

Monitoring Victoria's family violence reforms

Service response for perpetrators and people using violence within the family

January 2023



Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners

The Victorian Government proudly acknowledges Victorian Aboriginal people as the First Peoples and Traditional Owners and custodians of the land and water on which we rely.

We acknowledge and respect that Aboriginal communities are steeped in traditions and customs built on an incredibly disciplined social and cultural order. This social and cultural order has sustained up to 60,000 years of existence.

We acknowledge that Aboriginal communities includes both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in Victoria.

We acknowledge the ongoing leadership role of the Aboriginal community in addressing and preventing family violence and join with our First Peoples to eliminate family violence from all communities.

Recognition of victims and survivors of family violence

We acknowledge the terrible impact of family violence on individuals, families and communities, and the strength and resilience of the children and adults who have, and are still, experiencing family violence.

We pay respects to those who did not survive and to their family members and friends.

Family violence services and support

If you are concerned for your safety or that of someone else, please contact the police in your state or territory, or call Triple Zero (000) for emergency assistance.

If you have experienced family violence and need support or assistance, contact:

- > National Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence hotline
1800 RESPECT (1800 737 732)
- > Safe Steps 24/7 family violence response line
1800 015 188
- > Victims of Crime helpline for men experiencing family violence
1800 819 817 (8am-11pm)
- > Rainbow Door specialist LGBTIQ+ support, advice and referral line
1800 729 367 (10am-5pm).

If you are concerned about your behaviour and its impact on your family, contact the Men's Referral Service on 1300 766 491 (24/7 service).

Accessibility

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This document is also available in HTML, PDF and Microsoft Word format on the [Monitor's website](#).

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Foreword

This is our final report and it looks at one of the most critical aspects of Victoria's family violence reforms. This topic is about interventions available for people who use violence and abusive behaviours – the perpetrators of family violence. Some victim survivors we met with had left abusive relationships but were deeply concerned that without strong intervention from the system, their abuser could and would go on to perpetrate family violence in new relationships. We know that there are other victim survivors who do not want to leave the relationship but need the violence to stop. Important work is happening to address the underlying issues that drive family violence, but change will take time. In the meantime, to reduce risk and protect victim survivors, people using family violence must be held accountable and pushed to access interventions that enable behaviour change.

I am often asked if behaviour change is ever possible. Having spent a career working with offenders, my answer is yes. While taking part in treatment programs requires commitment, taking responsibility and hard work, help is available. Giving up on perpetrators is not an option, even though the work can be challenging. While the evidence base for behaviour change is still in progress, just making perpetrators attend programs is a powerful way to hold them to account with the prospect of developing insights that can promote change.

There has been much progress in the service response for perpetrators and this report highlights the range of programs and services offered. Unfortunately, prompt and timely access to services is not always available. This means there are missed opportunities for intervention and an undermining of efforts. It is despairing for victim survivors, law enforcement and service providers, who must continue to endure harm and repeatedly respond to the damage caused. It also allows perpetrators to avoid responsibility for their actions. We met with many impressive service providers, and we commonly heard that too much of their efforts are directed to addressing the consequences of long wait times between referrals and program commencements. These professionals can and will make an impact but must be supported with direct pathways into their services.

The quality of this report would not have been possible without the expertise and thoughtful guidance of the specialists at No to Violence, who are leading the change to end male-perpetrated family violence in Australia. These experts in their field generously reviewed our draft report to ensure the use of proper language and that our report did not contain information that could support a perpetrator's abuse of systems, and most importantly contributed their vast knowledge on the subject.

We are also grateful to the many organisations and individuals who took part in our consultations to share their knowledge and experience to inform this report. Also, to the victim survivors who bravely shared their expertise on the subject despite the emotions this may have invoked.

Given this is the final report in this series I would like to acknowledge the work of the amazing team I have been blessed with along the journey. They have displayed outstanding skills, worked tirelessly to deliver on an ambitious program and conducted consultations with stakeholders and victim survivors with openness and sensitivity. I know their work is appreciated and they are rewarded as they see the changes that are made. I would also like to sincerely thank the team at Family Safety Victoria who have been collaborative and generous in their advice and guidance on our reports. Their support has been greatly appreciated.



Jan Shuard PSM
Family Violence Reform
Implementation Monitor

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Monitoring context

About the Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor

The Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor (the Monitor) was formally established in 2017 as an independent statutory officer after the Royal Commission into Family Violence released its report in 2016. The role is responsible for monitoring and reviewing how the government and its agencies deliver the family violence reforms as outlined in its 10-year implementation plan Ending Family Violence: Victoria's Plan for Change.

On 1 August 2019 former Victorian Corrections Commissioner Jan Shuard PSM was appointed as the Monitor under section 7 of the Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor Act 2016. Jan took up her role on 2 October 2019, replacing Tim Cartwright APM, the inaugural Monitor.

Monitoring approach

The Monitor's 2021–2022 plan was developed through a process of consultation with government and sector stakeholders. Topics were selected that aligned areas of greatest interest and concern to sector stakeholders, with reform implementation activity outlined in the government's second Family Violence Reform Rolling Action Plan 2020–2023. In determining topics, the focus was on areas where an independent perspective could add the most value to the ongoing reform effort.

The following topics were selected for monitoring throughout 2021 and 2022:

- > accurate identification of the predominant aggressor
- > family violence reform governance
- > early identification of family violence within universal services
- > primary prevention system architecture
- > Aboriginal-led primary prevention and early intervention
- > crisis response to recovery model for victim survivors
- > service response for perpetrators and people using violence within the family (this report).

In undertaking our monitoring, the following cross-cutting themes are examined across all topics :

- > intersectionality
- > children and young people
- > Aboriginal self-determination
- > priority communities such as LGBTIQ+, people with disabilities, rural and regional, criminalised women, older people and refugee and migrant communities
- > data, evaluation, outcomes and research
- > service integration.

Monitoring of the selected topics is based on information gathered through:

- > consultations with government agency staff
- > consultations with community organisations and victim survivor groups
- > site visits to service delivery organisations (where possible)
- > attendance at key governance and working group meetings
- > documentation from implementation agencies, including meeting papers and records of decisions by governance bodies
- > submissions made to the Monitor in 2020 by individuals and organisations (many of these are available in full on the [Monitor's website](#)).

Engaging victim survivors in our monitoring

We actively sought to include user experience and the voices of victim survivors in our monitoring. The office has worked with established groups including the Victim Survivors' Advisory Council, Berry Street's Y-Change lived experience consultants and the WEAVERs victim survivor group convened by the University of Melbourne.

Stakeholder consultation

The Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor would like to thank the following stakeholders for their time in monitoring this topic:

- > Anglicare Victoria
- > Australian Childhood Foundation
- > Australian Psychological Society
- > Boorndawan Willam Aboriginal Healing Services
- > Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare
- > Commission for Children and Young People
- > Coroner's Court of Victoria
- > Court Services Victoria
- > Dardi Munwurro
- > Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (including Family Safety Victoria)
- > Department of Justice and Community Safety
- > Dhelk Dja Koori Caucus
- > Djirra
- > Drummond Street Service
- > Eastern Metro Regional Family Violence Partnership
- > Economic Abuse Reference Group
- > Ethnic Council of Shepparton and District
- > FamilyCare
- > Financial Counselling Victoria
- > Fitzroy Legal Service
- > Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal Co Op
- > Gippsland Lakes Complete Health
- > Gippsland Women's Health
- > Goulburn Valley Centre Against Sexual Assault
- > Goulburn Valley Regional Integration Committee
- > inTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence
- > Mallee Family Care Community Legal Centre
- > La Trobe Community Health Service
- > Migrant Information Centre (Eastern Melbourne)
- > Monash Gender and Family Violence Prevention Centre
- > NEXUS Primary Health (Broadford)
- > No to Violence
- > Our Watch
- > Primary Care Connect (Shepparton)
- > Quantum Support Services
- > Relationships Australia Victoria
- > Rumbalara Cooperative
- > Safe and Equal
- > Safe and Equal Expert Advisory Panel (survivor advocates)
- > Safe Steps
- > Seniors Rights Victoria
- > South-East Monash Legal Service
- > Specialist Family Violence Court – Ballarat
- > Specialist Family Violence Court – Shepparton
- > Statewide Family Violence Integration Advisory Committee
- > Switchboard - Rainbow Door
- > The Orange Door – Bayside Peninsula
- > The Orange Door – Goulburn
- > The Orange Door - Inner Gippsland
- > The Salvation Army
- > Thorne Harbour Health
- > Uniting Kildonan
- > Uniting Vic Tas
- > Victim Survivors' Advisory Council
- > Victoria Legal Aid
- > Victoria Police
- > Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency
- > Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service
- > Victorian Alcohol and Drug Association
- > VincentCare Shepparton
- > WEAVERS lived experience group (University of Melbourne)
- > Western Integrated Family Violence Committee
- > Women with Disabilities Victoria
- > Women's Legal Service Victoria
- > Yoowinna Wurnalung Aboriginal Healing Service
- > Youth Affairs Council Victoria.

Introduction

It is critical to provide a strong response to perpetrators that holds them to account, keeps them in view and encourages behaviour change, to enable victim survivor safety and wellbeing. Our companion report 'Crisis Response to Recovery Model for Victim Survivors' examines the progress in establishing an effective service system that meets the needs of victim survivors at their point(s) of crisis and supports their journey towards recovery. At the same time considerable work is being undertaken to reduce the incidences of family violence by holding perpetrators to account and actively working to change their behaviour through targeted interventions. Through this report, we have examined implementation progress in establishing an effective and joined-up service pathway for perpetrators and people using violence within the family. This included reviewing the availability and diversity of responses and interventions, and whether the necessary framework is in place to ensure their effectiveness.

These interventions are designed to encourage perpetrators to take responsibility for committing family violence, representing a significant shift away from a victim-blaming mentality of 'why don't they just leave?' It was universally agreed that promoting victim survivors' safety must always be the central goal of any work that occurs with perpetrators, as the CEO of Safe and Equal affirms:

Our services hear from survivors all the time that they don't necessarily want the relationship to stop – they just want the violence to stop, and of course without perpetrator interventions, how's that going to happen? We're going to still need ongoing and sustainable victim survivor services because this issue continues to rise, as we can see, but we do need to up the game on perpetrator interventions.

As Family Safety Victoria clearly articulated to us, the reforms designed to address and respond to people who use violence within the family have sought to shift focus to the perpetrator in assessing and responding to family violence risk. The reforms have aimed to build a cohesive system in which government departments, the sector and the community work together to create shared accountability that stops perpetrators from committing further violence. Many parts of the system have a role in identifying family violence and holding perpetrators to account.

While we touch on the need for a system approach to perpetrator accountability in this report, our primary focus is on specialist responses that aim to drive behaviour change, with an emphasis on perpetrator interventions, and we accept that these aspects are part of a broader perpetrator reform program. We recognise that work occurring beyond the family violence and justice systems (including in child protection services, alcohol and drug treatment programs, mental health services and others) is not reflected in this report but is critical to establishing a true system-wide approach to perpetrator accountability.

Experts with a track record of delivering perpetrator interventions recognise that not all participants will be open to changing their behaviour, and that entrenched negative attitudes and patterns of abuse are unlikely to disappear within a 20-week program. However, they believe that a proportion of those who use family violence can be motivated to start to change, and that supporting that process – along with concerted primary prevention efforts – is the way to get to the root cause of family violence.

The system must therefore encourage perpetrators to engage with interventions that can help them take responsibility for, and therefore change, their behaviour. Simultaneously, whether or not perpetrators take responsibility for their behaviour, the system must hold perpetrators to account for their use of violence. These concepts are captured in Box 1.

There are different pathways into perpetrator interventions (see Figure 1). The main pathways follow police attendance at a family violence incident, whereby the perpetrator is referred to The Orange Door and may also become engaged with the justice system. These pathways can lead to direct referrals into perpetrator services, although we note that engagement is not always mandatory, and even when it is, there may be access barriers. Perpetrators may also engage in help-seeking behaviour in an effort to address their use of violence. We understand that this behaviour is rare among perpetrators but acknowledge that there is an important opportunity for the range of services a perpetrator might engage with to encourage engagement with interventions.

Box 1: Internal versus external perpetrator accountability

To date, two different forms of perpetrator accountability have generally been recognised. The first is accountability that is externally imposed, so that men who use violence are held to account. The main mechanism by which this occurs is through the justice system. Perpetrators may become involved with the justice system following criminal incidents of domestic and family violence, or breaches of civil protection orders. At present, mechanisms for perpetrators to be held to account for their actions are not consistently embedded elsewhere in wider human services systems.

The second form of perpetrator accountability is one that is internally developed through men’s behaviour change programs, with the intention that men who use violence develop a sense of responsibility and commit to being accountable to their partners and children. This form of accountability involves cultivating an internal sense of responsibility for behaviour, rather than imposing external sanctions.

Accountability and responsibility do not always co-occur – in fact, they often do not. Perpetrators can be held accountable without necessarily taking personal responsibility for their behaviour.

*Adapted from: Australia’s National Research Organisation for Women’s Safety (2020): **Improving accountability: The role of perpetrator intervention systems: Key findings and future directions** (Research to policy and practice, 20/2020), p. 2.*

Figure 1: Pathways into perpetrator interventions



Source: Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor

Statistics on perpetrators in Victoria

This section (and Figure 2 on the next page) offers a snapshot of key police statistics related to perpetrators in Victoria. We note that the real prevalence of family violence in Victorian communities may be much higher because police cannot identify every incident of family violence due to reluctance to report, victims not recognising their experience as family violence and neighbours being unlikely to overhear more subtle forms of family violence.

In the year 2020–21 Victoria Police recorded 93,440 family violence incidents involving 58,118 perpetrators. Seventy-five per cent of perpetrators were recorded as male, noting that the 25 per cent of perpetrators recorded as female will include cases where victim survivors were misidentified as perpetrators (see our previous report¹ on this issue) and 30 per cent were repeat offenders (recorded as the respondent in two or more family violence incidents within the year). Police observed that mental health issues were likely present in 37 per cent of family violence incidents, alcohol in 22 per cent and other drugs in 16 per cent. Although these statistics may be useful as risk indicators, it is equally important to note that many people in our community experience these challenges, but they do not use violence towards their families. Family violence affects all sectors of society in Victoria, with most incidents involving perpetrators who were neither observed to be suffering from mental health issues or visibly affected by alcohol and other drugs; and up to 70 per cent of incidents involved a perpetrator who was reportedly employed. For the first time, reported family violence incidents against former intimate partners are almost at the same level as those against current partners. A police stakeholder suggested that COVID-19 restrictions may explain this trend, with perpetrators sitting at home and dwelling on past relationships.

Language in this report

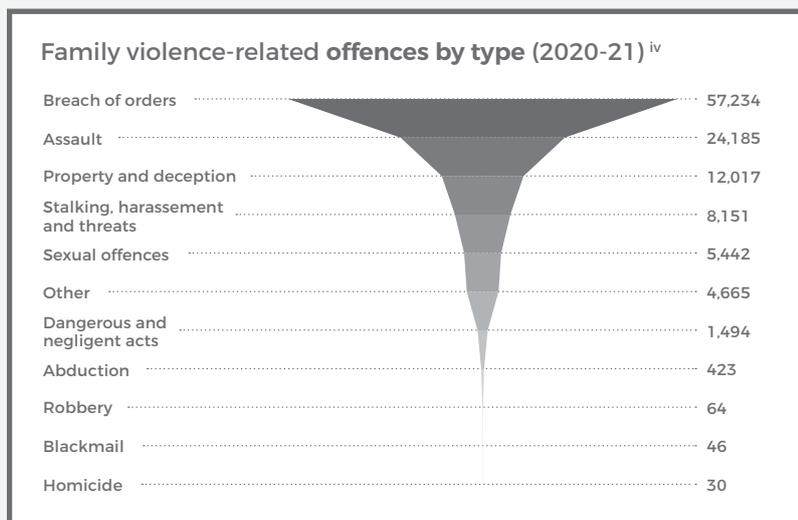
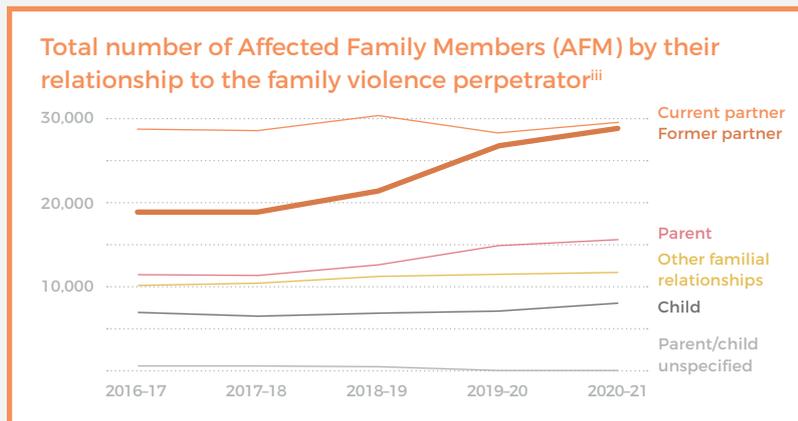
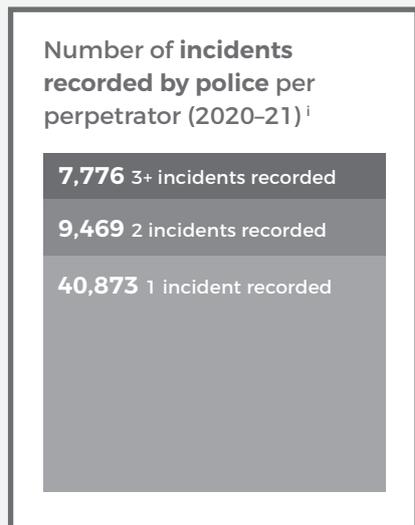
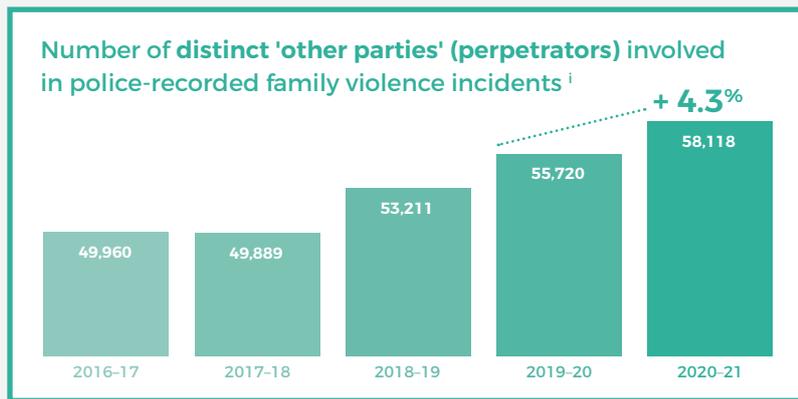
We recognise that some service providers and communities prefer the term ‘person using family violence,’ but for consistency with the Royal Commission, this report uses the term ‘perpetrator’ to describe people who use or have used family violence. Family violence is deeply gendered, with men making up the majority of perpetrators, while victim survivors are overwhelmingly women and children. Though acknowledging this reality, we employ the gender-neutral terms ‘perpetrator’ and ‘victim survivor’ throughout to be inclusive of all communities experiencing family violence.

Report scope and context

We acknowledge that the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the already high level of pressure on the family violence sector due to high demand and workforce shortages. Many of the new perpetrator services – such as the specialised practice area at The Orange Door, accommodation pilots and court-mandated men’s behaviour change programs – were rolled out amid multiple restrictions. The findings and suggestions in our report must be taken in this context.

The complex issue of adolescents who use violence within their families or intimate partner relationships is not included in the scope of this report. That is not to say it is not an important area; it is critically important and deserves attention in its own right. We suggest that this issue should be the subject of a future dedicated analysis.

Figure 2: Family violence perpetrators in Victoria



Data sources

- ⁱ Crime Statistics Agency, Family Violence Data Portal, Victoria Police Data Table 20, as at 18 July 2021
- ⁱⁱ Crime Statistics Agency, Family Violence Data Portal, Victoria Police Data Tables 1 & 6, as at 18 July 2021
- ⁱⁱⁱ Crime Statistics Agency, Family Violence Data Portal, Victoria Police Data Table 11, as at 18 July 2021
- ^{iv} Crime Statistics Agency, Family Violence Data Portal, Victoria Police Data Table 21, as at 18 July 2021
- ^v Crime Statistics Agency, Family Violence Data Portal, Victoria Police Data Table 16, as at 18 July 2021

Key findings and suggested actions

The landscape for perpetrator interventions has shifted significantly in Victoria since the Royal Commission. Perpetrator interventions are no longer limited to group men's behaviour programs, with a range of new programs being developed and trialled. Early evaluation data shows that many pilots – such as providing accommodation to keep perpetrators out of the victim survivor's home – are promising, but they have not yet been scaled up to meet the urgent level of need conveyed in our stakeholder consultations. More work on evaluation and research is needed to show which approaches are most effective in improving perpetrator accountability. However, due to the current level of unmet need, there is an imperative to act first and then adapt because developing the full evidence base on perpetrator interventions will take time.

Rather than being seen as taking funding away from victim survivors' services, perpetrator interventions are now accepted as a key part of the mainstream family violence response sector. Incorporating perpetrator practice into The Orange Door network reflects this key shift, but there are opportunities for improving the timeliness of referrals to avoid losing momentum at the crisis point when a client may be most motivated to change. Intake, assessment and decision-making processes need to be streamlined to ensure the focus is on referring clients into the right services at the right time.

We repeatedly heard during stakeholder consultations of the large demand and long waitlists for perpetrator programs, yet many initiatives – particularly pilots – had unfilled spots due to the lack of coordination of referrals and visibility of program availability and completions. This means that scarce resources and opportunities to promote perpetrator accountability are being lost due a lack of centralised information management. Better data on program completion and the attrition rates could also inform strategies on participant engagement and evidence on which programs represent a better return on investment. While attendance alone does not guarantee behaviour change, it provides an opportunity to engage and at a minimum to keep the perpetrator in view of the service system.

Stakeholders also drew our attention to the need to update the Men's Behaviour Change Minimum Standards to keep pace with new perpetrator initiatives and shifting modes of program delivery such as individual case management, perpetrator accommodation and online engagement. As practitioners and providers working with perpetrators need to be highly skilled to avoid collusion and unintended negative outcomes, stakeholders also urged the strengthening of Victoria's accreditation and oversight processes.

While there is a whole-of-government work program (articulated in the Family Violence Reform Rolling Action Plan 2020–2023) with a vision of a whole-of-system approach to driving perpetrator accountability, our report primarily reflects the main issues expressed in our stakeholder consultations, which largely focused on the implementation of perpetrator programs and The Orange Door. We suggest that more work is needed to operationalise the Rolling Action Plan's 'web of accountability' where the service system – and the broader community – joins forces to hold perpetrators to account and stop them from committing further violence.

Based on our analysis, we make the following high-level findings about the service response to perpetrators and people using violence. These findings form the main sections in this report:

1. There has been progress in increasing the focus on people using family violence, but more work is required to ensure a whole-of-system approach
2. The range of programmatic and service responses for people using violence has expanded, but availability is not able to meet demand or cater to the diversity of perpetrator need
3. Some coordination challenges need to be addressed to improve service responses to perpetrators
4. Continued efforts are needed to expand the evidence base for a robust suite of perpetrator interventions
5. Further development of Victoria's compliance and accreditation model is needed for men's behaviour change service providers to ensure robust program delivery.

In response to these matters, we propose the following actions (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Proposed actions to strengthen Victoria's service response to perpetrators

WHOLE-OF-SYSTEM APPROACH

1. Drive implementation of the perpetrator 'web of accountability', including by:
 - clearly articulating the roles of all parts of the 'web' and how they will work together to prevent perpetrators from committing further violence
 - implementing the MARAM perpetrator practice guidance.

ACCESS TO PERPETRATOR INTERVENTIONS

2. Invest in scaling up promising pilot interventions to meet demand, in particular perpetrator accommodation programs, responses for refugees and migrants and case management to prepare perpetrators for group programs

PERPETRATOR PRACTICE AT THE ORANGE DOOR

3. Streamline the intake/assessment process at The Orange Door to focus on referring perpetrators to the right services at the right time.

STANDARDS, MONITORING AND COMPLIANCE

4. Convene an independent expert advisory group to provide ongoing advice to the government on best practices and establish an accreditation and compliance model for perpetrator program providers.
5. Update the Men's Behaviour Change Minimum Standards to reflect the current range of perpetrator interventions and best practices.

COORDINATION AND DATA

6. Establish a centralised database for perpetrator interventions to give referrers and decision-makers access to data about demand, available placements and participant attrition/completions. Ensure that appropriate data governance from the outset to enable monitoring and sharing of information pertinent to evaluations and policy decisions across Victorian Government agencies.

What did the Royal Commission say and what has changed since?

The Royal Commission found that ‘measures targeted at holding perpetrators to account and reducing the use and severity of violence make an important contribution to the overall objective of keeping victims safe’² but that there was insufficient breadth and diversity of perpetrator interventions available in Victoria.

Most specifically related to a need for a collaborative response to perpetrators, the Royal Commission stated that:

*Improving perpetrator interventions should go beyond the mere joining-up of services. What is also required is a sense of collective responsibility across all relevant government departments and agencies, not just specialist services. Our approach must incorporate streamlined and comprehensive risk assessment and management practices, and intake and referral processes.*³

The Royal Commission made a series of recommendations that relate to perpetrators.⁴ These recommendations emphasised the need for:

- > defined roles and responsibilities and a consistent risk assessment and management strategy for all service providers and agencies that come into contact with perpetrators
- > a broad suite of evidence-based interventions that can be undertaken by all perpetrators, including those from diverse groups and with diverse and/or complex needs
- > perpetrators to have timely access to programs and interventions to ensure they are kept in view and held to account for their behaviours
- > demand planning to ensure agencies are sufficiently funded to meet demand for interventions
- > data collection and evaluation of interventions to judge their effectiveness, including victims’ assessments of safety outcomes.

Since then, the government’s approach to implementing these recommendations has been laid out through several plans, commitments, governance groups and reforms.

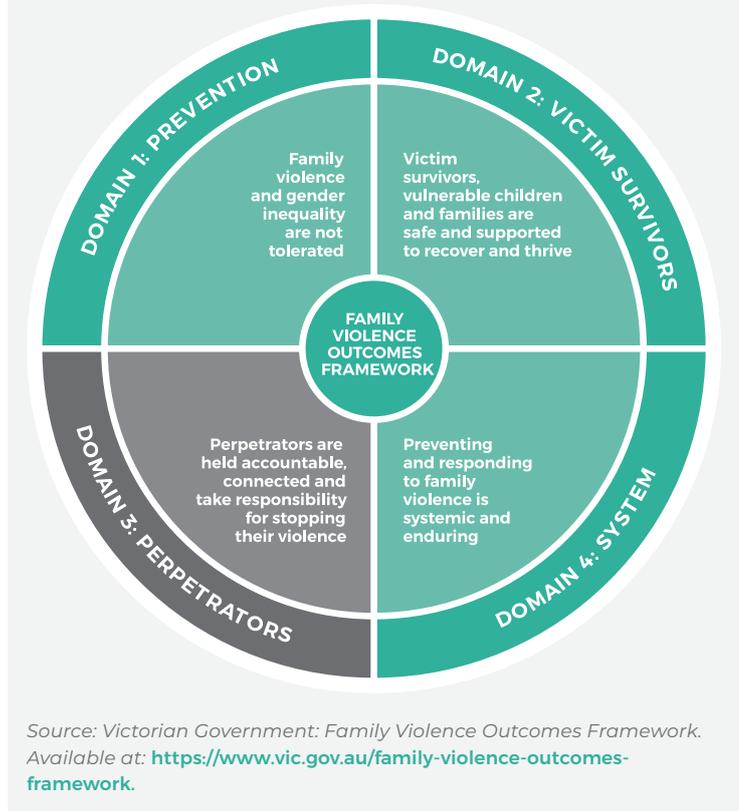
The **Expert Advisory Committee on Perpetrator Interventions (EACPI)** was established in 2016 to provide recommendations to the Victorian Government on the range of interventions needed to effectively reduce future harm from adult perpetrators of family violence. Its report was released in 2018, and its recommendations directly informed the Victorian Government’s whole-of-system work program to strengthen perpetrator accountability, which is outlined in the Family Violence Reform Rolling Action Plan 2020–2023. The Victorian Government has worked to ensure alignment between this perpetrator work program and other relevant plans and frameworks, which are outlined below. Service response to perpetrators features in Victoria’s family violence plans and structures, for example:

- > **Ending Family Violence: Victoria’s 10-Year Plan for Change** (2016) commits to building a better understanding of how to effectively intervene at the source of family violence, perpetrators and people using violence. It highlights the gap in the range and availability of responses to perpetrators, including culturally safe approaches and commits to improving these.

> The 10-year plan also introduced the **Family Violence Outcomes Framework** (see Figure 4), in which Domain 3 relates specifically to perpetrators: Perpetrators are held accountable, connected and take responsibility for stopping their violence. Indicators to demonstrate achievement of intended outcomes for this domain include:⁵

- Perpetrators stop all forms of family violence behaviour – Perpetrators understand the impact of their violence in all its forms, including all abuse and coercive and controlling behaviour. They take responsibility for their violence and choose to change their behaviours.
- Perpetrators are held accountable for their behaviour – Perpetrators are held accountable and supported to be accountable for their behaviours, receiving the right responses at the right time through a coordinated web of accountability.
- Perpetrators have safe and healthy connections and relationships – Perpetrators are supported to sustain behaviour change through a focus on building protective factors and improving their connections and relationships with their families, communities and society where it is safe to do so.

Figure 4: Family Violence Outcomes Framework diagram



- > To date, two rolling actions plans have been released to achieve the commitments outlined in this 10-year plan:
- The **Family Violence Reform Rolling Action Plan 2017–2020** included perpetrators as a central reform area and committed to building a better understanding of and improving perpetrator interventions and accountability.
 - The **Family Violence Reform Rolling Action Plan 2020–2023** includes perpetrators and people who use violence as a priority area. It sets out a whole-of-government perpetrator work program with actions focusing on enhancing service responses, improving cultural safety and inclusion, supporting better information sharing and risk management, building workforce development, and increasing research and evaluation into effective interventions. This whole-of- government work program is directly informed by the recommendations of EACPI's final report
- > **Building From Strength: 10-year Industry Plan for Family Violence Prevention and Response (2017)** describes the importance of building a web of accountability around perpetrators; however, at the time of publishing, it was waiting on further advice from the EACPI to determine workforce implications.
- The industry plan's first rolling action plan, **Strengthening the Foundations: First Rolling Action Plan 2019–2022** includes actions to build tools, skills and capability for workforces to work effectively with people who use violence.

- > The **Family Violence Research Agenda 2021–2024** sets out the Victorian Government's priorities for research on family violence and sexual violence and harm. Its priorities are perpetrators and people who use violence, with an emphasis on the different types of violence and effective approaches at changing perpetrator behaviour.
- > **Dhelk Dja: Safe Our Way – Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families Agreement 2018–2028** is the principal agreement between the Victorian Government and the Aboriginal community to address family violence. Strategic priority 3 is 'Self-determining Aboriginal family violence support and services'. This priority outlines a vision of early intervention and holistic support for a person, child or family who has experienced family violence, 'complemented by Aboriginal-led healing, therapeutic support and accountability for people who use violence, so they take responsibility for their behaviour'.⁶
- > **Nargneit Birrang – Aboriginal Holistic Healing Framework for Family Violence (2019)** is a framework developed to outline the most effective holistic approaches to enable better outcomes and healing for Aboriginal communities in response to family violence. Characteristics that are paramount in the service design of holistic approaches include 'People who use violence are held to account' and 'People who use violence are supported to understand the impact of violence and supported to develop non-violent approaches'.⁷
- > **Everybody Matters: Inclusion and Equity Statement** complements Ending Family Violence and acknowledges that people experiencing family violence as well as perpetrators are diverse and multidimensional. It outlines that an intersectional approach to service delivery will enable a better understanding and response to 'the complexity and spectrum of family violence experienced and perpetrated by people with a diverse range of social characteristics'.⁸

Key reforms include the following:

- > The **Family Violence Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework (MARAM)** establishes a system-wide approach and shared responsibility for family violence risk identification, assessment and management. This includes practice guides, tools and resources for professionals working with victim survivors and perpetrators of family violence.
- > **Risk Assessment and Management Panels** are made up of key agencies and organisations in local service areas and hold regular meetings to develop coordinated action plans to address the highest risk family violence cases.
- > The **Central Information Point** was launched in 2018 by Family Safety Victoria in partnership with Victoria Police, the Magistrates' Court of Victoria, Corrections Victoria and the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing. Staff from all these agencies are working together to provide consolidated reports of information about perpetrators and alleged perpetrators for the purpose of risk assessment and management.
- > The **Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme** is increasingly being used to share information about victim survivors and perpetrators across information sharing entities to improve the assessment of perpetrator risk levels.
- > The **Orange Door network** has now been established in all 17 Department of Families, Fairness and Housing regions in Victoria. It acts as a central entry point to family violence-related supports and interventions for perpetrators and people who use violence.
- > **Specialist Family Violence Courts** offer a more specialised approach to court design and operations with the intent to improve perpetrator accountability and keeping them in view. These courts are now operating in 12 locations across the state.
- > The creation of dedicated **Victoria Police Family Violence Investigation Units** and the **Victoria Police Family Violence Centre of Learning**, among other targeted initiatives, improve the way police respond to family violence incidents and better keep perpetrators in view.

1. There has been progress in increasing the focus on people using family violence, but more work is required to ensure a whole-of-system approach

There has been a significant investment and an overall cultural shift in Victoria's response to family violence over the past six years, bringing with it an increased spotlight on perpetrator behaviour. While previously it was seen as controversial to spend money on programs for perpetrators amid the scale of unmet need for victim survivors, there is an increasing understanding that victim survivor safety depends on addressing the behaviour of those using violence. The need to develop a full suite of service interventions for perpetrators is now widely accepted within the sector. One service provider told us:

I think there's a greater awareness and support for perpetrator services now compared to 20 years ago. I was constantly told 'you have to make them [victim survivors] leave'. People didn't want to discuss change for the perpetrators.

This is a welcome development because it is critical to directly address perpetrator behaviour in order to keep victim survivors safe. However, enforcement of family violence intervention orders (FVIOs) by police and the courts is still the main source of external accountability for perpetrators. With 51,367 breaches of FVIOs in 2021–22, this is placing substantial demand pressure on police and courts (we note that there are likely to be specific opportunities to strengthen the response to family violence perpetrators in these parts of the system but haven't explored these areas in detail for this report). There is now greater recognition of the need for broader, system-wide responsibility for perpetrator monitoring and accountability.

The Victorian Government's Family Violence Reform Rolling Action Plan 2020–2023 describes a long-term vision of a 'web of accountability' (see Figure 5) where the service system – and the broader community – works together to stop perpetrators from committing further violence, holds them to account, keeps them in view and supports them to change their behaviour and attitudes. The theory is that:

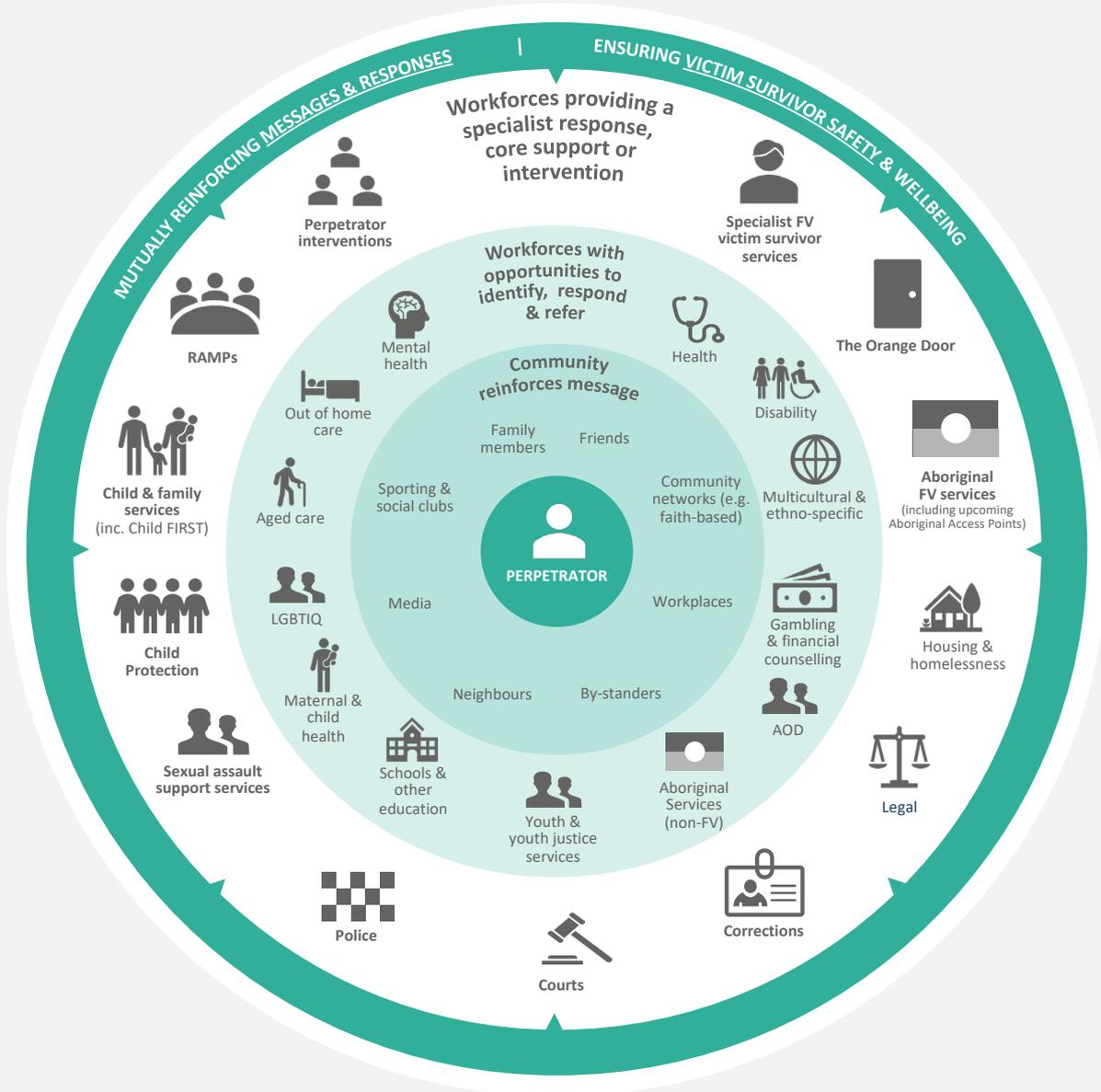
... every time a person who uses violence interacts with the service system, there is an opportunity to effect behaviour change and intervene. Behaviour change is more likely to happen when the government, the broader service system, community and society are working together to prevent violence happening and intervene early when it does.⁹

Some important components of this web of accountability that have been put in place are outlined below. These include Family Violence Investigation Units within Victoria Police, the creation of Specialist Family Violence Courts and a statewide network of family violence intake and assessment hubs. The private sector has also stepped up, with initiatives including introducing codes of conduct forbidding the use of company phones and laptops to commit family violence. While some important reforms have been implemented, it is currently unclear how the web of accountability is being and should be operationalised, yet this work is critical to ensuring Victoria has an effective, whole-of-system response to perpetrators that keeps victim survivors safe. We suggest that much more work needs to be done to clarify the role of the various actors depicted in the 'web', how they should interact with one another, and the work that is occurring to ensure all parts of the 'web' can effectively contribute to perpetrator accountability. As Dr Chris Laming, a men's behaviour change expert, explains:

An integrated family violence service system requires mutual respect between workers and a commitment to build up trust and confidence in one another's respective roles in the endeavour to keep women and children safe and hold men in view and accountable.

Relates to
action 1

Figure 5: Web of Accountability, Family Violence Reform Rolling Action Plan 2020–23



Source: Victorian Government (2020): Family Violence Reform Rolling Action Plan 2020–2023

System-wide approaches and capacity building

MARAM and family violence information sharing reforms represent the main, system-wide approaches to driving consistency of family violence understanding, setting out responsibilities for family violence identification, risk assessment and risk management, and authorising and enabling information sharing across participating workforces.

MARAM Perpetrator-Focused Practice Guides and Tools (also referred to as the 'Adult Using Family Violence Practice Guides and Tools')

Throughout 2020–2021, Family Safety Victoria worked with Curtin University and No to Violence to develop the new MARAM practice guides and tools for working with adults using family violence. Family Safety Victoria has described the development program as 'extensive', involving consultations with more than 1,000 professionals including academics, subject matter experts and workforce representatives. The Identification and Intermediate level perpetrator-focused MARAM practice guides and tools were released in July 2021 for non-specialist workforces. The Comprehensive level perpetrator-focused practice guides and tools were released in February 2022 for specialist workforces.

The perpetrator-focused practice guides and tools aim to support professionals across the system to identify, assess and manage risk when working with adults using family violence. This may be through observation only, a mixture of observation and prompting questions related to uncovering risk information, or through direct assessment. Across the practice and tools the focus is on identifying perpetrator behaviours, attitudes and patterns of coercive control, including systems abuse. Guidance includes considerations for working with a diverse range of adult perpetrators – including those who are older, Aboriginal, identify as LGBTIQ+, have a disability or are from a refugee or migrant background.

Stakeholders gave feedback that the perpetrator assessment tool is useful but very long, taking between two and four hours to complete – or up to six hours for a client who needs an interpreter. One service provider said that the length leads to services creating their own shorter versions, at the cost of consistency. Stakeholders also expressed that the practice guides are complex and could be simplified so practitioners have time to absorb the key information. To support the sector in implementing the new tools for working with adults using family violence, No to Violence's workforce development teams have launched a 'What Now' webinar series on implementing the MARAM Framework and the practice guides. We welcome this development and suggest that ongoing work is required to support the sector and ensure the practice guides are truly helping to drive perpetrator accountability.

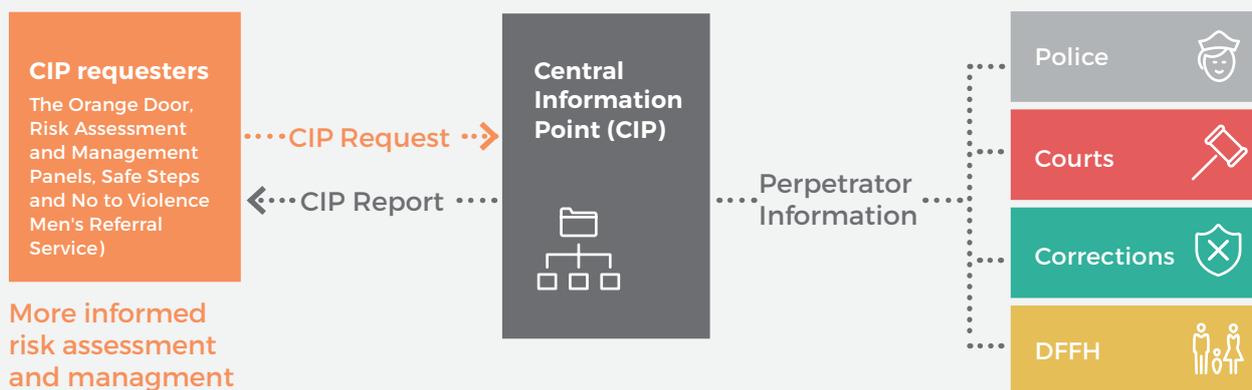
To understand whether the perpetrator Comprehensive Assessment Tool is working as intended, Family Safety Victoria has engaged Curtin University to analyse the information being gathered by services using the newly developed tools. This project will help validate the Comprehensive Assessment Tool and strengthen the underpinning evidence base.

Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme and the Central Information Point

Stakeholders have warmly welcomed information sharing reforms that allow workers in the family violence response sector to access and share potentially life-saving data to inform their assessment of perpetrator risk levels. 'We have found that information sharing is extremely beneficial ... we now have access to information that we previously would have had to fight tooth and nail to get,' said one service provider.

Stakeholders describe the Central Information Point as a 'game changer' due to its consolidation of data from Victoria Police, the Magistrates' Court of Victoria, Corrections and Justice Services and the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (see Figure 6). Men's behaviour change program providers gave feedback that the reports they received through The Orange Door have been incredibly valuable for gaining an objective picture of the perpetrator's risk level and progress, rather than relying on an often one-sided version of events from their client.

Figure 6: Central Information Point (CIP) Report Overview



Data custodians from four agencies: Victoria Police, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, Court Services Victoria and Corrections Victoria. The data custodians remain employed by their home agency however daily supervision and management is the responsibility of Family Safety Victoria under a memorandum of understanding.

Source: Presentation supplied by the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing

Central Information Point reports are available to practitioners at The Orange Door and to some Risk Assessment and Management Panels, and are provided in line with relevant information-sharing permissions or authorisations. We understand that Central Information Point management has also expanded direct access to the 24-hour crisis response organisation Safe Steps and to the Men's Referral Service. This is an important step to ensure timely information sharing on urgent cases.

While overwhelmingly supportive of the Central Information Point initiative overall, stakeholders recommended to reduce the processing time for requests by increasing staff resources. They also voiced their preference to receive the full version of the report rather than a summary prepared by The Orange Door. The team managing the Central Information Point told us that the timeline for responding to requests was often within 24 hours, with more than 16,000 reports produced from the beginning of the project up until September 2022. The Department of Families, Fairness and Housing said that the approach taken to date was to strike a balance between informing risk assessment and protecting privacy. The approval of a team leader at The Orange Door is required to launch a Central Information Point request, and for data protection purposes the overall report is designed not to be printed, with only the most relevant sections copied and shared with the requesting organisation.

Family Violence Investigation Units

Victoria Police has substantially changed its approach to holding family violence perpetrators to account. Police stakeholders told us that officers were now broadly aware that family violence is a 'real crime' rather than 'just a domestic'. Service sector stakeholders spoke positively about the increased level of family violence awareness among police officers. In the words of one stakeholder, 'Just knowing that you can ring the police and get a family violence response is huge'.

The creation of dedicated Family Violence Investigation Units ensures specialised detectives investigate high-risk cases and are on hand to provide advice to general duties police handling medium and lower risk cases. Stakeholders expressed that this has led to higher quality investigations, including the gathering of video testimony taken at the scene, which increases the chances of perpetrators being held to account in court.

Police stakeholders told us that the Case Prioritisation and Response Model tool was working well to estimate the level of risk based on the data entered in the Family Violence Report (L17). They believed it was positive that the tool allows for manual review to capture the assessments of attending police and their supervisors. As one experienced police officer told us, they rely on both the tool's calculation and their own professional judgement: 'The tool is useful, but you still need the human element'

As noted in our report 'Crisis Response to Recovery Model for Victim Survivors', a co-responder model has been trialled in some locations, whereby a social worker attends family violence incidents together with police. One such model is the Alexis – Family Violence Response Model, which was co-designed by Victoria Police and The Salvation Army, in collaboration with other local stakeholders. It involves an Alexis Senior Family Violence Practitioner from The Salvation Army being physically located within the local Victoria Police Family Violence Investigation Unit, and provides a coordinated, multi-agency response to families who are having repeated contact with police and services due to family violence. Benefits of a co-responder model include the ability to have social workers address social welfare issues at the scene of incidents, allowing police to focus on the investigative side. RMIT University found that co-responder models that conduct proactive outreach visits to high-risk perpetrators can reduce recidivism by up to 85 per cent.¹⁰

We were also told that the Family Violence Taskforce, which specialises in investigating serial high-risk perpetrators, had recently solved a number of important cases, including one involving a particularly violent perpetrator who preyed on numerous homeless women. A police officer told us: 'The Taskforce is a great addition to our ability to monitor perpetrators, and gives [Family Violence Investigation Units] a place to go when they need additional resources.'

Specialist Family Violence Courts

As well as supporting victim survivors to have a less confrontational and traumatic court experience, stakeholder feedback suggests that Specialist Family Violence Courts' expert magistrates and staff have increased perpetrator accountability by providing more tailored responses. For example, magistrates have the power to mandate that perpetrators complete behaviour change programs with a court-appointed provider. Court Services Victoria partnered with the Centre for Innovative Justice to develop the Court Mandated Counselling Order Program, which began operating in 2020. It is currently available at five Specialist Family Violence Courts and will be expanded to all 12 Specialist Family Violence Courts in the first quarter of 2023.

The role of the Respondent Practitioner provides an opportunity to assess risk, provide relevant referrals and ensure the perpetrator understands the court process. Dedicated practitioners for Aboriginal people who use violence have been provided through the Umalek Balit program, and LGBTIQ+ family violence practitioners have also been trialled in selected courts.

Perpetrator interventions in the corrections system

In prisons and community correctional services, perpetrators can be referred to a range of programs based on their risk profile and specific needs. Men's behaviour change service providers gave feedback that the short prison program 'Tuning into Respectful Relationships' is effective for preparing men to attend group work programs on release.

We heard during consultations about an opportunity to strengthen family violence perpetrator programs in prisons because there can be fewer or more manageable barriers to session attendance than in the community, where participants may be dealing with homelessness, lack of transport and work commitments. We note that there may still be some issues such as conflicting legal or medical appointments, or attendance challenges if the program is not mandatory.

The Orange Door

Situating The Orange Door as the central entry point for perpetrator responses, as well as for victim survivor support services, sends a strong signal that perpetrator programming is now integrated into mainstream family violence response.

Between July 2021 and June 2022, The Orange Door received 71,750 perpetrator referrals¹¹ (this refers to the number of referrals rather than distinct individuals, with some perpetrators having multiple referrals). The vast majority (84 per cent) of perpetrator referrals came via Victoria Police's Family Violence Report (L17.) The Orange Door then makes multiple attempts to contact each perpetrator to encourage them to take part in programs to address their behaviour. Participation is voluntary because there is no legal requirement for perpetrators to engage with The Orange Door after being referred. Figures on how many perpetrators had received services via The Orange Door were not available, suggesting there is room to develop information management and coordination to monitor the level of perpetrator uptake of services and keep them in view.

Risk Assessment and Management Panels

The Risk Assessment and Management Panels (RAMPs) have been strengthened since the Royal Commission, with an increased focus on keeping perpetrators in view to reduce the onus on the victim survivor to manage their own safety.¹² According to Family Safety Victoria, RAMPs are effectively linking relevant parts of the system (such as corrections, police, alcohol and other drugs, and mental health) to identify and manage the risk factors that are contributing to the use of family violence. This improves visibility of perpetrators across the system and is said to be reducing reoffending. Family Safety Victoria also notes that continued work on embedding the MARAM Perpetrator-Focused Practice Guides into the RAMP program guidelines will further improve consistency of responses.

Other stakeholder feedback on RAMPs suggests that agencies have generally collaborated well to share information and mitigate risk. We heard that one area of improvement in a few regions of Victoria is to review the RAMP membership to confirm that attendees are the decision-makers with the capacity to act in the relevant cases.

2. The range of programmatic and service responses for people using violence has expanded, but availability is not able to meet demand or cater to the diversity of perpetrator need

The Royal Commission highlighted that there were not enough places in perpetrator intervention programs to cater to all those referred to them.¹³ It also found insufficient breadth and diversity of perpetrator interventions available in Victoria, noting that referral to a men's behaviour change program was the most common response, with a lack of programs to cater for different cohorts or for the needs of perpetrators for whom group work is unsuitable.¹⁴ We have found that access to perpetrator interventions remains an issue, and while the suite of perpetrator interventions trialled has expanded considerably since the Royal Commission, these are on a relatively small scale.

Availability of perpetrator programs

Current data suggests that the problem of lack of availability and long waitlists continues, with the number of Department of Families, Fairness and Housing-funded program places per year roughly equal to 10 per cent of the total number of recorded family violence perpetrators. According to the latest available Victoria Police dataset, during 2020-21 a total of 58,118 individual perpetrators (includes both male and female) were recorded at family violence incidents. In 2021-22, 4,101 perpetrators were participating in men's behaviour change programs and 1,998 in case management (making a combined total of 6,099 participant slots being used) (see Figure 7).

Figure 7: Perpetrators and engagement with family violence services

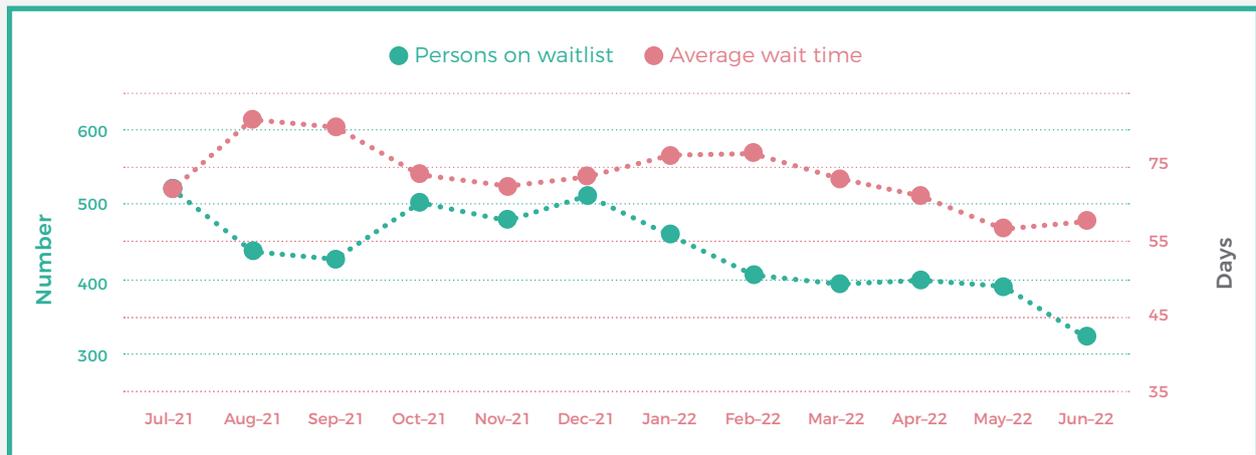


*Figures exclude court-mandated men's behaviour change programs and other initiatives run by the Department of Justice and Community Safety.

Source: Crime Statistics Agency, Family Violence Data Portal, October 2022. Victoria Police Data Tables 20; data supplied by Family Safety Victoria (Department of Families, Fairness and Housing).

When estimating the gap between the level of availability and demand, perpetrator motivation is one factor to consider, with The Orange Door data suggesting that around one-third of perpetrators avoid contact or decline services. Stakeholders point out that this is not surprising considering the nature of this client group, with many perpetrators not accepting responsibility for family violence and believing that the victim survivor is the problem. The Orange Door data also shows a relatively small number of perpetrators on the waitlist for men’s behaviour change programs. Across the state in June 2022, 323 perpetrators were on the waitlist, with an average wait time of 57.7 days (see Figure 8).

Figure 8: Number of perpetrators on The Orange Door men’s behaviour change programs waitlist and average wait time



Source: Graph supplied by Family Safety Victoria

The figures above do not include court-mandated perpetrator programs, which are critical to reaching perpetrators who lack the motivation to engage voluntarily with behaviour change programs. We were informed that Specialist Family Violence Court magistrates had made 1,209 mandated counselling orders during the past two years and that 528 perpetrators had so far completed their programs (see Table 1 and Figures 9 and 10).¹⁵

Table 1: All Specialist Family Violence Court mandated counselling orders

	2020-21	2021-22	Total
Total counselling orders made	558	651	1,209
Total program completions	113	395	528

Source: Data supplied by Magistrates’ Court of Victoria

During 2020-21, there were 31,197 FVIOs made across the state, primarily in mainstream Magistrates’ Courts because only three Specialist Family Violence Courts operated for the whole of the 2020-21 financial year (Ballarat, Moorabbin and Shepparton), with two more (Heidelberg and Frankston) launching in May and June of 2021. A total of 341 mandated counselling orders were made across the three Specialist Family Violence Courts operating throughout 2020-21, representing just over 14 per cent of finalised applications in those courts (2,392). The Magistrates’ Court told us that COVID-19 restrictions significantly reduced the proportion of possible counselling orders because in-person programs were interrupted and providers faced the transition to online groups. One program provider did not offer an online alternative, and not all respondents could attend online groups (which require the participant to have computer access and skills and a stable internet connection in a private space where they can speak freely).

Figure 9: All Specialist Family Violence Courts: Increase in mandated counselling orders and Program Completions



Source: Data supplied by Magistrates' Court of Victoria

Figure 10: Number of mandated counselling orders made, of the 2,392 FVIOs granted in Ballarat, Moorabbin and Shepparton Specialist Family Violence Courts in 2020-21

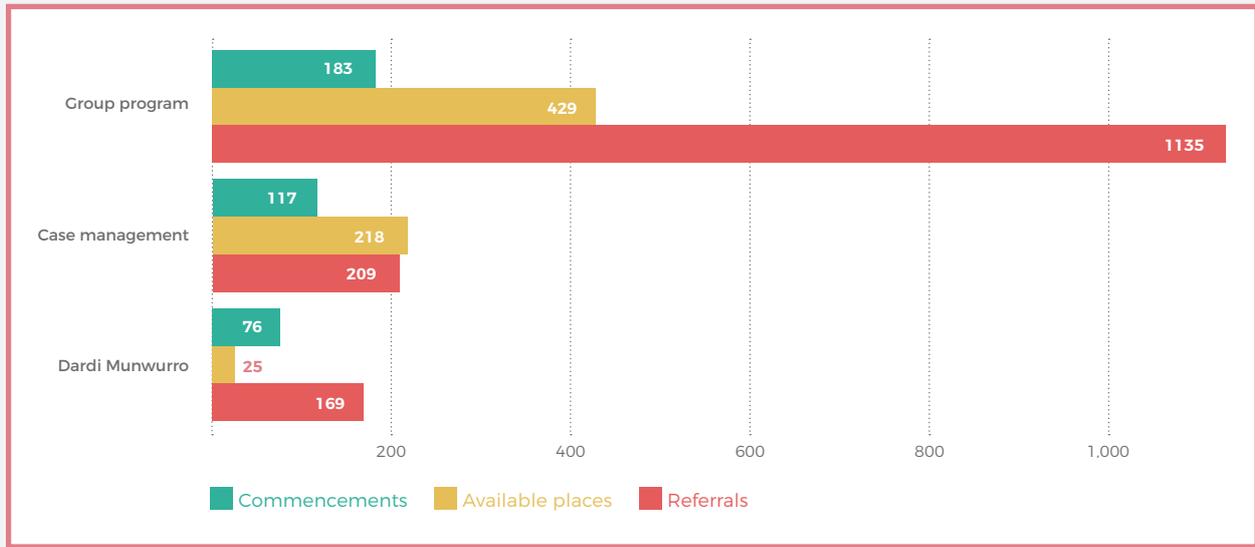


Source: Data supplied by Magistrates' Court of Victoria

Between 2020-21 and 2021-22, the number of counselling orders made in Specialist Family Violence Courts increased modestly (from 558 to 651), and the number of perpetrators completing their mandated program almost tripled to 395 as pandemic restrictions eased. The Magistrates' Court stated that they expect a significant rise in the number of counselling orders made in 2022-23 after seven new Specialist Family Violence Courts were established in October 2022, bringing the total to 12. Funding allocated for the Specialist Family Violence Courts' mandated counselling order program totals \$34.5 million from 2019-20 to 2023-2024.

Figures provided to us on the number of places available in Community Correctional Services programs for family violence offenders also suggest that demand outstrips supply. As depicted in Figure 11, for (mainstream) men's behaviour change group programs, there were more than six times as many perpetrators referred during 2021-22 as those who started a program. For (mainstream) individual case management, only slightly over half of those who were referred ended up participating. For Dardi Munwurro's (Aboriginal) Men's Healing and Behaviour Change programs, 76 started the program out of the 169 of those who were referred. For the two mainstream programs, the number of available places is significantly higher than the number of participants who actually took part, suggesting that the case management and group men's behaviour change programs may have been underutilised. The Department of Justice and Community Safety says that as well as the impact of COVID-19 restrictions on numbers, some of those who were referred may have been assessed as unsuitable for intervention. In 2022-23 the department has \$3 million allocated to community programs (including group men's behaviour change programs, case management and Caring Dads.)

Figure 11: Perpetrator referrals, available program slots and participant commencements in Community Correctional Services programs (2021–22)



Source: Data supplied by Department of Justice and Community Safety.

Within prisons in 2021–22, 15 perpetrators took part in a six-week (12-hour total) pilot program called Diffuse, which Corrections Victoria trialled at three sites. The psycho-educational family violence intervention addressed the definition of family violence and explored the elements of healthy relationships. Additionally, 206 prisoners across 11 sites completed the Tuning into Respectful Relationships program, while 15 completed the more targeted ChangeAbout program (for which prisoners are clinically assessed for certain criminogenic factors before being referred to this intervention, which is run by Corrections Victoria’s Forensic Intervention Services).

Across the wider service sector, almost all stakeholders we consulted expressed concern about limited access to perpetrator interventions and long wait times.

As long as we don’t have the resources – and we don’t, across the state – to respond to men’s violence, we’ll keep having to mop up the mess they make. – Service provider

The system has become more sophisticated; we used to do everything ourselves but now we have a whole system to refer people to. But the flip side is that demand for services has escalated as communities realise the prevalence of family violence and the trauma it creates. The demands not just on us but on every service provider are enormous. – Service provider

As we know in regard to people using violence, time is quite crucial in terms of service delivery. Anecdotally, we get an amazing response when delivering a response when within two weeks, compared to after two weeks. When reports come out about a murder-homicide, it makes workers anxious if we’re not able to get to clients in timely manner. – The Salvation Army

One of the things about people who use violence is that they come to the service at a point of crisis – if we wait, the crisis is gone and they lose their motivation to engage. – Primary Care Connect, Shepparton

There is a long wait for men’s behaviour change programs, particularly for voluntary participants. While magistrates may defer a sentence to allow time for respondents to engage in these programs, access delays mean the respondent is not kept in view during this period. – Victoria Legal Aid.

New types of perpetrator interventions

An expanded suite of perpetrator interventions is outlined below.

Men's case management

Men's case management is used for a range of purposes and may be complementary to men's behaviour change programs. For example, case management can keep clients engaged while they are on program waitlists and prepare them to participate in group programs. The one-on-one support provided by case management has a number of benefits, such as allowing a relationship of trust to develop between the facilitator and participants and preparing them for group work, in addition to enabling holistic wraparound service provision.¹⁶ These wraparound services can be accessed via referrals or brokerage (for example, to address needs related to accommodation, mental health or alcohol and other drug issues).

For men deemed ineligible for group men's behaviour change programs, case management allows them to be engaged in an individually tailored family violence intervention. The goal of case management is to stabilise the perpetrator's situation and reduce the risk to adult and child victim survivors. Support provided online or by phone can also reach people who live in remote or regional areas where services are not readily available. One example that received positive feedback from stakeholders is the Brief Intervention Service, run by the Men's Referral Service. It provides short, multi-session telephone support for men who use family violence.

Post-group services

Post-group intervention is based on the concept that some men's behaviour change program participants may benefit from having the option to continue attending groups long term. Family Safety Victoria has funded several post-group services including a pilot post-group in rural Gippsland for men who have previously completed men's behaviour change programs.

Peer facilitation/navigation

The Drummond Street Services Living Free from Violence program (for women in prison who have used violence) is seeking to incorporate women who have completed the program and have lived experience as co-facilitators for future programs to enhance engagement and participation. Similarly, the Department of Justice and Community Safety is exploring using 'peer navigators' to reduce barriers for perpetrators in effectively engaging with the justice system.

Perpetrator accommodation-based interventions

Perpetrator accommodation-based interventions aim to keep victim survivors safe in their homes by providing alternative accommodation for perpetrators who are willing to engage in behaviour change interventions. The Family Safety Victoria-funded Men's Accommodation and Counselling Service (previously known as the Perpetrator Accommodation and Support Service) is implemented by No to Violence. Under the original pilot program, perpetrators excluded from the home due to family violence could receive up to 14 days of crisis accommodation along with wraparound support to address immediate needs and links to services to address their offending behaviour. Established in September 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic, 290 perpetrators had been accommodated by June 2021. Referrals to the program were lower than expected, with possible reasons including a lack of awareness across the service system regarding the pilot, and perpetrators being reluctant to engage due to the stigma of using a family violence service and/or unwillingness to participate in counselling.¹⁷

An independent external evaluation found that perpetrator engagement in the crisis accommodation and counselling program 'suggests an increased likelihood that [affected family members] may have experienced increased levels of stability and safety during the high-risk period immediately following the perpetrator's legal exclusion from the family home. PASS has supported clients to understand their exclusion from the home and reduce breaches of FVSN and FVIO conditions, thereby contributing to improved [family member] safety.'¹⁸

Following the evaluation, the program was extended, and men who are assessed as eligible and appropriate, including by agreeing to participate in family violence counselling, are now offered up to 30 days of crisis accommodation.

A new pilot, the Medium-term Perpetrator Accommodation Service (MPAS) is also now underway and being evaluated. Perpetrators can receive up to six months of accommodation support on the condition that they stay engaged with a family violence service. MPAS is being piloted in partnership with local housing providers and is being run by three perpetrator case management providers (in Central Highlands, Loddon and North East Melbourne) and two Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (in North East Melbourne, Hume Moreland and Inner Gippsland).¹⁹ The program also includes a family safety contact response, which involves support to affected family members, including children. This may require working closely with child protection and/or family services in developing safety plans.²⁰

The initial phase of the MPAS evaluation found that the program was supporting people using violence to change their behaviour by providing a holistic and wraparound service, and that there was a high level of engagement with victim-survivors through family safety contact workers. The evaluation found that family violence service providers and housing providers were well-connected to The Orange Door and community services for other support needs. It also highlighted some barriers to implementation amid a tight housing market and clients' limited financial circumstances. Although most implementation plans state that accommodation will be provided through 'head lease' programs or private rentals, 10 per cent of clients were in crisis accommodation (such as hotels, motels and rooming services). Where a private rental was able to be found, according to the evaluation report, service providers emphasised the importance of providing access to housing exit options, otherwise there was a risk of homelessness for clients, and possibly repeat use of violence.

Caring Dads program

Caring Dads is an internationally recognised family violence behaviour change program that emphasises parenting skills and maintaining a respectful relationship with children's mother(s) to promote healthy child development. Stakeholders regard the project as a promising entry point for engaging family violence perpetrators who may be more motivated to change for the sake of their children than for their current or former intimate partner.

Cross-sector collaboration with the alcohol and drug treatment sector

The KODY project is an example of an innovative partnership between the alcohol and drug treatment and family violence sectors. An organisation offering drug and alcohol treatment programs in Melbourne, Odyssey House, teamed up with a Caring Dads provider, Kids First Australia. This partnership enabled participants to receive treatment for drug and alcohol abuse at the same time as improving their fathering skills, with practitioners from both sectors coordinating closely on case management. The program takes an all-of-family approach to ensure the safety and wellbeing of children and provides parenting support. Another notable program integrating family violence and alcohol and drug treatment for perpetrators is the U-Turn program run by Taskforce and funded by the Department of Health. According to an evaluation of the 12-week program by Monash University: 'Informed by [alcohol and other drug] harm minimisation

principles, feminist theory and a psychoeducational framework of behaviour change, U-Turn ensures that men are visible and accountable for their actions, that they have access to support, and that women and families are kept safe.²¹

Community programs for Aboriginal people

Aboriginal programs tend to focus on cultural healing and connection to the community and culture. We have explored this unique approach and the important work of many Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations in depth in our report 'Aboriginal-led Primary Prevention and Early Intervention'. We note that one residential Aboriginal men's healing program (which also provides support as participants transition back to the community) contributed to reducing family violence risk factors such as alcohol and drug abuse and unemployment.²²

Community programs for diverse groups

Several programs designed for diverse groups have also been implemented. For example, LGBTIQ+ programs engage participants who may distrust the mainstream service system due to perceptions of discrimination or lack of understanding of the nature of family violence in LGBTIQ+ relationships. As well as often using community languages, programs designed for perpetrators from refugee or migrant backgrounds apply a cultural lens to make mainstream approaches more relevant.

According to an evaluation of community-based perpetrator intervention trials, programs for diverse groups (including refugees and migrants, LGBTIQ+ people who use family violence, women who use family violence and perpetrators with a cognitive impairment) 'are contributing to a greater level of risk management of people who use violence, particularly those with complex needs. By engaging people who use violence who were previously not accessing services, these programs are "keeping them in view", which enables providers to better identify and manage risk.'²³

Programs for women who use force

Run by Bapcare and Berry Street, Positive Shift emphasises accountability for using force while also being sensitive to women's experiences as a victim of intimate partner violence. Family Safety Victoria told us that while the Positive Shift intervention was originally funded under the perpetrator trials, further discussion is required for understanding who this group of women are and whether it is appropriate to label them as perpetrators. As explored in our report, 'Accurate Identification of the Predominant Aggressor',²⁴ a victim survivor who, through an act of self-defence or violent resistance, commits a crime may be inaccurately labelled a family violence perpetrator, at least at the time of the incident. Being able to separate such an act from a pattern of abuse requires a nuanced understanding of the dynamics of family violence and the difference between men's and women's use of violence. The MARAM Framework is clear that women 'tend to use force to gain short-term control over threatening situations, rather than using already held power to dominate or control their partner'. This motivation is 'distinctly different from men's use of violence, which is characterised by a pattern of coercive, controlling and violent behaviour'.²⁵

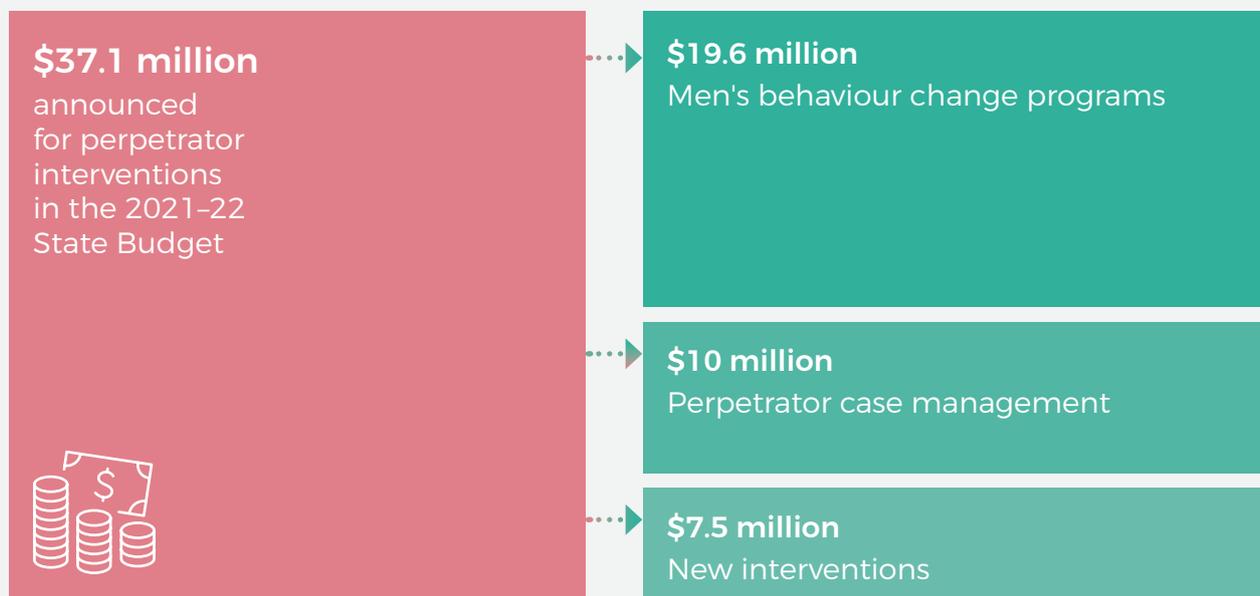
Investment in new perpetrator interventions

Although the range of perpetrator interventions on offer has significantly expanded, new types of interventions only attract about a fifth of the funding. More than half of the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing's perpetrator interventions budget is still going to group men's behaviour change programs (\$19.6 million out of the total 2021–22 budget of \$37.1 million) (see Figure 12).

Stakeholders explained that many of the perpetrator interventions for diverse cohorts are still being tested and are yet to be scaled up. 'We've become addicted to pilots,' said one service provider. The Monash Gender and Family Violence Prevention Centre explained:

There is a reluctance to invest because we don't know what works – evidence has been so slow because a lot of pilots weren't captured by evaluations ... It's hard when we don't know which horse to back, but it's hard to get past that without investing more heavily in certain programs.

Figure 12: Perpetrator intervention funding (Department of Families, Fairness and Housing)



Note: Figures exclude court-mandated men's behaviour change programs and other programs run by the Department of Justice and Community Safety.

Source: Figures supplied by Family Safety Victoria.

Gaps and urgent needs: scaling up perpetrator accommodation and interventions for refugees and migrants

Feedback and anecdotal evidence from our stakeholder consultations indicated two particular gaps where perpetrator responses urgently need to be scaled up: perpetrator accommodation programs and interventions for refugee and migrant communities, particularly in rural areas. We note that in addition to these, the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing identified a further gap for adults with an intellectual disability who use violence. Another gap that Family Safety Victoria is working to address is programs for serious-risk perpetrators. Consultation is underway to design a two-year program, and \$3.2 million in funding has been allocated.

Relates to
action 2

Perpetrator accommodation

Victoria Police told us that the most critical period for FVIO breaches is immediately after perpetrators are excluded from the family home, with offenders typically returning within seven days (or even on the same day). They explained that:

We remove them from the property and we set them up to fail. They have nowhere to go as local hotels know them and won't take them. They end up sleeping in their cars or in a tent city. The victim survivor gets pressure put on her to let them back into the home, and the cycle starts again. We're not going to change that cycle of violence unless we spend some money on our perpetrators, even if that goes against the grain.

Aboriginal service providers shared that if perpetrators are left homeless, victim survivors are often shamed by the community into allowing them back:

It would be good to have a residential healing room for men that would allow women to stay in their own house. That's the biggest concern for women, 'he's not here and has nowhere to live so he could rock up at any time'.

Other service sector stakeholders also stressed that stabilising the perpetrator's immediate needs is necessary to bring them to a stage where they can start to address their family violence behaviour. Monash Gender and Family Violence Prevention Centre explained:

If perpetrators don't have secure housing, it's a barrier to men's behaviour change participation. There can be a reluctance in investing in work for perpetrators as it is sometimes seen as taking away from victim survivors, but if we're working with perpetrators, we need to address their needs. While homelessness and housing insecurity are not causal of use of violence, working to meet perpetrators' basic needs should be seen as part of the effort of driving them to end their use of violence against women.

Providing crisis accommodation to perpetrators can act as a 'circuit breaker' during the high-risk period immediately after the perpetrator is excluded from the home. It also provides an entry point for referral to family violence services, in addition to drug and alcohol, mental health and other services if needed. Medium-term accommodation can provide the opportunity for more sustained interventions to improve perpetrator accountability, and stakeholders were clear that the existing perpetrator accommodation programs need to be scaled up as soon as possible to meet the level of need.

Refugee and migrant interventions

According to multicultural service providers, another major service gap in perpetrator interventions is for refugees and migrants. The gap in programs tailored to their needs and experiences is particularly evident in rural areas such as Greater Shepparton, where 2021 census statistics show that 25 per cent of the population was born overseas.²⁶ Local family violence service providers told us that there were many newly arrived refugees and migrants in the area from a wide variety of cultural backgrounds and speaking a range of languages, but there was a lack of specialised programs for them. A police officer told us that the need was overwhelming: 'We haven't even scratched the surface of family violence in this community.' Stakeholders strongly urged the expansion of inTouch multicultural perpetrator programming to the Shepparton area.

While the needs in Shepparton appeared particularly acute, a migrant service provider in Melbourne also told us that there is still a major service gap in other areas of the state. New arrivals may not be familiar with the state's role in regulating family violence, may distrust government services and may not speak English well enough to take part in men's behaviour change programs. When there is a lack of alternative family violence services available, this can also create inequities in the justice system because perpetrators who cannot prove they have undertaken programs may get worse legal outcomes. Migrant perpetrators excluded from the family home also may not be able to access some basic services as non-citizens.

The Migrant Information Centre (Eastern Melbourne) explained to us that drivers of family violence are often linked to migrant men's feelings of disempowerment:

Some men feel their status is affected in Australia, as they don't have power or authority they felt back home. They feel that even their children have more power, as often happens in migrant families because young people learn the language and adapt to local culture quicker. There is a sense of shame; a sense of not being good enough. Some men try to reclaim a sense of power and status by using controlling behaviour within the family.

We heard from both rural and urban multicultural service providers that they see an urgent need to tackle the issue of family violence. However, they struggle to find the time and resources to develop appropriately adapted men's behaviour change materials and to provide the extra case management support that clients need. Funding and resources are also an issue when it comes to community capacity building and co-design around family violence interventions. Multicultural organisations say these initiatives are particularly important to bridge the divide with communities that are not accessing mainstream services and where family violence is traditionally resolved within community and family settings.

3. Some coordination challenges need to be addressed to improve service responses to perpetrators

Reforming Victoria's family violence system after the Royal Commission was an enormous undertaking. New systems needed not only to be set up but to be integrated with each other. Launching new initiatives created new benefits but also raised new risks and practice issues. For example, rolling out perpetrator crisis accommodation programs reduced the risk of perpetrators excluded from the victim survivor's home breaching their orders, but it also raised coordination and management challenges amid high general demand for crisis accommodation. Family Safety Victoria is addressing this with the Local Family Violence Motel Coordination Projects, which aim to develop systems and information sharing processes between local agencies and to manage key risks, challenges and relationships with motels.²⁷

Stakeholders raised a range of areas where improved coordination was needed to strengthen the system response to perpetrators. We suggest consideration is given to these when articulating how the web of accountability will be operationalised. The main issues raised are explored below.

Relates to
action 1

Private psychologists and information sharing

A number of stakeholders felt that private psychologists not being included in the Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme (in addition to not being prescribed under the MARAM Framework) constituted a gap. Perpetrators who can afford private services (such as for presenting needs like mental health or use of alcohol or other drugs) risk falling out of view of the service system, while those perpetrators on lower incomes are more closely monitored.

Visibility of perpetrator program demand, availability and completion

There is a lack of coordination regarding perpetrator programs, with no central database for referrers to be able to find available placements in registered programs for men's behaviour change programs and other types of interventions. As a result, stakeholders report that some programs have months-long waitlists, while others struggle to recruit enough participants to fill their available spots. An evaluation by Deloitte Access Economics also found that in some regions of Victoria, The Orange Door had little awareness of the Family Safety Victoria-funded diverse cohort trials for perpetrators being delivered in their area.²⁸ Family Safety Victoria told us that it is important to note that the scale of these pilot programs is so small, limited awareness raising can be done without creating unrealistic expectations of access. Without a centralised system, referral processes for perpetrators largely rely on individual practitioners' local knowledge about available programs. There is also a lack of visibility around perpetrators' completion rates for men's behaviour change and other programs, and reasons for withdrawal. Family Safety Victoria told us that with the rollout of The Orange Door network complete, there is now an opportunity to assess the feasibility of a statewide information management system for perpetrator programs. We suggest that it would be timely and appropriate to address this issue as a matter of priority, and that Family Safety Victoria could consult with the Crime Statistics Agency on how this information could be consistently collected for both referral and results measurement purposes.

Relates to
action 6

Coordination between perpetrator and victim survivor services

Safe and Equal staff saw a need to strengthen the family safety contact aspect of perpetrator interventions (where program providers are required to conduct regular outreach to the participant's partner or ex-partner to monitor their wellbeing):

It would be so valuable to have a role in specialist family violence services to keep eyes on the perpetrators – to liaise with perpetrator services within the bounds of information sharing requirements to see where they are living, what they are doing in terms of interventions and services – as a support for the more direct work happening with the victim survivor.

According to Family Safety Victoria, implementing the MARAM practice guides (including in organisations' policies and procedures) will help drive coordination with responsibilities of specialist services to share information and support strengthened collaboration in risk assessment and management.

Coordination between The Orange Door and other elements of the family violence system

A number of practice issues were raised during consultations about coordination with The Orange Door network, which is a central plank of Victoria's family violence reforms and was envisioned to streamline and improve access to services for victim survivors and perpetrators. However, how it coordinates to assess perpetrator risk with another key plank of the new system, the Specialist Family Violence Courts, is unclear. The guidelines for the court's Family Violence Practitioners mention The Orange Door's role in referring clients to Specialist Family Violence Courts but do not outline standard operating procedures for how the Respondent Workers should coordinate risk management with their Orange Door counterparts.²⁹ We were also told that the network's practitioners had not been routinely attending the daily court triage meetings, but that there is now ongoing work to improve coordination. Legal support services were initially not included in The Orange Door design, although a four-year Victoria Legal Aid pilot at one site began in October 2022.

Another issue raised by stakeholders was that The Orange Door's ability to offer a timely and consistent service to clients was affected by it operating differently depending on the service area, or even within the same location. Several suggested that this situation may be due to a 'matrix' staff arrangement where many practitioners are employed by various partner agencies (e.g. the Salvation Army, Uniting Care), which each bring their own policies and procedures. Men's Behaviour Change expert, Dr Chris Laming suggested that, furthermore, more work needs to be done to retain The Orange Door workforce and enable them to more effectively carry out their work with perpetrators, stating that:

Relates to
action 3

I know many Orange Door workers, both as past colleagues, or as students I taught. They are generally good and dedicated workers who have a personal commitment to ending violence against women and children. I believe the ongoing pressure to both deal with clients effectively and professionally, as required by their job descriptions, and at the same time fill their [caseload] quotas, is the reason many buckle under the strain and leave The Orange Door, despite the good pay.

Stakeholders also expressed mixed views on whether the addition of The Orange Door network was leading to improved outcomes. A senior official from The Orange Door highlighted that:

Previously, agencies did their own individual triage. Now, this is centralised in The Orange Door with high-risk cases referred to the specialist sector. Previously, agencies could close the door based on demand, and there was no oversight of that. At The Orange Door, the door is always open to everyone.

Others raised the issue that government investment has focused on intake and assessment without a commensurate investment into services:

Enhanced intake within The Orange Door provides a comprehensive overview of risk. However, like many organisations within the sector, workforce capacity continues to be a key barrier to timely intervention.

– Nexus Primary Health

If you have an assessment and referral point and don't increase the services around it, it stays the same. It's just an assessment and referral point. It's a missed opportunity. – Commission for Children and Young People.

4. Continued efforts are needed to expand the evidence base for a robust suite of perpetrator interventions

The Royal Commission highlighted the importance of investing in the still-emerging evidence base about perpetrators, their motivations and the types of interventions likely to be most effective in reducing their violence:

There are serious gaps in our knowledge about the characteristics of victims and perpetrators of family violence and about how the systems that respond to such violence are working. These gaps restrict the government's ability to respond to family violence effectively and to plan for the future, and could well result in ineffective or wasteful expenditure on some responses and insufficient expenditure on others.³⁰

It also recommended introducing better evaluation practices and to continue to support research into family violence.

Overall, we find that progress has been made since the Royal Commission in evaluating new types of interventions for perpetrators and in conducting research to better understand their characteristics and motivations. Important efforts are also underway to establish a common evaluation framework to allow for better comparison of the effectiveness of different perpetrator interventions.

Perpetrator research

The Victorian Government has recently conducted two major reviews of perpetrator programs and available best practice literature. The first is a comprehensive desktop study examining the available evidence base on perpetrator interventions, which Family Safety Victoria commissioned the Department of Premier and Cabinet to develop in order to inform a theory of change on perpetrator accountability. The second is an overarching review conducted by the Department of Justice and Community Safety based on its internal evaluations of family violence interventions for justice clients. This review documents lessons learned and provides an opportunity for government to understand which aspects of family violence perpetrator interventions work best for justice clients.

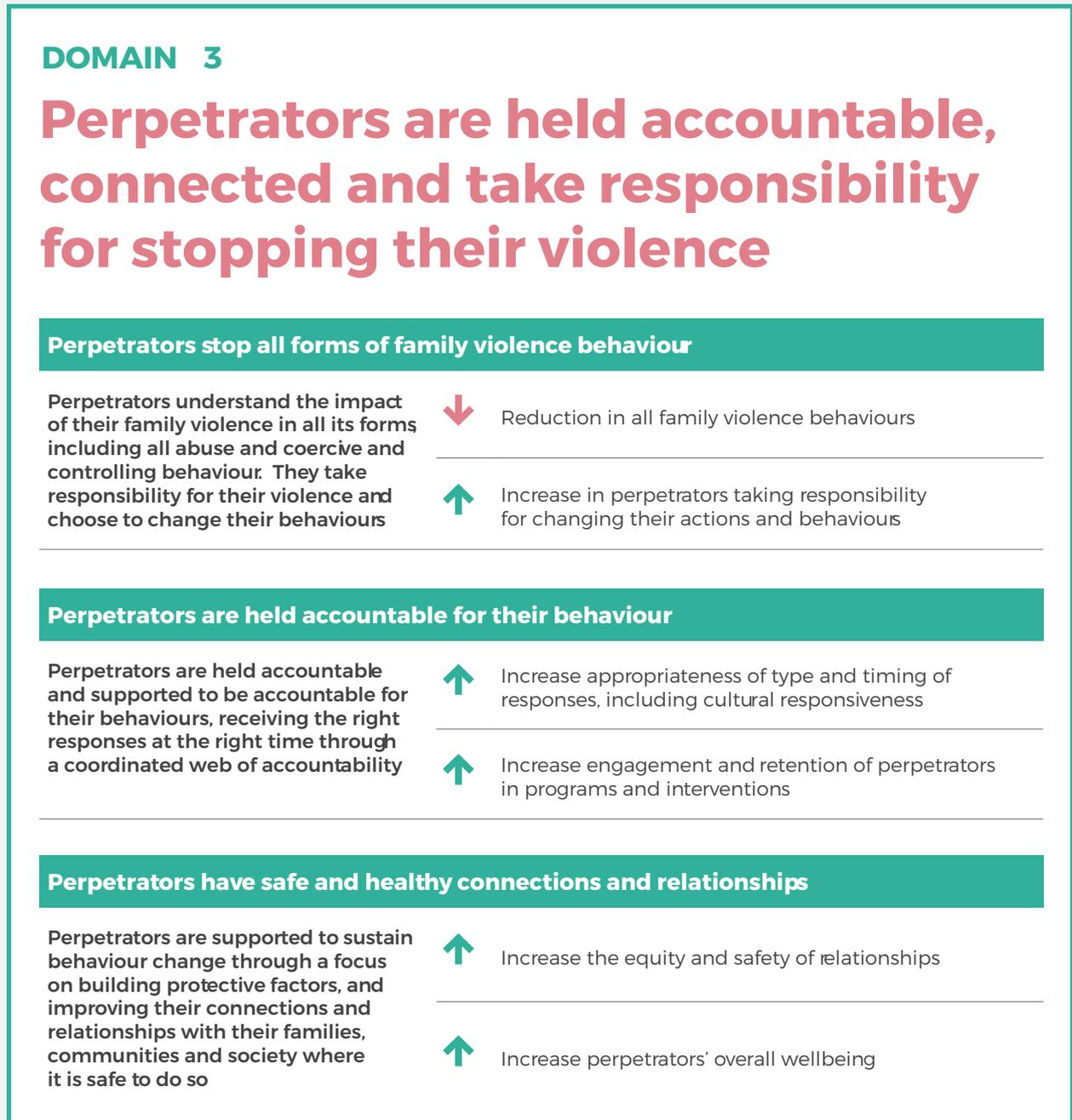
There is a need for ongoing research to better understand perpetrators, the drivers of family violence and how this intersects with special needs for diverse cohorts. The Victorian Government is continuing to invest in research to better understand perpetrators, both by funding state-based initiatives and by contributing \$1.1 million in the 2022-23 State Budget to the Australian National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS).

Also, in August 2022, Victoria's Minister for Prevention of Family Violence announced 13 successful projects funded under the Family Violence Research Program 2021-2024, of which three focus specifically on perpetrator responses. The topics to be covered include interventions for young perpetrators, early identification of LGBTIQ+ perpetrators, and participant engagement strategies to reduce attrition in perpetrator programs.³¹

Developing the Family Violence Outcomes Framework

Domain 3 of the Victorian Government's Family Violence Outcomes Framework is 'Perpetrators are held accountable, connected and take responsibility for stopping their violence'. It includes the six indicators listed in Figure 13.

Figure 13: Family Violence Outcome Framework Domain 3 (Perpetrators)



Source: Victorian Government: Family Violence Outcomes Framework. Available at: <https://www.vic.gov.au/family-violence-outcomes-framework>

Stakeholders consulted for this report had mixed views on the measurement of the indicator 'Reduction in all family violence behaviours' and how it can be used as a performance metric, given that figures showing a decrease in recidivism could also mean that breaches of FVIOs were not being reported and acted on.

Noting that Family Safety Victoria is currently engaged in a consultative process to determine the best way to measure the indicators in the Family Violence Outcomes Framework, we suggest that the indicators could also be further developed by making them more specific (for example, how is 'perpetrators' overall wellbeing' defined?) and by including baselines, realistic targets and timeframes for achieving those targets. For example, what is the current average level of perpetrator retention in programs, and what would be an attainable target and within what timeframe? A government statistics expert highlighted that it is critical that services collect and enter indicator data (for example, number of perpetrators completing programs) into systems in a standardised way wherever possible to ensure progress in delivering services can be monitored and reported on.

Guidance could also be developed for the perpetrator service response sector to specify the data that is needed to measure the indicators, and the roles and responsibilities for data collection. For example, how is the 'equity and safety of relationships' defined, how is it measured and who is responsible for doing so? As we noted in our Reform Governance report:

There is no clear relationship between the major investments and their intended or projected bearing on high-level outcomes. While activities have been grouped under what they are expected to contribute to, there has been no articulation of the connection between the inputs (delivery of initiatives), the outputs (provision of services) and the results or outcomes these are having. It is not possible to determine the extent to which outputs are contributing to outcomes. Without this logic, governance mechanisms are limited in their ability to measure, monitor and report on progress. Oversight bodies should now be pivoting their efforts towards measuring short and medium-term outcomes – what is working and what is not – to determine progress towards achieving the vision.³²

One area of progress is the development of a client-reported outcomes measurement approach for perpetrator interventions, which has been trialled in the Medium-term Perpetrator Accommodation Service (MPAS) since 2021. Two sets of questions have been developed as part of the MPAS evaluation - one for perpetrators and one for adult victim survivors - and these are to be asked at the point of program entry and program closure. These questions align with relevant outcome indicators in the Family Violence Outcomes Framework and will directly contribute to the evaluation of outcomes achieved by the MPAS. The approach is also expected to contribute to the broader work to measure and monitor outcomes across the family violence system.

Evaluation of perpetrator interventions

As outlined in section 2, since the Royal Commission both Family Safety Victoria and the Department of Justice and Community Safety have implemented several innovative pilot programs trialling approaches to individual case management and programs for perpetrators from diverse communities (refugee and migrants, LGBTIQ+ and so on) and those with complex needs (alcohol and other drug issues, mental health). These evaluations have given valuable insight into intended and unintended outcomes, contributed to identifying promising new interventions and indicated the potential benefits of further investment in these areas. They have also highlighted lessons learned to improve the implementation of future interventions. For example, the evaluation of the perpetrator accommodation program shows the importance of building awareness about new interventions among networks that can provide referrals and the importance of branding perpetrator interventions in a more positive way to encourage uptake.

Given the importance of evaluation activity in building the evidence base, we suggest the Victorian Government should continue to invest in quality evaluations, ensuring adequate funding is allocated at the program design stage and ensuring evaluation data collection starts early enough to capture key data, including baseline measures as appropriate.

We note the development of a common evaluation framework, and some common evaluation challenges, both of which are described below.

Developing a common evaluation framework

Since the EACPI delivered its final report in 2018, the Victorian Government has adopted the advisory committee's advice on establishing a common evaluation framework for perpetrator interventions to ensure rigour and consistency in evaluations and better comparison of outcomes.³³ Family Safety Victoria's guidance document 'Key Evaluation Questions to Examine the Implementation of Perpetrator Interventions' provides solid and clear guidance regarding evaluation themes (see Table 2) and key questions, covering cost-benefit analysis, intended and unintended outcomes and lessons learned.

Table 2: Perpetrator Accountability: Key Evaluation Themes in the Common Evaluation Framework

Evaluation theme	Description
1: Appropriateness	Evidence of a need for the initiative, and that the initiative is fit for addressing the problem
2: Acceptability	Evidence that the initiative is perceived as acceptable and satisfactory by all stakeholders
3: Fidelity	Evidence that the initiative has been delivered as intended and described
4: Adoption	Evidence of accessibility and uptake of the initiative
5: Integration	Evidence that the initiative is working together as part of an effective integrated family violence system
6: Feasibility	Evidence that the initiative is able to be delivered in the chosen setting(s)
7: Sustainability	To what extent is the initiative likely to be sustainable into the future?
8: Cost	To what extent is the initiative delivered within available funding and cost effective?
9: Intended and unintended outcomes	To what extent has the initiative been effective in improving outcomes for the target group(s)? > What other impacts (positive or negative) have resulted from the initiative? > What key factors have enabled or constrained the initiative's effectiveness?
10: Sharing and using evidence	What key lessons can be drawn from the initiative?

Source: Based on Family Safety Victoria's 'Perpetrator Accountability – Key Evaluation Questions'

Evaluation experts highlighted that it was important to have this centralised guidance in place to avoid a 'piecemeal' approach with data not being comparable due to varying methodologies. Monash Gender and Family Violence Prevention Centre explained that striking a balance between standardisation and flexibility is needed for innovative projects:

To some extent we need to be comfortable with the messiness to this work when tailoring programming; we need more evidence and more consistency in evaluation practice, but at the same time data can't necessarily be compared if different programs are doing different things with different people.

Key evaluation challenges and issues

As outlined by the EACPI, in general there are multiple inherent challenges associated with evaluating perpetrator interventions, whether in Victoria, the rest of Australia or internationally.³⁴ While it is still critical to take advantage of opportunities to conduct evaluations, it is important to be aware of the following issues when considering evaluation design:

- > Measuring impacts can be difficult when desired outcomes might only be achieved some time after a program has ended, and other factors may shape perpetrator behaviour.
- > Many evaluations rely on a reduction in perpetrator reoffending (as measured by contact with the justice system) as the sole indicator of success, yet most family violence incidents go unreported.
- > Perpetrator programs are not conducive to some impact evaluation methodologies. For example, randomised controlled trials usually require a control group to compare with the treatment group, which poses ethical problems in perpetrator program evaluations because it would mean refusing program access for otherwise eligible perpetrators. Other alternatives exist for conducting rigorous studies – for example, collecting pre and post measures from perpetrators, victim survivors and others in a position to observe perpetrator behaviour change.
- > It can be challenging to recruit a significant sample if perpetrators and victim survivors are not motivated to participate in evaluations. In the absence of their active participation, comparing reoffending outcomes between program participants and a control group based on matching people on certain characteristics in system-level data is one alternative, although recidivism is not a complete measure of all family violence behaviour.

Stakeholders also raised several areas for improvement in the way perpetrator interventions are evaluated, including:

- > The need for disaggregated data to shed light on the experiences of diverse cohorts: While perpetrator data on the Crime Statistics Agency's Family Violence Data Portal is usually disaggregated by gender and Aboriginality, disaggregated data on perpetrators is much more limited for refugee and migrant communities, LGBTIQ+ people and disability status.
- > The need to capture a wider range of outcomes: Stakeholders expressed interest in evaluations assessing the full range of outcomes from perpetrator interventions, including measures of recidivism and reported changes in victim survivor safety and perpetrator behaviour.
- > The need to build (and fund) evaluation into program design across the board: Although independent evaluations have been funded for a number of innovative pilot projects, only a small number of evaluations have recently been carried out in Victoria for group men's behaviour change programs, which continue to attract more than half of Family Safety Victoria's perpetrator intervention funding. Stakeholders expressed that more evaluation funding was needed to improve program quality. It should be noted that while the approach of group men's behaviour change programs themselves is not new, evaluation is still needed to assess the performance of service providers, value for money and the quality of the men's behaviour change curriculum and facilitation. Especially in light of the revised Men's

Behaviour Change Minimum Standards, evaluations should also assess providers' level of compliance with the need to refer perpetrators to other services, follow-up between sessions to maintain motivation and attendance, assess and manage risk and carry out their essential family safety contact function.

- > The need for systemic collection of client feedback data: To design appropriate perpetrator interventions and assess their effectiveness, it is critical to allow for regular opportunities to receive feedback from victim survivors, perpetrators and frontline service workers. Data should be collected in a systematic way from the outset, with a clear data collection and analysis plan about which data will be collected, when/how it will be analysed and who is responsible. One evaluation conducted by Monash University for a Relationships Australia men's behaviour change program in Victoria suggested that to overcome challenges in collecting evaluation data from participants, a 'Research Champion' should be embedded with the program coordination team to collect user experience data throughout the life of the program.³⁵
- > The need for evaluations of online interventions to identify best practices: Stakeholders highlighted that the COVID-19 response has driven a major shift in service delivery formats, and in the post-pandemic period it will still be valuable to assess how remote men's behaviour change programs have benefited clients in rural areas. There is a need to develop a strong body of evidence to determine the most appropriate and effective use of technology with men's behaviour change clients, including looking at issues such as the maximum group size and how to keep participants engaged in an online format.

5. Further development of Victoria's compliance and accreditation model is needed for men's behaviour change service providers to ensure robust program delivery

The Royal Commission recommended that the Victorian Government, in consultation with the peak body working to end men's family violence, No to Violence:

- > reviews and updates the Men's Behaviour Change Programs Minimum Standards to reflect research findings, national and international best practice, and the central importance of partner contact work
- > develops a compliance framework, incorporating an accreditation process, for providers of men's behaviour change programs.³⁶

The minimum standards were revised accordingly in 2017, following a review by Monash University in consultation with the wider sector and building on the key principles developed by the EACPI. Key changes included:

- > increasing the program duration from 12 to 20 weeks
- > requiring timely responses to program enquiries and following up with participants before the program starts
- > new qualification requirements for facilitators and family safety contact workers
- > new reporting requirements including keeping records of attendance, referrals and risk assessment
- > extra support for victim survivors and their families through an enhanced family safety contact function.

After the EACPI's mandate ended in 2018, No to Violence was funded to produce implementation guidance for the revised standards and to support providers to transition to the new standards.

However, the second part of the recommendation was not fully implemented. Men's behaviour change program providers' compliance with the standards is largely self-regulating, with organisations required to conduct their own annual operational reviews without external checks and balances. Beyond the requirement that providers sign up to join No to Violence, there is no central accreditation process or body responsible for overseeing program quality and compliance.

Case for updating the Men's Behaviour Change Minimum Standards

Many stakeholders consulted for this report expressed that there is now a need to update Victoria's Men's Behaviour Change Minimum Standards again.

Relates to
action 5

The revised standards are set out in a concise, clear document, but there have been significant shifts in the perpetrator intervention landscape over recent years. At the time of revising the standards, group men's behaviour change programs were the predominant service response to perpetrators. Stakeholders believe there is a need to revise the standards again to keep pace with the new suite of responses (such as perpetrator case management and accommodation interventions), in addition to the greater acceptance of online programming post-COVID. Family Safety Victoria also told us that the standards should undergo further revision to align with the perpetrator-focused MARAM practice guides.

Monash Gender and Family Violence Prevention Centre explained:

The minimum standards definitely need to be updated; there has been so much innovation and progression since 2017. There's also a big difference in perspective – for example, online programs were considered out of the question back then, as well as mixing case management with men's behaviour change. We need to make room for innovation and best practice. There's a critical need to update them.

Another area of the minimum standards that warrants further consideration is the requirement for programs to last a minimum of 20 weeks. This is in line with the international evidence base that suggests programs need to be of a sufficient length to overcome participants' initial resistance to re-examining their behaviour and becoming more open to change. In recognition of the different approach and cultural context, the minimum standards do not apply to Aboriginal-led programs.³⁷ However, the 20-week minimum may be a barrier to accreditation for services targeting refugee and migrant perpetrators or other groups with specific needs. One stakeholder mentioned that because there is a large gap in services for migrant perpetrators and for people with alcohol and other drug issues, referrals are often made to programs that are shorter than the 20-week duration defined in the standards. While the standards discuss eligibility considerations for diverse groups and those with complex needs, there is little guidance on how these needs can best be addressed and the degree of flexibility that may be required.

As the field of perpetrator interventions is constantly evolving depending on the emerging evidence base and innovative program pilots, we suggest consideration of periodic revisions of the minimum standards to ensure they reflect current and robust practice for perpetrator interventions. A central expert panel (such as the previous EACPI) would be well-placed to do this.

Need for greater oversight of perpetrator program compliance

Many stakeholders felt there was room to strengthen Victoria's compliance and accreditation process for providers of men's behaviour change and other perpetrator programs. They voiced concerns that programs across the state may be of varying quality and may not reflect an understanding of the deeply gendered nature of family violence. They pointed out that there is no centralised curriculum, with providers largely left to their own devices to generate their own content. A No to Violence representative stated: 'I'm still a bit concerned about program design. There's nothing in the standards, for example, about needing to have a session plan.'

Relates to
action 4

One service provider felt that the approach in New South Wales provided a potential best practice model with its process of accrediting individual men's behaviour change sites. Under the NSW Compliance Framework for Men's Domestic Violence Behaviour Change programs, providers must apply for registration from the Department of Justice, providing evidence of their program strategies, policies and processes for review by an expert advisory panel.³⁸

Monash Gender and Family Violence Prevention Centre, which has conducted extensive research into perpetrator programs, also raised the idea of having a central accreditation process by a review board:

Everyone's doing something slightly different with perpetrator interventions. As funding is handed out in small buckets, there's almost a pressure to be 'innovative' to get funding and evaluation is not always built into it. Also, the funding may only support a short term pilot with one cohort of participants and limited evaluation so the capacity to assess the program is restricted. We need to provide funding for longer and we need more thought given to what that looks like, whether it's about funding for up to one year, make a program produce a clear guide and program materials to go to a board for accreditation, and then if it's approved then it's funded for two to three years to have a stable workforce. What is clear is the current model of small pockets of often isolated funding doesn't support building sustainable responses to men's use of violence against women.

The Caring Dads program provides a good example of robust quality assurance (see Box 2).

A number of men's behaviour change program service providers expressed that funding had not been increased enough to meet the cost of providing the expanded family safety contact program, as well as the higher expectations for individual follow-up with men's behaviour change participants between sessions to maintain their attendance and motivation.

Box 2: Program quality assurance example – Caring Dads

A Canadian-developed program being piloted in Victoria shows a program-level approach to facilitator accreditation and program quality assurance, with a dedicated program manual and facilitator training. While Caring Dads is a parenting program rather than a men's behaviour change program, it highlights how fathering can be used as an entry point to working on intimate partner violence given its session 'Relationship with My Child's Mother'. All Caring Dads facilitators are required to maintain current certification and training in the latest program manual, which contains detailed session plans and resources. To remain in 'good standing', facilitators must follow contractually mandated guidelines and reporting requirements. Facilitators are also sensitised in how to be alert to the potential unintended negative effects of the program, such as it being misused in a child custody battle, providing false reassurance to service providers that reduces monitoring of victim survivor safety, and parenting tips being weaponised to undermine victim survivors' confidence in their parenting skills.

Source: Caring Dads (2018): Helping Fathers Value their Children program manual, third edition.

Debate over minimum qualifications for perpetrator program staff

As explored in our companion report 'Crisis Response to Recovery Model for Victim Survivors', stakeholders expressed mixed views about the implementation of Royal Commission Recommendation 209 (see Box 3) amid the current workforce shortages in Victoria's family violence service sector. Many providers were concerned that raising the bar for minimum qualifications had made it more even more difficult to recruit in the current tight labour market, particularly in rural areas.

Box 3: Royal Commission into Family Violence Recommendation 209 and its implementation progress

Recommendation 209

*The Victorian Government include in the 10-year industry plan for family violence prevention and response a staged process for the introduction of mandatory qualifications for specialist family violence practitioners, so that no later than 31 December 2020 all funded services must require family violence practitioners to hold a social work or equivalent degree.**

Now implemented by the Victorian Government, the recommendation means that:

- > Practitioners employed before the transition period are exempt from the minimum qualification requirement, as long as they maintain continuous service in specialist family violence roles.
- > New specialist employees have a five-year transition period from 1 July 2021 until 30 June 2026 during which they must either hold a Bachelor of Social Work or equivalent qualification, or be working towards one within five years from their date of employment (if they have at least five years of experience in a relevant field or hold a related qualification).
- > Candidates who bring significant cultural knowledge or lived experience and who face barriers to educational pathways can be employed in specialist roles with appropriate support, and have 10 years to work towards a social work or equivalent qualification.**

* Source: State of Victoria (2016): Royal Commission into Family Violence: Report and Recommendations, Vol VI, Parl Paper No. 132, p. 202.

** Source: Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (2021): Mandatory Minimum Qualifications for Family Violence Practitioners: Recommendation 209. Available at: <https://www.vic.gov.au/mandatory-minimum-qualifications-specialist-family-violence-practitioners>.

Aligning with the mandatory qualifications policy that resulted from Recommendation 209, the 2017 Men's Behaviour Change Minimum Standards contain a provision for minimum qualifications and experience of men's behaviour change facilitators. The revised men's behaviour change standard currently provides for facilitators to have access to supervision of their sessions by a more experienced practitioner at least monthly, and to undertake at least four relevant professional development opportunities per year.

At least one of the two group facilitators must have an undergraduate degree in social work or a related field, in addition to a graduate diploma or certificate in men's family violence and 100 hours of men's behaviour change facilitation experience. The second facilitator must have at least a social work degree and to have observed at least 10 men's behaviour change sessions.³⁹

Some service providers believed that the minimum qualifications did not provide enough recognition of work, life and cultural experiences. However, others underscored the importance of making sure workers were highly qualified and trained for the challenging work of providing services to perpetrators without colluding or leading to negative unintended consequences. They explained that the professionalisation of the sector has been a game changer in terms of improving the standard of practice, with a No to Violence representative expressing that: 'Working with perpetrators is hard, nuanced and particular work. I'd be nervous to see the spirit of the Royal Commission recommendation undermined.'

Glossary of relevant terms and abbreviations

Aboriginal	While acknowledging the diversity of Aboriginal people in Australia, in this document the term 'Aboriginal' has been used to refer to all people of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander descent.
Affected family member	A person who has experienced family violence, also known as a victim survivor. The term is predominantly used in police and court proceedings to refer to the person to be protected by a family violence intervention order.
Applicant	A person who applies for a family violence intervention order. This can be a Victoria Police member applying on behalf of the affected family member.
Central Information Point	Provides timely information to support effective risk assessment and management of perpetrators of family violence. Enabled by the Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme, it brings together representatives from Court Services Victoria, Victoria Police, Corrections Victoria and the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing to consolidate critical information about perpetrators of family violence into a single report. Reports can currently be requested by The Orange Door network and some Risk Assessment and Management Panels.
Collusion	Intentional or unintentional collaboration with a perpetrator by reinforcing, excusing, minimising or denying a perpetrator's violence towards family members and/or the extent or impact of that violence. Collusion can take many forms (verbal and non-verbal). It can be conscious or unconscious and it includes any action that has the effect of reinforcing the perpetrator's violence/supportive narratives as well as their narratives about systems and services.
Community services	Local support services for individuals and/or families that may include providing information, advice, practical help, financial help or a combination of services. Community services often address the needs of diverse groups.
Court Mandated Counselling Order Program	An order that requires a respondent to attend a counselling program to encourage behaviour change. Counselling orders can be made by magistrates at Specialist Family Violence Courts. If a respondent does not comply with a counselling order they can be charged with a criminal offence.
Diverse groups	Groups that may have different experiences of family violence and different needs, and who may be experiencing added barriers to seeking help and receiving support due to their particular background or personal characteristics. These include children and young people, older people, Aboriginal people, people within culturally diverse communities, people within the LGBTIQ+ community, people living in rural, regional and remote communities, people with a disability, people experiencing mental health issues, male victims, women prisoners and women who work in the sex industry.
Expert Advisory Committee on Perpetrator Interventions (EACPI)	Group established in November 2016 as a time-limited committee to advise government on the family violence perpetrator interventions that should be available in Victoria to ensure the safety of women and children. Its report was delivered to government in October 2018 and released publicly in October 2019. It made 22 recommendations, ideally to be implemented within two years.
Family Safety Victoria	A Division of the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (comprising some portfolio responsibilities of the former Department of Health and Human Services) with dedicated responsibility for delivering key elements of family violence reform. This includes the Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme, The Orange Door network and the Family Violence Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management reforms.

Family violence	Any behaviour that occurs in family, domestic or intimate relationships that is physically or sexually abusive; emotionally or psychologically abusive; economically abusive; threatening or coercive; or is in any other way controlling that causes a person to live in fear for their safety or wellbeing or that of another person. In relation to children, family violence is also defined as behaviour by any person that causes a child to hear or witness or otherwise be exposed to the effects of the above behaviour. This definition includes violence within a broader family context such as extended families, kinship networks and communities.
Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme	Established in legislation, the scheme enables sharing of information between authorised organisations to support the assessment and management of family violence risk.
Family violence intervention order (FVIO)	A court-issued order to protect people from further family violence.
Intersectionality	Refers to the structural inequality and discrimination experienced by different individuals and communities, and the impact of these creating barriers to service access and further marginalisation. Intersectionality is the complex, cumulative way in which the effects of multiple forms of identity-based structural inequality and discrimination (such as racism, sexism, ableism and classism) combine, overlap or intersect, in the experiences of individuals or communities. These aspects of identity can include gender, ethnicity and cultural background, language, socioeconomic status, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, age, geographic location or visa status.
Family Violence Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management (MARAM) Framework	A framework to help identify, assess and manage family violence risk. A range of organisations are required by law, under the Family Violence Protection Act 2008, to align their practices and policies with MARAM, which replaced the former common risk assessment framework or 'CRAF'. The framework is supported by operational practice guidance and risk identification, assessment and management tools.
Family Violence Report	Risk assessment and management tool completed by Victorian police officers after every family violence incident. It is informed by the officer's observations and includes an assessment of the severity of risk based on responses from all parties involved. It automates referrals to The Orange Door, community agencies and/or Child Protection, where required. Also known as an 'L17'.
Keeping perpetrators in view	Services or agencies having oversight of a perpetrator to minimise risk of future harm.
LGBTIQ+	An inclusive initialism that refers to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender / gender diverse, intersex and queer people.
MARAM	See Family Violence Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework.
Men's behaviour change programs	A psycho-educational group-based program that works with perpetrators to address their use of family violence.
Perpetrator	A person who uses, or has used, family violence. Acknowledging that misidentification can occur, perpetrator means 'the predominant aggressor' in cases where the victim survivor (the person most in need of protection) fights back.
Perpetrator accountability	Perpetrators being kept in view and facing appropriate and consistent responses to their conduct.
Person using violence	An alternative term for 'perpetrator' preferred by some communities and service providers. It is perceived as more conducive to client engagement and the potential for behaviour change.
Perpetrator case management program	A collaborative support service for perpetrators of family violence to address the barriers to engaging in the change process. Case managers assess risk, develop case plans and goals, monitor progress and provide a connection to a range of required services, based on individual needs.

Risk Assessment and Management Panels	Formally and regularly convened meetings of key agencies and organisations in local service areas that manage the highest risk family violence cases. The panels develop coordinated action plans to address serious and imminent threats to an individual's life, health, safety or welfare. There are 18 panels operating across Victoria.
Respondent	A term used by police and the courts to describe the alleged family violence perpetrator.
Royal Commission into Family Violence	Established in 2015, the Royal Commission was tasked with finding ways to prevent family violence, improve support for victim survivors and hold perpetrators to account. The Royal Commission provided its report, which included 227 recommendations, to the Victorian Government on 29 March 2016.
Safe Steps	A 24/7 statewide specialist support service for victims of family violence. Services include information and referral, crisis response, specialist family violence risk assessment, Safety planning, and access to supported crisis accommodation.
Specialist Family Violence Court	Specialist courts that provide enhanced safety features including separate entrances for victim survivors and remote hearing facilities. Specialist Family Violence Courts are staffed by specially trained magistrates and court staff, partner agencies and other court-based services to deliver a coordinated response. Magistrates at Specialist Family Violence Courts have powers to mandate counselling orders for perpetrators.
The Orange Door	The Orange Door network is for adults, children and young people who are at risk of experiencing or have experienced family violence, and for families who need support with the development and wellbeing needs of their children and young people. It assesses and responds to a person's needs and risk, and connects people to family violence services, Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs), family services and services for perpetrators (collectively referred to as 'core' services). The Orange Door network also connects people to a broader range of services such as mental health or housing support. The Orange Door also provides services for perpetrators of family violence, engaging to hold them accountable for their choice to use family violence and provide services to assist them to address their use of violence.
Violence against women	Any act of gender-based violence that causes or could cause physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of harm or coercion, in public or in private life. This definition encompasses all forms of violence that women experience (including physical, sexual, emotional, cultural/spiritual, financial, and others) that are gender-based.**

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Endnotes

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- 14 Ibid.
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