motivation to ending family violence for young people.

DV Vic looks forward to continuing to work with Victorian Government to develop and implement a Youth Strategy that recognises and invests in the futures of young people who are at risk of, and healing from family violence in all its forms, and which builds on and strengthens the progress the Government have already made with family violence reforms.