

Submission to the Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor *'Monitoring the Family Violence Reforms'*

Quantum Support Services (Quantum) provides State Government funded programs across a broad range of services for vulnerable clients within Gippsland in Victoria. These services include Family Violence Crisis Response and therapeutic care, Women and Children's Refuge, Out of Home Care (including Kinship Care), programs to support families, children and young people, including residential advocacy services and crisis accommodation. Our organisation employs in excess of 150 employees and has been operating in the region for over 30 years.¹

Within the context of Gippsland, our service encompasses the Local Government Areas of Latrobe, Wellington, East Gippsland, South Gippsland and Baw Baw. East Gippsland, Latrobe and Wellington Local Government Areas consistently rank amongst the highest in the State (currently ranked number one, two and three respectively amongst 79 Local Government Areas), in terms of Family Violence incidents reported to the Victorian Police per capita.²

Quantum is grateful for the opportunity to make this submission to the Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor. As a leading service provider to people experiencing family violence in Gippsland we have a longstanding and strong interest in assisting the Monitor in its fourth and final report to Parliament on the progress of the implementation of the reforms. This feedback draws on our expertise and practical knowledge in assisting victims/survivors and keeping the perpetrator accountable and in view.

The submission is structured in accordance with the Monitor's inquiry addressing three areas of the consultation: how the family violence service system, and users' experience of it, has changed since the Royal Commission into Family Violence (the Royal Commission); what is still required in the family violence reforms; and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

¹ Gippsland is a large rural region located in the south east of Victoria. It extends from the outer Melbourne metropolitan region to New South Wales border. There are pockets of social-economic disadvantage across Gippsland with a high percentage of people on low incomes, higher than the state average. The Latrobe Valley is one local government area that has significant disadvantage and is ranked as the seventh highest disadvantaged community in Australia.

² Family incidents and rate per 100,000 population by police and local government area according to Crime Statistics Agency: East Gippsland ranked number one for 2019-2020 (an increase of 1.58%); Latrobe ranked number two for 2019-2020 (an increase of 8.84%); and Wellington ranked number three for 2019-2020 (an increase of 22.3%).





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

The Royal Commission handed down its report and recommendations at the end of March 2016.³ Quantum commends the Victorian Government's commitment to a monumental task of implementing all 227 of the recommendations.⁴

Enormous progress has been made since transforming the scope and complexity across the entire service system with exemplary initiatives such as The Orange Door, the Central Information Point (CIP), the Family Violence Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework (MARAM), industry planning and workforce development.

Whilst such progress has been made, we are quite disappointed in the recent changes made by Victoria Police in relation to the CIP. The changes have occurred with the absence of consultation, collaboration, and reference back to the Royal Commission recommendations which led to the introduction of the CIP. Recent changes have resulted in a return to silo information and has removed the capacity of The Orange Door and related case management functions to maintain the perpetrator in view and accountable. For example, the CIP no longer records the whereabouts of the perpetrator nor information related to warrants linked to family violence. Victoria Police has advised that The Orange Door practitioners can seek this information from the Courts and other venues, therefore they are no longer providing the information within the centralised system designed to keep the perpetrator accountable and in view. The work load demand, burden of administrative tasks, and the nature of Police shift work and leave will result in The Orange Door practitioners not having the capacity to conduct comprehensive risk and safety assessments.

From the perspective of Inner Gippsland's service delivery, observations of our agency indicate that The Orange Door initiative provides a broader support for clients where there is one entry point. Clients are supported to engage with holistic care strategies in a case planned environment. Referrals are improved by connections between support agencies such as the services operating in family violence, child and family supports, men's perpetrator services, mental and physical health services and accommodation supports. Clients also benefit through strengthened agency relationships established through The Orange Door that support improved culturally appropriate engagement and response, such as those agencies offering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific programs and those assisting the Culturally and Linguistically Diverse members of community. As an agency, Quantum has seen a shift of the

³ Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor, *Report of the Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor* (November 2019) https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/file_uploads/FVRIM_Report_Premiers_Copy_18_December_2019_cdMzLDbL.PDF at 13 July 2020.

⁴ Victoria State Government, Department of Premier and Cabinet, *Three Years from the Royal Commission into Family Violence* (2019) <https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2019-03/apo-nid227726.pdf> at 16 July 2020.



burden away from victims/survivors towards increased perpetrators accountability. Nevertheless, there is still a need for more services for perpetrators as women and children are still being uprooted in order to protect themselves from perpetrators of violence.

An area requiring urgent attention is the definition of integrated practice across The Orange Door sites in Victoria. Written guidelines provided by Family Safety Victoria (FSV) are open to interpretation and provide no clarity. As a Family Violence Specialist organisation we hold significant concerns should The Orange Door move to an 'uber' worker model where specialisation is not valued and maintained. FSV have not clearly articulated how specialisation will be maintained, advocating more for a generalist practitioner that responds to the complex needs across multiple domains. Whilst FSV has given a commitment to work towards developing this clarity, their time frame of December 2021 is not reasonable or reflective of their understanding on how integral this definition is to the successful collaborative model The Orange Door is intended to provide.

Further concerns for Quantum is feedback from the Regional Family Violence Principle Advisor (previously known as the regional Implementation Coordinator) stating that FSV believe that they focused too much on family violence in the first roll out of The Orange Door sites, resulting in the intention to be more child wellbeing focused for future sites. The concern held by Quantum is the purpose of and reasons leading to the Royal Commission into Family Violence being overlooked and lost as time continues on. The changes to the CIP already demonstrate that this is a real concern and is already happening in practice.

Overall, service providers are now operating in a more collaborative manner with easier ways to share information. While there is still more work to be done with embedding MARAM, it has already positively impacted service delivery through providing greater clarity and confidence within the workforce when referring, along with a more streamlined processes. The introduction of the MARAM framework has provided an improved platform for the focus on safety and wellbeing for women and children, empowering the workforce to share and gain information which in turn improves the ability to assess and respond to risks. These outcomes are also supported through the Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme (FVISS) and Child Information Sharing Scheme (CISS). The implementation of the MARAM framework has ensured that risk assessment and risk management approaches are embedded in practice across a broader range of community service programs beyond just family violence specialist services.

To effectively embed MARAM within an organisation takes a dedicated and highly skilled and experienced resource. FSV has provided no recognition, resource or funding to support organisations like Quantum to embed MARAM. This lack of recognition and support is reflected in the differing levels of quality training that was provided initially to no formal



commitment to providing ongoing high quality training to ensure a robust and well informed and trained sector.

Significant progress has also been made in building knowledge, raising awareness and engaging the community on family violence prevention through initiatives such as Respect Victoria - an independent statutory authority focused on the primary prevention of family violence and violence against women.⁵

Quantum commends the Victorian Government on advancing the Royal Commission's recommendations to date. Some important changes to the family violence service system that still need to occur are discussed in the next chapter.

Looking forward – what is still required in the family violence system

Focus on permanent housing solutions

There are still insufficient safe housing options for women and children experiencing family violence in Gippsland. This places women and children at ongoing risk from either choosing to remain in the violent home or being caught in a system where they are waiting for some form of secure housing. Quantum currently has four clients continuing to stay in violent relationships due to lack of adequate housing support and a number of others in temporary crisis accommodation due to a lack of other options. Temporary accommodation is not only expensive and unsustainable long term, but significantly reduces the adult and children victim/ survivor's ability to move past the experience of being subject to violence, due to being confined to basic accommodation, often with limited facilities including some with virtually no kitchen facilities.

Quantum applauds the Victorian Government on the recent investment to construct a new Family Violence housing refuge in Morwell Victoria. The refuge includes in-house support and after-hours service provision, providing people experiencing family violence with the ability to more quickly access safe accommodation, holistic support, advocacy, and therapeutic supports in time of crisis. However, Quantum believes that there needs to be more permanent housing for women at the point of exit from the refuge. Crisis accommodation can only be effectively managed where there are appropriate, affordable and accessible exit options. This is not the case across Gippsland. Currently Quantum's crisis funded programs are spending a significant portion of their allocated brokerage on crisis accommodation in local motels and boarding houses. Lack of appropriate cooking facilities in crisis accommodation (such as motels) keeps victims/survivors in financial disadvantage because they are often observed using their money on takeaway, which can be more expensive than cooking and storing their

⁵ Ibid.



own food. This cycle causes further disadvantage and financial vulnerability, which is further impacted by increased disconnection to family, community and self, with a negative impact to mental health as a common outcome. As a result, Quantum believes that the current practice, brought on by insufficient resources, of exiting family violence clients from the refuge into temporary accommodation such as motels is not only inappropriate but unsustainable.

In addition, our service delivery and ability to provide effective accommodation support to people escaping family violence is impacted by the growing trend of Melbourne support services placing their clients in crisis accommodation in the Gippsland region. This has the impact of forcing our clients to move to even more rural remote settings, with the associated impacts of limited to non-existent employment opportunities, minimal (if any) public transport networks, and barriers in accessing support services through geographic isolation. For a lot of women to get secure housing or to maintain distance from their abuser means they have to leave their communities, their friends, and their work—and there is still no guarantee that alternative sustainable and secure housing can be identified or sourced. For those who want to leave the area, the likelihood of being supported by Melbourne based services and accommodation is extremely low.

Private rental is often out of their reach for those victims/survivors reliant on government income support such as pensions and benefits, specifically the JobSeeker payment. This means they may have extraordinarily limited options for accommodation which includes accessing refuge supports, couch surfing with friends and family, or staying with relatives which can be subject to limited privacy and often cramped living conditions, particularly when children are involved. We often have clients from whom children have been removed by Child Protection temporarily due to family violence exposure, women then exit the relationship and are faced with Parenting Payment being reduced to JobSeeker (as the children are not in their care). Women can only have their children returned once they obtain an appropriate accommodation, however it is literally impossible to afford appropriately sized, safe and secure housing on the JobSeeker payment.

Further, our organisation often supports clients who are required by authorities to pay for damages to the properties caused by their perpetrators, resulting in financial disadvantage as well as potential problems when applying for future private rental opportunities. There are also serious systemic limitations on financial support that can be offered to assist tenants when their name is not on the tenancy or, contrastingly, only their name is on the tenancy. We believe more reforms are necessary with Residential Tenancies Authority and Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal to broaden their understanding and empathy for the complexities involved with family violence. This includes Quantum's strong encouragement for crisis refuge accommodation to be exempt from clauses contained in the Residential Tenancy Act.



Quantum strongly holds the view that time limited exemption on temporary accommodation including refuges should be exempt from the residential tenancies act – regulation 6 and 13.

Defining refuge accommodation according to a set time period ignores the function crisis accommodation provides in the family violence sector. This places the focus on the accommodation as a housing option when it is in fact part of a service function. The accommodation supports the delivery of a service to address risk and safety concerns for women and children who have experienced family violence making the accommodation secondary to the service being provided. Family Violence services are not funded as residential rental providers and if they were expected to manage leases it would detract from their ability to provide the services they are funded for and impact and change the relationship with women seeking safety. In providing a trauma informed, recovery centred service this would be inappropriate. Linking refuge accommodation to leases implies a more permanent tenure within a service system funded as a short term crisis response. Leases would result in blocking up a system already in high demand and leave women and children at risk of serious harm.

Consider complexities of dealing with family violence in rural and remote areas

The Victorian Government needs to take into consideration the complexity of dealing with family violence in rural and remote areas. Aside from significant limitations in available housing and associated options, many other services are also out of reach for our clients such as family violence counselling, mental health services or disability supports. Not only is this assistance very limited in regional Victoria, it is usually coupled with unacceptably long waiting times or limited intake criteria, such as only being accessible through other means (for example, accessing mental health supports only if the client is on National Disability Insurance Scheme - NDIS).

This has resulted in some of our clients with mental health issues not receiving the required support or adequate supports being retracted; clients returning to alcohol and other drugs to cope with precarious mental health and children being removed, all of which in turn further exacerbates mental health. The need for a specialist lens around family violence and mental health is crucial in providing ongoing holistic support to clients and managing the risk and safety. The Government's Enhanced Capacity Building Mental Health and Alcohol and other Drug Family Violence Advisor phase 2 funding did not include funding for Family Violence Specialist input. The funded organisations in Gippsland providing these roles from an Alcohol and Other Drugs and Mental Health lens report the absence of family violence specialist in their work is hindering the success and any measurable outcome. Unfortunately, family violence funding for this initiative was not continued past phase 1.

In addition, NDIS created substantial gaps for people seeking help. Only a very small proportion of the estimated 150,000 people experiencing mental illness each year are actually



eligible for the NDIS.⁶ NDIS implementation issues are impacting on current and prospective participants' access to adequate psychosocial supports. There is an unclear delineation between the NDIS and the mental health system at the operational level resulting in gaps in service provision and duplication of services.⁷ The threshold to pass the assessment to access NDIS for our clients is often too high, requiring a permanent condition, leaving many unable to access the treatment they require. Meanwhile, family violence continues to be one of the leading contributors to disability and illness among Victorian women aged 15 to 44 years.⁸ Women with disabilities are more likely to experience family violence and for more extended periods of time. There are many barriers that prevent them from seeking help, including reliance on the abuser, fear and service gaps in disability and women's agencies. It is essential for the Government to invest in training and additional resources for practitioners to adequately address complex needs of women with disabilities.

Continue community education

Quantum commends the success of community campaigns such as 'Respect Women: Call It Out' which focused on the prevention of family violence, including violence against women and active bystander intervention. We believe that responding to family violence is a shared responsibility. We recommend advertising The Orange Door and Safe Steps on television and make it clear to women that it is safe to report.

Focus on dissolving siloes

Currently the progression of the reforms has structural shortcomings. We believe that improvements could be made to the operations of the FSV which was established in July 2017 to progress towards delivery of the family violence reforms. From our experience, FSV mostly operates in silo (both within FSV and external to FSV) when implementing the reforms. Adopting a more collaborative, consultative and equal partnership approach in engaging with other agencies, particularly with Domestic Violence Victoria, Not To Violence and the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare could largely benefit the implementation. Any future evaluation seeking input from practitioners should not be coordinated, facilitated or in the presence of FSV staff. This continues to occur when an individual The Orange Door staff partake in an annual evaluation. Options for honest feedback is limited as the funder is either facilitating the feedback sessions or is in the room.

⁶ Mental Health Victoria, *Saving Lives Saving Money* (2018) https://www.mhvic.org.au/images/PDF/Policy/FINAL_Saving_Lives_Money_Brochure_HR.pdf at 1 July 2020.

⁷ Victoria State Government, *Productivity Commission mental health inquiry* https://www.pc.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0015/241341/sub483-mental-health.pdf at 24 June 2020.

⁸ VicHealth, *Violence Against Women in Australia: An overview of research and approaches to primary prevention* (2017) <https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/media-and-resources/publications/violence-against-women-in-australia-research-summary> at 22 July 2020.



Continue to invest in the workforce training

Additional training continues to be required within the sector and other services. We have observed an increase in training in other services about the impacts of family violence and trauma but believe more is required. Particular gaps identified by our workforce are around judicial powers and decision-making, as well as the role of the police in relation to guidelines and responsibility in terms of responding to family violence. Being able to understand the responses of police and court systems will enable better service delivery for our clients and provide opportunity for workers to have a stronger understanding around family violence responses.

Ongoing training around mental health would also be beneficial for workers to further their intersectional lens in the context of complex mental health and the correlation with family violence, as well as training on how to appropriately and safely engage with children who have experienced family violence.

Reform Family Law system

Presently there are serious financial barriers, as well as a lack of information, in accessing justice system for victim/survivors. We have clients who have been unable to access Legal Aid funded lawyers to help prevent the removal of their children from their care. Usually this is ascertained to the lack of access to legal supports under Legal Aid. It is also important to broaden Magistrates' understanding and empathy for the complexities involved with family violence, particularly the difficulties of lengthy drawn-out court proceedings in relation to family law matters or property settlements. This has negative impacts on the mental health of victims/survivors and their children, reduces their capacity to move past the violence when they are in a legal 'limbo', as well as enabling perpetrators further perpetrate violence in this time.

Further, we strongly recommend that Australia should follow United Kingdom and other countries in making 'coercive control' towards an intimate partner or family member a chargeable offence. The offence involves a pattern of domination and intimidation towards a family member that may include emotional or financial abuse, isolation and other forms of abuse, but need not include physical or sexual violence.⁹ Serious consequences can flow from non-physical abuse and that behaviour should therefore be criminalised. Controlling behaviour can strip a person of their autonomy and self-worth and can make it difficult for the victim to recognise that they are being abused and to leave the relationship.¹⁰

⁹ Fernanda Dahlstrom, *Should Coercive Control Be An Offence?* (2020) <https://www.gotocourt.com.au/legal-news/coercive-control-offence/> at 14 July 2020.

¹⁰ Ibid.



Another issue we are often faced with is the inability to access the release date of imprisoned perpetrators due to their privacy. Our clients fear that imprisonment is often just an ineffective deterrent without a heavy focus on changing the attitudes of perpetrators and believe that the release date should be available to them in order to adequately assess their safety. Notably, during the COVID-19 pandemic, we have had many client's perpetrators being released prematurely from prison, again without notice. We recommend that there should be a risk register for highly violent perpetrators, similar to sex offenders registers.

Lastly, it is essential that the Victorian Government moves away from an adversarial system that often replicates the power imbalance and dynamics of family violence.¹¹ The need to produce evidence of family violence in family law matters continues to deter victim/survivors from raising family violence in court proceedings. Some victim/survivors may not have supporting evidence, such as a protection order. For many there are fears of not-being believed and the combative nature of the adversarial system deter them from disclosing and encourage them to settle for unsafe and unfair outcomes. Instead of the hostile nature of family law processes, we need a coordinated trauma-informed response to the diverse and intersecting needs of family law system users, especially victim/survivors of family violence. It is therefore essential to consider whether the Family Court can implement alternative decision-making models.

Increase perpetrator interventions programs

There needs to be an increased focus on accountability of perpetrators of family violence through more services being made available. We believe it is crucial that perpetrators are supported and monitored by case managers as well as further encouraged/ordered to participate in specific therapeutic supports. It is essential not only for their accountability but also to reduce further perpetration of family violence.

Men's behaviour change program is a great initiative to begin the change process in men's behaviour and provide a forum for exploring and challenging beliefs, acknowledging their violence and learn strategies to stop it. However, the program remains controversial. Firstly, while participation in these programs can be voluntary, majority are court-mandated. This is a significant issue in itself as the perpetrator is not attending on their own will, and the driver for change is therefore absent. Secondly, there is a lack of longitudinal research on the effectiveness of the program and issues with how these programs are evaluated - differences in what is measured (attendance versus demonstrated changes in attitudes), how change is

¹¹ Domestic Violence Victoria, *Australian Law Reform Commission Review of the Family Law System: Discussion Paper* (2018) https://www.alrc.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/family-law_284_domestic_violence_victoria.pdf at 16 July 2020.



measured (by self-reporting versus formal measurement tools), and a lack of follow-up to measure long-term change.¹² Evidence is required as to whether it has major impact.

It is also critical to have the breadth of specialist perpetrator interventions and support to respond to perpetrators with their complex needs and from diverse cohorts. Counselling is available for men who are victim/survivors through Victim of Crime Support agencies, however there is no specialist counselling for men who are perpetrators.

Men's behaviour change programs are targeted at men already engaging in abusive behaviours. It is essential to focus on early intervention and prevention, and challenge social norms through education. More programs are also needed to stop intergenerational family violence with a particular focus on adolescence and young children displaying violent behaviours are necessary.

Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

Agency response

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted how service providers support people experiencing family violence.¹³ As shutdown commenced in March 2020, Quantum like many other agencies, was required to review operations with the view of managing risk, keeping the workforce safe and providing continued high level of service to clients of the service. In response, the organisation formed an Emergency Response Team, which consisted of Executive Team Members (Finance, People Learning and Culture and Client Service Delivery), key management representation (Quality and Risk, Innovation, Communications/Media, Service Stream Managers, Client Administration) all under the direction of the CEO. Part of the activity of the group was to guide organisational responses to a rapidly changing environment and identify key challenges, required responses and allocate accountability for managing activities.

The group focussed on moving toward providing a model of remote delivery, including the development of policy, procedures, training frameworks, supervision arrangements and risk management frameworks to support this significant shift in delivery practice.

The organisation was able to achieve successful flexible work strategies for almost all staff of the agency, including reception staff, administration staff, management and client service

¹² Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS), *Evaluation readiness, program quality and outcomes in men's behaviour change programs* (2019)

<https://www.anrows.org.au/project/evaluation-readiness-program-quality-and-outcomes-in-mens-behaviour-change-programs/> at 22 July 2020.

¹³ Monash University, *A bubble set to burst: Why urgent support must be given to domestic violence workers* (1 July 2020) <https://lens.monash.edu/@politics-society/2020/07/01/1380770/we-are-in-a-bubble-that-is-set-to-burst-why-urgent-support-must-be-given-to-domestic-violence-workers> at 6 July 2020.



delivery staff (case workers). This change provided the opportunity for our service delivery workers to conduct risk assessments, and undertake planning and case management with clients from their own homes.

Under the guidance of Quantum's dedicated Emergency Response Team the agency developed and implemented a customised Business Continuity Plan response, which included the introduction of a specialist Crisis Response Team (CRT) to provide emergency supports on an as needs basis, within tight risk management protocols.

Referral Impacts

The referral pattern observed for family violence victims/survivors within our service reduced significantly at the commencement of the pandemic. It is believed that this was as a result of enforced isolation and the constant presence of perpetrators in the victims' homes and the lack of opportunity to escape, particularly in families who were subject to job loss.

Since that initial reduction in referrals, we are now observing a dramatic increase in numbers. More concerning is the escalation of the severity of risk from these referrals, with the agency participation in the Risk Assessment Management Panel (RAMP) reporting an increase in the number of clients at high risk of fatality. The interpretation of this trend by our agency is that the opportunity for victims to escape their circumstance has been restricted by the COVID-19 pandemic, but the level of danger has escalated to the point that they require increased support and safety planning in order to protect themselves and their children.

Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) women and children experiencing family violence are also particularly vulnerable during pandemic due to over reliance on the perpetrator to inform them about the coronavirus. We have noticed a new narrative in Police referrals of perpetrators using the virus as a form of control, threatening women that if they go out they will get the virus and give it to their children, and that Child Protection removes children from women who have contracted coronavirus because they put their children at risk. It is essential for the Victorian Government to ramp up its coronavirus measures to support vulnerable CALD women and children and properly engage with them about COVID-19 to ensure they are receiving official coronavirus advice and have appropriate literature and resources available.

Further, due to financial pressures, family tensions and a heightened sense of uncertainty and anxiety during the pandemic we are observing families not previously known to the sector reaching out for our services, citing COVID-19 verbal arguments leading to significant family violence. While the drivers of family violence such as gender inequity, power control, coercion would have been present before the pandemic, COVID-19 has become another tool/factor of the family violence. Quantum believes that social media and advertising campaigns linking COVID-19 and family violence would be beneficial.



While the agency has seen an increase in demand for our services, the lack of face-to-face contact and the constant presence of perpetrators in victims' homes makes delivery of our support more difficult and complex. The agencies Client Response Team was formed to ensure a collective specialist response to Quantum's most vulnerable clients during periods of pandemic allowing for safe practice in delivering most needed outreach to clients.

Funding

We commend Victorian Government's investment in short-term accommodation for people experiencing family violence who do not feel safe isolating or recovering from coronavirus at home. An extra \$20.2 million aims to help family violence services to meet the expected increase in demand and provide critical help to clients.¹⁴ As restrictions begin to ease in Victoria, it is essential that funding and resources continues to increase to ensure the sector can meet the demands of the increasing number of women seeking help from violence. Additional funding is also necessary to support women who are unable to access technology and are, hence, severely disadvantaged.

Quantum service delivery staff have observed that clients reaching out to us have more complex issues as a result of the pandemic, in particular with significant mental health issues or homelessness. This has caused our case managers to work outside of their role. This is likely related to the increased funding in family violence sector and not others which has been a double-edged sword.

As previously stated, the underlying repercussions of accessible and affordable housing and lack of supports, particularly in mental health space, is evident in the current support period trends. While many of our employees were able to adopt new self-care strategies developed during the lockdown, we strongly believe that investments are now needed to ensure the health and wellbeing of support workers now and into the future. Our employees have reported they have missed the support of being together in the office and stressed the importance of peer support in the sector.

Current and Anticipated Workforce Impact

During the pandemic clients have demonstrated the need for additional and complex contact. This has included the requirement for longer and more intense support, with additional assessment considerations (such as escalated risk linked to COVID19 isolation in addition to health concerns), as well as the introduction of COVID19 screening questions and risk

¹⁴ Sisters of the Good Samaritan of the Order of St Benedict, *Funding boost for family violence services during COVID-19 crisis* (April 2020) <https://www.goodsams.org.au/article/funding-boost-for-family-violence-services-during-covid-19-crisis/> at 4 July 2020.



management protocols. The impact of not being able to conduct face to face contact has resulted in increased paperwork and administration, and impacted the dynamic in creating a rapport and trust with the client, which now requires a longer timeframe to establish. It is anticipated at the end of the pandemic restrictions that there is likely to be a significant impact on the health and wellbeing of the workforce, in particular, the potential risk associated with mental health impacts that will be seen across the sector.

In addition, there are concerns in the context of risks associated with vicarious trauma that may be compounded by the workers' inability to remove themselves from the work environment while operating from their homes. This is currently being addressed by our agency through the use of a complex wellbeing strategy and various targeted support activities, however, it is possible that a consideration will need to be made across the entire workforce to best address this issue across the sector.