

## **How has the family violence service system changed since the Royal Commission?**

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**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? Please share specific examples from your own sector or organisation. We welcome comment on changes to both your sector or your organisation's service delivery, as well as any broader system issues.**

The Victorian Trades Hall Council (VTHC) delivers education and training around both gendered and family violence as workplace issues. VTHC also campaigns on the issue of both, to improve the safety of Victorian workers affected by both types of violence in the workplace. The most significant change we have seen is the rise in awareness amongst the community regarding family violence and a shift away from seeing it only as a private issue between the affected parties. When we deliver training there is generally acceptance amongst participants that family violence is a community issue and therefore also a workplace issue that can and must be addressed systemically. We have also seen the increase of paid family violence leave being provided in workplaces via EBA clauses or policy. The introduction of 5 days per year of unpaid family violence leave into all Awards is a movement in the right direction however VTHC advocates that this be extended to 20 paid days. Paying workers with the time they need to take away from work in order to address their family violence circumstances creates the opportunity for them to adequately and safely manage their situation safely and with minimal adversity. Although this issue does not directly relate to the Victorian family violence service system, the various systems regarding family violence do interact and impact each other.

**How has the experience of accessing services and support changed since the Royal Commission for victim survivors, including children, and perpetrators of family violence? Please share specific examples or case studies where possible. NB: Please ensure when you are providing case examples that individuals are not identified.**

Although our work does not focus directly on supporting victim survivors and perpetrators of family violence, we do come across both in the course of our work and find that there are accessible ways that we can make referrals. Particularly the Orange Door seems to be a resource that has proven an improvement for service users although we cannot speak to the experience of workers in those services. This is particularly positive given our work is not directly in family violence service delivery but we have found it straightforward to make successful referrals for those who attend training or make contact with our program of work.

## **Looking forward – what is still required in the family violence reforms**

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

Without paid family violence leave and adequate workplace supports for workers there are limitations in what workers subjected to family violence can do. The evidence shows that victim survivors need economic security in order to make

decisions about their lives in relation to family violence. For example, leaving a family violence situation is incredibly difficult if one will not receive an income enabling payment of moving costs, housing and associated costs. Further, the lack of affordable and suitable housing in Victoria throws up another barrier. Again, whilst these examples are not strictly related to the Victorian family violence service system, the interaction of both have significant impacts on service users. A worker may not feel able to freely make a choice regarding taking time to address their family violence circumstances without adequate protections. Often times a victim survivor requires time off from work to address issues directly related to family violence, such as court or doctor attendance, taking children to support services and so on, however they may feel unable to do this when faced with loss of income or adverse action from an employer.

Systemic and structural inequities between men, women and LGBTIQ people must be levelled. Misogyny, sexism, homophobia, transphobia and so on underpin the cultural attitudes that allow for a society to manifest the extreme violence we witness being perpetrated under the moniker of family violence. It is not sufficient to simply address the end result, rather we need to intervene and disrupt the cultural narrative that has historically turned away from this type of violence. This can be achieved through education and training as well as with material changes to eradicate the exclusion of women and LGBTIQ people from public life and other influential roles in workplaces, community and families.

The body of work developed and delivered by the VTHC endeavours to challenge attitudes through campaigning, educating and training unions and workplaces in their understanding of both gendered and family violence and what can be done to eradicate both in the workplace and community.

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

All workers should be able to access 20 days paid family violence leave regardless of employment status. That is, whether employed on a casual or permanent basis, access to paid family violence leave should be the same. Workers should also be guaranteed no adverse action against them should they require family violence leave.

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

In addition to the above points the family violence workforce, which is made up predominantly of women, needs to be adequately resourced and remunerated with specific consideration given to OHS frameworks. The family violence service sector is a highly skilled and essential workforce who should be paid accordingly. Further, the sector and workforce should receive ongoing funding rather than year to year where required, along with targeted project funding where specific planning, research or program delivery is required. This would provide stability of planning and capacity to provide best practice service delivery based on sound theoretical and experiential practices. Further, secure ongoing funding allows for the potential for

adequate reflective learning and continuous improvement within services. This will benefit the workforce but will also, importantly, resource and advantage the service users and community and ensure a higher standard of enduring outcomes.

### **Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic**

#### **What has been the biggest impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on your organisation or sector? How have the services that your organisation or sector provides had to change?**

VTHC is the peak body of the union movement in Victoria. The Australian and Victorian trade union movement is aware that the impact of COVID19 has disproportionately been borne by women who work in some of the hardest hit industries and comprise more of the casual workforce than men do. Those who were able to work from home during the pandemic were most regularly asked to complete risk assessments that only identified physical hazards such as trips and lighting rather than identifying possible psychosocial hazards and gendered and family violence. In the training VTHC has provided prior to and during the COVID19 pandemic, we were able to educate participants about the need to include these hazards checks in their workplace risk assessments and to work with them to identify solutions to the risks. For example, some workplaces were able to offer safe office space to workers who faced high risk of family violence in the home and would be protected by actually attending a physical workspace each day. We did this by moving our education and training package to the online realm, delivering both training and webinars over Zoom. Usually this kind of information would be delivered in training in which participants attend a physical space.

#### **Has the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted any strengths or weaknesses in the family violence service system?**

The COVID19 pandemic has highlighted the ways in which family violence in the home is certainly a workplace issue. Due to the vast numbers of workers working from home during this period, it has highlighted the ways in which the family violence significantly impacts work and shows clearly that the family violence pandemic is a community, not a private, issue.

Additionally, the disproportionate negative affect of the COVID19 pandemic on women because of job termination, frontline work and caring potentially makes them more vulnerable to remaining ensnared in family violence situations.

#### **Are there any changes resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic that you think should be continued?**

1. Work from home risk assessments should include questions relating to risk of gendered and family violence.
2. Solutions to the above should be provided by employers to the employee who is identified as at risk as the employer has the duty to provide a safe workplace.
3. For VTHC, the use of online resources means we have had a greater reach in engaging workers across the state, even the country, in training and webinars

focusing on family violence as a workplace issue. We will be endeavouring to continue that work beyond the pandemic to expand our connection to those workers who do not reside in urban areas.

### **General Comments**

**The Monitor invites you to make any final general comments around the family violence service system reform.**

Overall the progress of family violence reforms, arising out of the 2016 Royal Commission, give promise of a healthier future in which all Victorians will live without violence. However, the progress is slow and if all related service or legal systems do not also shift and develop with the family violence service system then there will continue to be gaps and breaches of those reforms.

It is imperative that the system itself is fully funded in a secure and ongoing way. Such funding will allow for the most appropriate remuneration of the service system's highly skilled and necessary workforce, it will allow for long term planning and sustainability that will affect the workforce and community for the better.