

## Barwon Area Integrated Family Violence Committee

### Submission to the Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor

July 2020

#### Barwon Area Integrated Family Violence Committee

The Barwon Area Integrated Family Violence Committee (BAIFVC) provides leadership, advocacy and specialist expertise to strengthen, integrate and improve the family violence response system and help end family violence across Victoria's Barwon Area. The Barwon Area is defined by the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), and comprises four municipalities located to the south-west of metropolitan Melbourne. These are the City of Great Geelong, Colac-Otway Shire, Surf Coast Shire, and the Borough of Queenscliff.

#### **BAIFVC has representation from:**

- Women's specialist family violence & sexual assault service
- Men's specialist family violence service
- Family Safety Victoria
- Victoria Police
- Child & Family Violence Services Alliances
- Department of Health & Human Services
- Adolescent family violence service
- Dhelk Dja Regional Action Group
- Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation
- Community legal service
- Housing & homelessness service & network coordinator
- Health service
- Victim Assistance Program
- Victoria Legal Aid
- Organisation providing services to culturally & linguistically diverse communities
- Offender support service
- Family Relationship Centre
- Department of Justice & Community Safety
- Department of Education & Training
- Victoria Police

BAIFVC has representation from specialist family violence services as well as broader cross-sector organisations and alliances whose work intersects with family violence response, early intervention and prevention. Committee members, including the BAIFVC Leadership Group, are all senior leaders involved in strengthening the family violence system and ending family violence in the Barwon Area.

BAIFVC is one of 14 regional family violence committees or partnerships that exist across Victoria. As local system governance structures, these committees or partnerships are integral to the success of the Victorian Government's current agenda to transform family violence under *Ending Family Violence: Victoria's plan for change*.

The BAIFVC is supported by an Independent Chair and a Principal Strategic Advisor. The BAIFVC meets quarterly and is guided by a Leadership Group that meets monthly. BAIFVC is well-placed to inform, influence and shape the priorities and directions of the state-wide family violence reform agenda as the Victorian Government implements initiatives from *Ending Family Violence* across Victoria.

The BAIFVC welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor's fourth and final report. Our submission attempts to focus on broader system issues, rather than specific service or operational issues. A number of BAIFVC member organisations have also made their own submissions. A list of BAIFVC member organisations is attached (Attachment 1).

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

## 1.1 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?

Major changes identified include:

**Orange Doors** The introduction of the Orange Door and the creation of a centralised intake and triaging point for family violence and child well-being in Barwon has changed the way in which women, children and perpetrators access support services. The Barwon Orange Door has been operating successfully for over two years. (It was one of the first Orange Doors to be established, opening in May 2018).

**MARAM** The introduction of the framework is creating a shared understanding of risk assessment and management, assisting professionals to take appropriate risk management action, and developing a clear understanding of the responsibilities of other parts of the system to coordinate and implement safety and accountability planning. If the aims of the MARAM framework are achieved, it will make an enormous difference to the safety and well-being of victim survivors through effective identification, assessment and management of family violence risk.

**Information Sharing Schemes** are enabling greater sharing of information across the service sector to keep the perpetrator in view and inform risk assessment and management.

**Central Information Point (CIP)** is providing access to valuable risk information on perpetrators which has improved risk assessment and safety planning for women and their children.

**Family Violence Flexible Support Packages** have been critical to meeting the immediate needs of women and children in a timely way, enhancing their safety, minimising disruption, creating stability, and supporting their recovery. The availability of FSPs has indisputably led to better outcomes for women and children. As one worker stated, having access to FSPs is an *“extremely important and crucial element in keeping women safe. It allows caseworkers to effectively meet clients’ safety needs whilst also efficiently and effectively addressing their needs as outlined in their case plan.”*

**Workforce capacity and capability building initiatives** such as the *Strengthening Health Responses to Family Violence* and *Mental Health and Alcohol and Other Drugs Capacity Building Project* are enhancing the capability of non-specialist workforces to identify and respond to family violence. These types of initiatives are critical to achieving the intent of the MARAM Framework in establishing a system-wide shared understanding of family violence, and assisting professionals to identify and assess family violence risk effectively to keep victim survivors safe, and to keep perpetrators accountable. These initiatives must be adequately resourced and supported to continue.

**Victoria Police family violence response.** Victoria Police’s response has significantly improved since the RCFV. Key initiatives have included the introduction of senior dedicated family violence roles, intelligence analysts, family violence-specific training officers, changes to family violence investigation units and the new Code of Practice for the Investigation of Family Violence. In Geelong, the FVIU is co-located at the MDC which also includes the Sexual Assault and Family Violence Centre (specialist family violence and sexual assault service).

## 2. Looking forward – what is still required in the family violence system?

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

In addition to the responses contained in 2.2 below, the following issues remain outstanding.

**Capturing the client journey** There is a need to capture the client journey through the system to deliver better understandings, insights and shifts in our collective thinking. Investigating the client journey can help to bring to life the statistics and create human-centred insights to inspire new service delivery ideas, and create more focused, supportive and responsive practice. The BAIFVC has identified this as a key strategic priority for its work over the next three years.

**Service integration** Clearer practice guidance on what service integration is across the child and family, and family violence services is required.

**Greater focus on data and evidence** There is a need to improve the capacity and capability to collate and utilise data and evidence to inform decision making, planning, improvement, advocacy and communications to deliver a truly integrated family violence system in Barwon. The implementation of the RICKIE (Regional Integration Committees Key Information & Evidence) Project will hopefully assist with this.

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

Whilst it is acknowledged that we are only part-way through *Ending Family Violence, Victoria's plan for Change* 10-year plan, the following issues have been identified as requiring more or ongoing attention:

**Voice of victim survivors** Greater priority needs to be placed on consulting with, and listening to, victim survivors. This is critical to the success of both the implementation and monitoring of how the reforms are landing locally. However, family violence services would need to be adequately resourced to undertake this important work. The state-wide Victim Survivor Advisory Council (VSAC) is a model that could potentially be replicated locally, but would require appropriate funding. It is well-known that VSAC requires significant resourcing and effort from government; a local VCAC would similarly need to be financially supported.

**Long-term recovery** Further resourcing of family violence services is required to support women and children post the initial crisis response and facilitate their long term recovery eg therapeutic counselling, housing, mental health support. Much of the focus has been on entry into the service system eg roll-out of Orange Doors, but less focus has been on the journey to recovery. Whilst some therapeutic initiatives have been funded, greater effort is needed to support victim survivors in their recovery if we are to fully realise the vision of the family violence reforms. As an immediate priority, increased resourcing for family violence counselling is required to reduce the current long wait-lists.

**MARAM** Whilst the implementation of MARAM is described as a 'maturity model', there remains a significant way to go to embed the framework across the service system. Delays in the distribution of key guidance documents (eg MARAM Organisational Embedding Guide) have impeded the implementation of MARAM. The perpetrator and adolescent family violence practice guides and tools are yet to be released. The Family Violence Foundational Knowledge e-learn module has never eventuated and appears to have disappeared from government MARAM advice. The MARAM training has had a mixed history - initial training was poorly

received. However, more recent training modules are sound and have been well-received but continue to be over-subscribed. In general, there has been a lack of considered sequencing of MARAM implementation.

**Information Sharing Schemes** There remains work to be done to increase the capacity and capability of workforces to use the information sharing schemes. More training is needed to assist practitioners across all sectors to confidently use the schemes. In terms of capacity building, for some tier 3 sectors in Barwon (eg mental health) responsibility for responding to information sharing requests rests with a sole position. This is having significant impact on workload, and is impeding the embedding of the scheme across the entire workforce.

**Identification of family violence** There remains a need to increase the broader communities' understanding of family violence. The current MARAM training does not provide for the delivery face-to-face training to the general community on how to recognise and respond to family violence. In response to this gap, the BAIFVC has chosen to fund and design *Family Violence and Sexual Assault – Understanding and Responding* training across Barwon in 2020/2021. This training is similar to the de-funded Identifying Family Violence training that Family Violence Regional Integration Committees delivered for many years prior the current family violence reforms. It will target members of the broader community and students. The training will build participants' awareness and understanding of the causes and issues surrounding sexual assault and family violence and to develop skills and confidence in effectively identifying and appropriately responding to disclosures.

**Family violence and sexual assault** Collaboration (in terms of service delivery and professional development), and possible unification, between family violence and sexual assault services requires greater attention and development (Recommendations 31 and 32). Recommendation 31 is recorded on the RCFV acquittal website as still 'in progress' despite the timeline being 'within 2 years'. (It is noted that the timeline for Recommendation 32 was 'within 5 years').

**Specialist Family Violence Courts** Roll-out of additional specialist family violence courts across the state is required. Barwon does not have a Specialist Family Violence Court and there is very strong support for one in Barwon. Many services have reported shortcomings with the operation of the Magistrate's Courts in Geelong and Colac, both in terms of magistrates' (poor) understanding of family violence, physical layout, operation, outcomes for victim survivors, and accountability for perpetrators. This is of significant concern and needs to be addressed as an urgent priority.

**Interface between Orange Doors and MDCs** As part of the development and operation of Orange Doors, further consideration needs to be given to how Orange Doors interact with existing MDCs. We understand this work is underway but progress has been slow - this work this should be prioritised.

**Housing** Lack of both crisis, as well as safe and affordable housing, in Barwon remains extremely problematic. There is simply a lack of supply of appropriate housing for both victim survivors and perpetrators. Additional capital investment to deliver more social and public housing across Barwon is required – this is an urgent priority.

**Research** more resourcing is needed to conduct research into priority cohorts eg women with disabilities, CALD women, aboriginal women and rural women.

**Perpetrator services** Greater placed-based resourcing for men's case management and men's groups is required eg Caring Dads.

**Diverse communities** Greater collaboration and engagement with diverse communities (eg CALD and Aboriginal services, LGBTIQ, people with disabilities, rural women) is required to provide culturally and service-appropriate responses to both victim survivors and perpetrators.

**Responses to trauma for children** Greater resourcing of evidence-based programs to address trauma in children exposed to family violence is needed.

**Prevention and early intervention** More resourcing of prevention activities to develop a whole-of-community approach to achieving gender equality. Programs and initiatives to address the social determinants of violence against women are needed, as well as bystander training for community members.

**Reform governance structure** Further attention and consideration is required on the governance structure for the reforms, particularly the acquittal of Recommendation 193. The RCFV acquittal website lists Recommendation 193 as completed. Whilst this may be true for the high-level, state-wide structures such as the creation of Family Violence Steering Committee, VSAC and FSV, the role and inclusion of Family Violence Regional Integration Committees (which already existed prior to the RCFV) in the governance structure remains unresolved. In its chapter on Sustainable and Certain Governance, the RCFV identified FVRICs as a key component of the governance structure. Family Violence Regional Integration Committees (FVRICs) play a key role in overseeing the implementation of the reforms locally, and ensuring local service systems are integrated. To date, this important and unique role has not been meaningfully embedded in the state-wide governance structure. Whilst some progress has been made with the creation of the State-wide Family Violence Integration Advisory Committee (a group comprising the FVRICs Principal Strategic Advisors across the state), more work on the 'vertical integration' of FVRICs into the state-wide governance structure is required. In designing how FVRICs will be meaningfully included in the governance structure, a review of the equitable resourcing of FVRICs should also be undertaken to address inadequate funding levels, and rectify the funding disparities that exist between FVRICs.

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

**Roll-out of Orange Doors** In planning the future implementation of Orange Doors across the state, FSV and partner agencies must ensure that appropriate planning and processes are in place to support operation prior to opening. This issue has been identified in previous FVRIM's reports but nevertheless should be restated.

**Shared, collective approach** There needs to be a greater emphasis on facilitating and supporting local partnerships, rather than just focusing on the process of implementation.

**Measuring the impact of the reforms** There is a need give further consideration to the shared measurement of long-term outcomes (ie monitoring through time), and a mechanism to demonstrate the impact of the family violence reforms, system integration and improvement efforts (ie evaluation and learning).

**A shared, collective approach to local implementation** The role of Family Safety Victoria is to both undertake key reform policy and program development work, but also act as the implementation arm of government. FSV is essentially a central agency with no presence regionally (other than in Orange Doors where their role is operational). Conversely, DHHS has regional offices across Victoria, yet appear to have had limited involvement to date in supporting or monitoring the implementation of the reforms in local areas. Making better use of DHHS local offices and the local expertise they possess could potentially assist FSV to better gauge how the reforms are landing 'on the ground'.

Similarly, FSV could make better use of regional governance structures, particularly Family Violence Regional Integration Committees (FVRICs). The RCFV clearly stated that FVRICs should be part of the governance

structure 'for implementing the Commission's recommendations and overseeing systemic improvements in family violence policy' (RCFV Summary, 2016, p.97). FVRICs have broad cross-sector representation and are very well-placed to perform this role. They have considerable knowledge and expertise about the local service system. FSV could capitalise more on the unique value and role FVRICs can play in supporting the implementation of the family violence reforms at the local level. (See also response on Governance above).

**Continuing to monitor reform implementation and impact** With the Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor in its final year, it is critical that the function of monitoring the implementation and impact of the reforms, and the associated accountability this brings, continues. *Ending Family Violence* is a 10-year plan. To lose the independent monitoring function not even five years in to the 10 year timeframe could impact the likelihood the vision of *Ending Family Violence* will be achieved. If not performed by the FVRIM, a mechanism to continue the important function of monitoring the implementation of the reforms must be created and performed elsewhere.

The BAIFVC has identified this issue as a key priority in its Strategic Plan 2020-2021. We have set ourselves the task of exploring what a local reform implementation monitor function that routinely checks the family violence system would look like for the Barwon Area. We would appreciate the opportunity to discuss this idea with the FVRIM's office, particularly in relation to the lessons learned from the FVRIM after five years of operation, and how we might potentially replicate this function locally.

### 3. Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

The BAIFVC has identified the need to capture the Barwon service system's response during the COVID-19 pandemic as a key priority. We have connected with a research team at Monash University and are promoting participation in their research project *Responding to the 'shadow pandemic': practitioner views on the nature of and response to violence against women in Victoria, Australia during the COVID-19 restrictions*. A survey of family violence practitioners was conducted in May this year. We asked Monash University to extract Barwon data from this survey and compile a report on Barwon practitioners' responses which they generously agreed to do. **A copy of this report is attached (Attachment 2).**

The BAIFVC has identified the issue of responding to emergencies, such as the COVID-19 pandemic or the recent summer bushfires, as a key priority. To this end, we have included the development of an Emergency Management Plan for the Barwon Area in our 2020-2023 Strategic Plan. This will encompass consideration of how we ensure an integrated system response to family violence in the context of climate-related disasters, public health emergencies and other unforeseeable events.

### 4. General Comments

We thank you for considering our submission and look forward to the Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor's final report in 2021.