



**No to Violence**

Working together to end men's family violence

# NTV Submission to the Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor

17 July 2020

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## Acknowledgement of Country

No to Violence acknowledges First Nations Peoples across these lands; the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waters. We pay respect to all Elders, past, present and emerging. We acknowledge a deep connection with country which has existed over 60,000 years. We acknowledge that sovereignty was never seeded, and this was and always will be First Nation's land.

## Introduction:

No to Violence appreciates the opportunity to provide a submission to the Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor regarding the implementation of the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Family Violence (the Royal Commission).

No to Violence is Australia's largest peak body for services that work directly with men who use violence, as well as the operator of the Men's Referral Service – a telephone and online counselling service and referral service to link men with longer term support

Since the tabling of the Royal Commission report in March 2016, the Victorian family violence sector has come a long way. No to Violence commends the work of our colleagues across the sector and government. It is important to acknowledge the goodwill, dedication, expertise and time spent on working to end family violence.

As a peak body and service that works with men who use violence, we can attest first hand to the increase in professionalism and availability of services. Indeed, our relationships with all the Ministers involved in these transformational reforms and public servants across the Victorian Government, in particular Family Safety Victoria and the Department of Justice and Community Safety, continue to grow.

However, as with all major reforms, change can be difficult. We have learned things along the way, and there are still areas that need increased focus.

In the development of this report, No to Violence has engaged with our members, experts in their fields, and colleagues across the sector. In doing so, we have a number of recommendations which will improve the services we provide and integration with the sector.

### Summary of recommendations:

1. For an effective and coordinated system, support and fund appropriately the full implementation of the Expert Advisory Committee on Perpetrator Interventions (EACPI) recommendations. (See also Section 4.)
2. All Government departments involved in perpetrator intervention services should continue to support a vibrant policy network through active engagement with peaks.
3. Review The Orange Door implementation to implement in full the recommendations of the Victorian Auditor-General's Office (VAGO).
4. Release the evaluation of the State-funded perpetrator intervention trials in order to build on learnings with follow-on programs and/or additional trials.
5. Continue the updating of the Capability Frameworks to meet growing demand and invest in additional funding in workforce capacity building and capability development in men's family violence.
6. Review state-based OH&S regulations to support workplaces to protect victim survivors and safely engage perpetrators in a process of accountability and change.
7. NTV supports the long-term implementation of the Respectful Relationships program across all schools in Victoria.

- 8.** NTV supports the current expansion of perpetrator interventions including those presented in the COVID-19 service guidelines and suggests further expansion should be considered.
- 9.** No to Violence encourages the government to undertake more work on the implementation of the recommendations made in the Brain Injury Australia report on acquired brain injury among perpetrators and victim-survivors of family violence.
- 10.** Implement the recommendations of the Expert Advisory Committee into Perpetrator Interventions.
- 11.** Review of practice guidance and procedures for engaging with men at the Orange Door sites.
- 12.** Extend support for the dissemination of MARAM perpetrator practice guidelines.
- 13.** A greater, permanent investment in support and training in working with perpetrators of family violence.
- 14.** Development of a Compliance Framework for all perpetrator interventions.
- 15.** An agreed vision for the system that is supported by all services.
- 16.** Funding bodies agree to a shared understanding and acceptance of perpetrator intervention models that meets the needs of all service users.
- 17.** A funding model for perpetrator interventions is developed that aligns all funding bodies into one agreed funding approach
- 18.** Funding for perpetrator interventions needs to be consistent irrespective of the funding stream.
- 19.** Funding models should reflect the suite of flexible interventions that agencies need to provide in a comprehensive response to men's family violence.
- 20.** In collaboration with the sector and relevant policy making networks, service guidelines should be developed establishing clear expectations about priority outcomes.
- 21.** Commission a post-COVID-19 review to capture sector lessons and build them into service guidelines for flexible, responsive interventions.
- 22.** Funders also need to send clear signals regarding expectations in the changed, COVID-19 service environment and beyond.

# 1. What are the major changes you have seen in the family violence service system since the Royal Commission into Family Violence made its final report and recommendations in 2016?

Since the Victorian Royal Commission handed down its recommendations on 30 March 2016, No to Violence and its members have experienced major changes to how Victoria's family violence system works. Key changes include:

## a) System governance and design

The introduction of legislated information sharing, and risk frameworks have been concrete steps toward forming a web of accountability.

This formalised effort to create a coordinated system, while not always well articulated and yet to be fully implemented, nonetheless represents significant progress from where we were five years ago.

Publication of the Expert Advisory Committee on Perpetrator Interventions (EACPI) report and recommendations has provided an official platform for the perpetrator intervention sector's accumulated professional wisdom. However, implementation has been varied and commitment to full implementation remains to be seen.

**Recommendation 1: For an effective and coordinated system, support and fund appropriately the full implementation of the Expert Advisory Committee on Perpetrator Interventions (EACPI) recommendations. (See also Section 4.)**

The family violence reforms provided an urgency for greater collaboration between services, Peak bodies and government departments

Relationships across the sector are more consultative, constructive, and increasingly based on a shared understanding of the issues. While there are some ongoing differences in priorities and organisational culture between the community- and state-based bodies, there is a strong desire by all parties to move forward.

Implementation of the EACPI recommendations will further enhance these collaborative relationships by supporting interventions that hold people using violence to account while engaging them to stop their use of violence

**Recommendation 2: All Government departments involved in perpetrator intervention services should continue to support a vibrant policy network through active engagement with peaks.**

The introduction of The Orange Door (TOD) Hubs has represented a major change; but not always an improvement in the way perpetrators of family violence are engaged in interventions.

Our members' experience of the Orange Door has been consistent with the findings in the recent VAGO report: TOD model are not yet realising their potential for supporting victim survivors and perpetrators of family violence.

**Recommendation 3: Review The Orange Door implementation to implement in full the recommendations of the Victorian Auditor-General's Office (VAGO).**

## b) Perpetrator-focused family violence interventions

Services that deliver interventions have continued to develop beyond the concept of a one-size-fits-all response, within the coordinating framework of the updated Family Safety Victoria Minimum Standards.

The breadth of flexible interventions capabilities has been particularly visible during the current COVID-19 crisis, during which services have adapted by providing tailored combinations of group work (MBCPs and fathering programs), individual work (case management and counselling), family work (family safety contact and co-parenting programs) and community work (healing approaches and men's behaviour change groups in language).

Services have negotiated the difficult terrain of moving services online and over the phone, often for the first time ever. The Service Guidelines emerging from consultation and coordination with members over this period will be able to serve as an important groundwork for an integrated suite of flexible interventions.

Ongoing investment in research and program innovation is needed in order to increase the system's capacity to engage effectively with the complex risks and needs presented by the men's family violence cohort. A monolithic approach fails to address or manage the complex needs and risk variables upon presentation at an Orange Door service. Insights generated from evaluation of the perpetrator intervention trials should be released to help build practice and the evidence base around what works.

**Recommendation 4: Release the evaluation of the State-funded perpetrator intervention trials in order to build on learnings with follow-on programs and/or additional trials.**

## c) Workforces and workplaces

No to Violence's approach to workforce development has become more sophisticated and competency based.

The Workforce Training Innovation Fund (WTIF) Project has provided early indications of the importance of integrating specialist knowledge about working directly with men using family violence into non family violence sectors. For example, our work delivering training to Mental Health Victoria indicated that mental health practitioners valued having the basic skillset in screening perpetrators of family violence and warm referral pathways where family violence was identified.

Victoria's adoption of the two capability frameworks: Responding to the Family Violence Capability Framework and the Preventing Family Violence and Violence Against Women Capability Framework has helped the workforce development sector adapt training and development strategies that engage both specialist and non-specialist workers in accredited and non-accredited training. This is evidenced through the stronger collaboration between industry and the Vocational Education and Training sector in the embedding of specialist knowledge

This development was visible in the convergence of energy and talent at NTV's international conference in 2019 (conference report available on our [website](#)). However, growth in demand continually exceeds the sector's capacity to respond and as we continue the work in developing qualifications equivalencies and integrate a five year implementation plan, further investment in assisting the workforce to meet the requirements of Recommendation 209 will be required.

**Recommendation 5: Continue the updating of the Capability Frameworks to meet growing demand and invest in additional funding in workforce capacity building and capability development in men’s family violence.**

Since the Royal Commission, there is a greater appreciation of the scale and complexity of family violence, its gendered drivers, and the need for coordinated responses. Increasingly, employers are taking responsibility for ensuring the safety of their employees who are affected by family violence. This has been seen in early moves by employers and unions toward using a family violence lens when designing workplace policies and employment agreements. State-based workplace policy instruments could be used to support these moves.

**Recommendation 6: Review state-based OH&S regulations to support workplaces to protect victim survivors and safely engage perpetrators in a process of accountability and change.**

#### **d) Primary prevention**

The implementation of the Respectful Relationships program across all Victorian schools has supported young people of all ages to explore their understanding of gender equality and respectful relationships. Supported by age appropriate resources, this program is laying long term foundations to support communities to be free from violence, inequality, and racism.

Acknowledging the program scaffolds from year to year, if implemented in this way young people will experience thirteen years of conversations and activities on respectful relationships that they will take into their adult lives. This program is an important and a successful element of a prevention / intervention model that will show positive outcomes in the years to come.

This is also supplemented well by the work of Our Watch and Respect Victoria, ensuring these important messages are reinforced across all levels and across more areas of the community. Ongoing investment in primary prevention is essential if we are going to see reductions of family violence across future generations.

**Recommendation 7: NTV supports the long-term implementation of the Respectful Relationships program across all schools in Victoria.**

## 2. How has the experience of accessing services and support changed since the Royal Commission for victim survivors, including children, and perpetrators of family violence?

Since the tabling of the Royal Commission's report in 2016, Victoria's responses to men who use violence has improved. Programs have improved and are more integrated into the Victorian system.

The lack of consideration of perpetrators and their intersecting needs and identities was cited by the Royal Commission as one of the reasons for modest perpetrator intervention outcomes and one-size-fits-all intervention designs pre-Royal Commission.

Since that time, a number of efforts to 'pivot to the perpetrator' have been undertaken which has resulted in more responsive and accessible services for a greater number of Victorians.

No to Violence welcomes the development of more nuanced aetiological and program design models which seek to understand perpetrators not just through their behaviour but within their full context. Such models necessitate targeting the diverse needs and experiences of perpetrators in addition to the diverse risks and ways their behaviour may harm others.

There are numerous examples in the Victorian system of how moving towards more holistic understandings of perpetrators is leading to the system's capacity to keep more perpetrators in view. Holistic risk identification, assessment, management, and information sharing policies and procedures are outlined in the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework (MARAM). These have empowered broad sections of the Victorian service system to play a role in supporting the safety of a greater number of victim-survivors who previously would not have been identified as requiring support.

No to Violence looks forward to the release of the MARAM perpetrator practice guidelines which will help extend the important function of supporting victim-survivor safety and wellbeing with perpetrator identification and assessment.

### ***System innovations which have led to greater accessibility for perpetrators of family violence:***

- *An increase in state funding allowing more perpetrators to access services.*
- *The roll-out of state-wide case management for perpetrators. Allowing services to address client circumstances and target barriers that may inhibit participation in interventions to address violence and abuse.*
- *Family Safety Victoria and Department of Justice and Community Safety Innovation trials demonstrating targeted and holistic interventions are more effective than generic one-size-fits-all approaches.*
- *Preliminary findings from the adoption of the Canadian Caring Dads program into Australia highlight the utility of targeting men through their identity as fathers and important intervention innovations such as a combining individual and group program delivery.*

While these and similar developments in system design and program delivery have increased accessibility of the service system for perpetrators of family violence, there remain a number of existing systemic barriers which inhibit the capacity to identify, engage, and keep perpetrators in view.

These barriers include the following:

**a) Three separate funding streams**

The intervention system for perpetrators consists of three different funding streams provided by Magistrates Court Victoria, Corrections Victoria, and Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS).

These different funding streams consist of different referral pathways and underlying assumptions that inform program design and delivery. For example, in DHHS funded interventions, perpetrators deemed to be low risk may be thought to benefit from an intervention; whereas in corrections-funded programs, intervention may be thought to be inappropriate or harmful.

Such differences in program design and delivery has implications for program accessibility, consistency and the capacity of the system to keep perpetrators in view. There is need for a more coordinated systems approach to perpetrator interventions that offers the perpetrator a consistent service response irrespective of level of assessed risk and referral pathway.

**b) Waitlists**

Community-based interventions are characterised by long waiting lists – in recent conversations (June 2020) with our members, No to Violence has found that the [average waitlist of respondents](#) was nearly three months with some members' waitlists being up to 40 weeks.

The failure of the system to provide a swift response to perpetrators of family violence is of grave concern. In order for interventions to be effective, clients must cognitively associate the response of the system (intervention) with their behaviour (violence and abuse).

The consequence of having three to six month delays between system response and perpetrator behaviour is likely to lead to interference into this association. For example, many clients report anger at the system when they are left without support or a means to address their behaviour while prevented from seeing their children. These associations of anger and resentment at the system often replace the association between the system response and perpetrator behaviour. Such feelings are known to lead to program dropout which in turn is known to lead to re-perpetration

**c) Unclear vision**

Despite the Royal Commission highlighting the lack of developed system responses and consistent outcome findings for perpetrator interventions, perpetrators remain an after-thought within the system.

The best evidence indicates that whole-of-family responses to family violence are the most effective. This means that perpetrator interventions cannot be considered as an adjunct to an already developed response but must be considered as an integral part of that response. Without an evidence-based theory and associated intervention strategy to identify, engage, and ultimately change the behaviour of these Victorians, the state's goal of ending family violence will not be realised.

**Recommendation 8: NTV supports the current expansion of perpetrator interventions including those presented in the COVID-19 service guidelines, and suggests further expansion should be considered.**

### 3. What are the most critical changes to the family violence service system that still need to occur?

There can be little doubt about the progress that has been made in Victoria's family violence system since the Royal Commission handed down its report in 2016.

Since that time, a number of initiatives have been established to better respond to perpetrators of family violence. The roll-out of state-wide case management for perpetrators, the development of cohort-specific intervention models, and the development of integrated intake services, in the form of The Orange Door, are just a few examples of the great strides that have been made by the family violence service system.

No to Violence wish to highlight two kinds of critical changes needed in the family violence system. The first of these include initiatives that have been undertaken but not yet completed and the second include initiatives identified in research but not yet actioned.

#### a) Initiatives that have begun but are not yet completed

##### i. Perpetrator system design

A number of important steps have been made to create a system that responds to perpetrators of family violence in a sophisticated, evidence-based manner that supports the safety and well-being of victim-survivors.

The findings from the Expert Advisory Committee on Perpetrator Interventions (EACPI) has been instrumental in progress towards more effective perpetrator system responses. Some of the committee's recommendations have been actioned, while others require further steps towards implementation.

No to Violence thanks the Victorian government for their significant investment in the EACPI and its resulting report. We believe to maximise return on this process and, most importantly, build the most effective responses to perpetrators of family violence, it is crucial that all EACPI recommendations are actioned and funded

##### ii. Multi-agency Risk Assessment and Management perpetrator guidance

The development of guidance designed to support specialist and non-specialist workforces to identify and respond to perpetrators of family violence is a significant development in the development of practices and procedures to identify and respond to perpetrators of family violence.

No to Violence in partnership with Family Safety Victoria is leading on this work with the outcome resulting in an essential and required guide. Training and support for workers to implement this guidance will be critical in his implementation.

##### iii. Adolescent family violence

The prevalence of adolescent family violence, particularly towards parents, has begun to emerge as an issue requiring significant investment, research, policy, and practice development.

The recently published '*PIPA project: Positive Interventions for Perpetrators of Adolescent violence*' report has highlighted the dearth of appropriate services for adolescents who may be using family violence and the harms that current justice-based responses can cause in these situations.

NTV believe it is essential that therapeutic and evidence-based responses, separate and apart from responses to adult perpetrators of family violence, are developed by the intervention system. NTV

would also like to see further quantitative (prevalence) and qualitative (characteristics of victims and perpetrators) research undertaken in this area in order to develop appropriate system response

#### iv. Victims and perpetrators of family violence with brain injury

Following recommendation 171 of the Royal Commission into family violence the Victorian government funded Brain Injury Australia to undertake a study into the prevalence of acquired brain injury among perpetrators and victim-survivors of family violence.

This report found that two in five Victorians attending hospital due to family violence<sup>1</sup> acquired and brain injury among perpetrators of family violence is approximately double what it is in the general Victorian population.

Despite these findings, none of the recommendations to build a family violence system more responsive to services users with an ABI have been implemented by the Victorian government.

**Recommendation 9: No to Violence encourages the government to undertake more work on the implementation of the recommendations made in the Brain Injury Australia report on acquired brain injury among perpetrators and victim-survivors of family violence.**

#### b) Initiatives identified in research but not yet actioned

##### i. Evaluation framework for perpetrator interventions

Due to multiple funding streams, program designs, and philosophical assumptions undergirding program design and delivery (see Q.3), there remains a great degree of inconsistency in what individual programs and organisations designate as essential components in perpetrator interventions.

There are a number of complicated factors in the emergence of programs relating to the social demand for interventions with perpetrators.

Much program development has been based on theory. Much of this theory has been tested and validated, nevertheless there remains a lack good quality evaluation studies - especially in Australia - to assist program providers and policymakers to deliver consistent yet targeted evidence-based programs.

This issue has been recognised in Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) report on *Evaluation readiness, program quality and outcomes in men's behaviour change programs*. It is recommended that steps are taken to implement the recommendations made in this report

No to Violence has been a longstanding advocate for a perpetrator intervention compliance framework that holds individuals, organisations and systems accountable for the services they deliver.

The lack of this framework has been heightened in the COVID-19 pandemic with organisations across the family violence sector implementing quickly developed service delivery model that have the potential to place people at greater risk than the intended outcome.

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<sup>1</sup> Over a 10-year period (N = 16,000)

This Framework should be developed as a matter of urgency using the skills and experiences from the sector. (See Section 4 for more detail.)

## 4. Are there any parts of the family violence reforms that have not yet progressed enough and require more attention?

As the family violence reforms are implemented and continue to build in their development and maturity, it is important to note that scaffolding the implementation has offered both a targeted and considered approach. This scaffolding has built a solid base to refine existing reforms while implementing new ones.

### a) Expert Advisory Committee into Perpetrator Interventions Recommendations

To continue the improvement for the Victorian responses to perpetrators of family violence, No to Violence considers the implementation of the EACPI recommendations as pivotal.

These 22 recommendations offer leadership to perpetrator intervention developments and while a number of recommendations have or are being implemented, this work heightened through the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need to progress this work as a matter of urgency.

The sector is seeking guidance and support to drive their work with perpetrators and the EACPI report and recommendations offer this

There is now more than ever the need for perpetrator intervention oversight. No to Violence continues to advocate for **recommendation 19** in the EACPI report; ‘an expert reference group to be established to provide oversight and guidance to the perpetrator interventions’.

The establishment of this group will provide greater oversight of the perpetrator intervention developments in strong partnership between government and the sector. It can also enable the implementation of EACPI recommendations through the collaboration and integration of the various government and non-government services implementing or overseeing perpetrator interventions.

**Recommendation 13** asks for the review of the use of technology to improve the effectiveness and reach of face-to-face perpetrator interventions. The COVID-19 pandemic has certainly brought the use of technology to the forefront of perpetrator interventions and while advancements in this area is being made, the sector requires guidance and direction to ensure the safety of victim survivors underpins all interventions.

**Recommendation 10: Implement the recommendations of the Expert Advisory Committee into Perpetrator Interventions.**

### b) The Orange Door

The implementation of the Orange Door continues to cause confusion and concern to the men’s specialist family violence sector and the broader systems established to support families.

While the Victorian Auditor General Office (VAGO) report highlighted ongoing developments required to make the sites fully operational, the lack of a clear guidance on perpetrator work at these sites has meant minimal numbers of men accessing the service.

A growing backlog of intakes and assessments and a lack of capacity to move men through the sites to perpetrator interventions is also present, growing wait lists into services. No to Violence seeks a review of the perpetrator practice guidance developed in the early stages of the Orange Door roll out and to bring them in line with current and emerging practices.

The Perpetrator intervention workforce is a small but growing sector and No to Violence believes that the Workforce Development and Industry Plan would benefit from a review to ensure the skills required of those coming into the sector are meeting minimum standards.

**Recommendation 11: Review of practice guidance and procedures for engaging with men at the Orange Door sites.**

#### **c) Multi Agency Risk and Management (MARAM)**

The implementation of the Victim Survivor Practice Guidance for the MARAM in the victim survivor work has established a clear baseline for this work to be done in a consistent and coordinated way.

The development of the perpetrator practice guidance is currently underway and will be available in early 2020. Due to COVID-19 this work has progressed slowly and will require additional time to finalise.

**Recommendation 12: Extend support for the dissemination of MARAM perpetrator practice guidelines.**

#### **d) Ongoing development and review of perpetrator services**

No to Violence believes that the ongoing development and implementation of the perpetrator intervention responses is at a critical stage of development and the current environment provides a unique opportunity to develop and expand the range of interventions available to more men and their families.

No to Violence believes the implementation of the EACPI recommendations and adequately resourcing organisations to deliver best practice is crucial.

**Recommendation 13: A greater, permanent investment in support and training in working with perpetrators of family violence.**

To progress this work, No to Violence supports rigorous compliance and accountability frameworks to hold men accountable and the systems that are intervening with families. We continue to advocate for a compliance framework for perpetrator interventions to ensure programs and organisations are delivering safe and accountable services.

**Recommendation 14: Development of a Compliance Framework for all perpetrator interventions.**

## 5. Are there any improvements that could be made to the implementation approach of the family violence reforms?

It is important that the progress made since the tabling of the Royal Commission is noted before talking about improvements to the system.

The Royal Commission proposed massive changes to the way that the family violence and related sectors worked – what has been implemented has made positive changes to the lives of people who have experienced violence, and prevented violence from happening.

However, systemic reform generally requires a new system which was the role of government and the sector to construct. The Victorian Government and organisations sector should be congratulated on the commencement of the journey to a new family violence system.

The journey for major change is difficult and windy path and improvements will always be needed. The need for ongoing reviews of the reforms are essential to ensure they are meeting the needs of families and the community. The family violence sector has developed significantly in the past three years and while the Royal Commission recommendations remain relevant today, the need for continuous improvement and refinement is critical. We have learnt much through trial and error and we should use these learnings to adapt and adjust the ongoing implementation.

It has become evident that the engagement, retention and intervention approaches with perpetrators are still at the commencement of their journey. Current reforms and work requires significant investment and time to ensure safe practices are occurring. Programs need to be developed and implemented based on sound evidence, practice wisdom and commitment.

No to Violence believes that further work and investment is required to bring service systems together.

**Recommendation 15: An agreed vision for the system that is supported by all services; bringing together services for all.**

The lack of a clear shared vision for service integration and collaboration has been clear within Orange Door locations, and while these issues are being addressed, No to Violence believes that these lessons should be used to develop a more integrated system response across all family violence interventions.

There continues to be a need for departmental collaboration with perpetrator intervention models ensuring a fluid pathway for perpetrators to enter and exit the service system where accountability, responsibility and behaviour change underpin the work.

The current perpetrator intervention system treats the perpetrator differently depending on where they have entered the system, who is funding the intervention and what the compliance requirements are. This means the one client could receive three different responses.

**Recommendation 16: Funding bodies agree to a shared understanding and acceptance of perpetrator intervention models that meets the needs of all service users.**

**Recommendation 17: A funding model for perpetrator interventions is developed that aligns all funding bodies into one agreed funding approach**

**Recommendation 18: Funding for perpetrator interventions needs to be consistent irrespective of the funding stream.**

## 6. What has been the biggest impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on your practice, organisation or sector? How have the services you provide had to change?

### a) Service delivery

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic and physical distancing requirements, men's family violence providers have transitioned to new modes of service delivery.

In the initial Stage 3 restrictions, Men's Behaviours Change Programs ceased to operate in person. With the initial lifting (and during Melbourne and Mitchell Shire's more recent Stage 3 restrictions), the advice of the Victorian Government is that they may continue if they are able to abide by physical distancing restrictions.

In response to the restrictions and to ensure men who were in programs are continuing to be engaged, there has been combination of individual interventions or small group work via either phone or video conferencing.

Members found there was a need to upskill staff in delivering individual change-oriented and active holding work with men over the telephone. No to Violence has developed a Remote Working Toolkit and will shortly commence training across Australia, providing the sector with these much needed skills. Local and international evidence during this time have supported the effectiveness of actively engaging men in phone interventions.

The increase in more labor-intensive individual phone-based work has stretched services to capacity. More individual and phone-based work is likely to be necessitated by a backlog of cases arising from the lockdown period. No to Violence is concerned that current funding models restrict the opportunities to provide these types of funding.

**Recommendation 19: Funding models should reflect the suite of flexible interventions that agencies need to provide in a comprehensive response to men's family violence.**

### b) Responding to increased risk

Service providers have commenced conducting revised risk assessment and management plans for new and existing clients in response to COVID-19.

This was done in recognition of the increased and varying risk of family violence to adult and children victim survivors during disasters. Revised risk assessment then informed interventions in terms of frequency of contact, coordination with other services, justice responses and aspects of behaviour change content where appropriate.

Heightened and varied risk has included:

- Increased opportunities for financial abuse arising from many clients losing work or hours. Lower household incomes resulted in men increasing their financial control. Some examples included restricting access to money and coercion to access superannuation.
- Risks related to children arose from men "overholding", citing concerns of spreading the virus. Social isolation also increased risk to partners/ex-partners in co-parenting contexts.
- Adaptation to engaging remotely was particularly difficult for some cohorts, leading to elevated risk. Family safety contact workers reported increased difficulties finding safe ways of communicating with victim survivors. Men with cognitive impairments who require body

language and facial expressions for communication also found it particularly difficult to adapt to working online.

**Recommendation 20: Jurisdictional funders should commission research into risk frameworks' ability to capture changed conditions arising from extreme events.**

### c) Client engagement

Service providers have found that both perpetrators and victims are engaging and maintaining contact at higher rates than before coronavirus (COVID-19).

They are reporting that men who use violence are responding well to the increased frequency of individual work. Victim survivors are also responding well to the proactive family safety contact function. While there have been some positive responses to remote based services, concerns have been raised by service providers whether this work is safe, effective and supported by policy directions.

**Recommendation 21: In collaboration with the sector and relevant policy making networks, service guidelines should be developed establishing clear expectations about priority outcomes.**

## 7. Has the COVID-19 crisis highlighted any strengths or weaknesses in the family violence service system?

### a) Services were adaptive and demonstrated the high level of practice wisdom

Services have responded swiftly to ensure interventions meet the needs of clients in the context of COVID-19 restrictions.

In the absence of practice guidance that supports delivering perpetrator interventions during emergencies such as pandemic, service providers used a variety of approaches and frameworks to ensure the safety of women and children during this time.

To do this, services drew upon a high level of practice wisdom and experience to ensure that interventions were meeting the needs of clients. This included individual work and the use of technology to engage with clients neither of which have a large evidence base for providers to draw upon.

**Recommendation 22: Commission a post-COVID-19 review to capture sector lessons and build them into service guidelines for flexible, responsive interventions.**

### b) No policies for working from home

As employers, our member agencies are responsible for the health and wellbeing of their employees. Overall, we believe our member organisations provided safe and healthy conditions for their workers.

However, many members described increased work-related stress arising from blurred boundaries between work and family life. It remains unclear how existing workplace Occupational Health and Safety policies address the conditions of employees in the family violence sector who are working from home for prolonged periods.

Long-term physical and mental health effects may yet emerge, and services need guidance and support as employers to maintain safe and healthy work conditions when staff are working from home.

### c) A lack of consistent timely guidance from funding bodies

No to Violence's members have expressed frustration of the lack of clear guidance and support from their funders. Although the COVID-19 pandemic commenced considerably in March / April 2020, COVID-19 specific guidelines were released on 14 July 2020 – several months later.

There is also a clear need for disseminating the advice of the Chief Health Officer, including its application in the context of all family violence support services. This has compounded pressure on service providers and potentially elevated risk.

Key issues on which members have sought advice include:

- Practice guidance
- Safety and legitimacy of online interventions
- Expectations of funders and others in the authorizing environment

In addition, funding bodies for men's family violence interventions should work collaboratively to ensure that policies and service guidance are consistent.

**Recommendation 23: Funders also need to send clear signals regarding expectations in the changed, COVID-19 service environment and beyond.**

## 8. Are there any changes you have made, or observed, during the COVID-19 pandemic that you think should be continued?

### a) **Flexibility** in interventions

Prior to COVID-19 pandemic, services received funding that was tied to specific interventions for men – MBCPs, Case Management or Caring Dads.

Through the pandemic, services been flexible in how they deliver these interventions, with delivery often including a combination of individual and group work either in person, over the phone or via video.

Members have expressed their desire to continuing delivering services in such a flexible manner after the COVID-19 pandemic. This would create more opportunities for services to meet perpetrators 'where they are at' and make it easier to keep men in view.

In order to accomplish this, members will require clarity around individual work – the purposes and outcomes and a clear framework for this change work as well as active holding.

In addition, services will need clear information on how individual, phone-based work is recognised as 'equivalent' interventions to MBCP work for the purposes of court order. The parameters around using technology in interventions, given safety and privacy concerns also requires clear guidance. Service funding models should be revised to accurately reflect the diverse types of work that services are providing.

**See Recommendation 19 (above).**