



Men's Education Towards Anger & Life

*"Getting in tune with yourself, your partner, your
kids and your life"*

**David Nugent
Counsellor/Psychotherapist
Member of the Australian
Counselling Association**

**P.O Box 102,
Webb Street, LPO,
Narre Warren, 3805.**

PH: 0401 766877

www.heavymetalgroup.com.au

20/07/2020,

To whom it may concern,

I am writing on behalf of the Heavy M.E.T.A.L. (Men's Education Towards Anger & Life) Program to share how the Royal Commission (R.C.) and changes to policy and recommendations to services have affected the Heavy M.E.T.A.L. Program services which consequently impacts the community.

The Heavy M.E.T.A.L. Group is a counselling service and a provider of a Behaviour Change Program for men. It is not a 24-hour Emergency Support Service. The Behaviour Change Program consists of two phases, which run over a minimum of 12 months (academic year). Participation length varies depending on recognition and understanding of the material presented, ownership of past behaviours, and regular attendance. The delivery of this Program is as per the recommended standards set by the Department of Human Services and No To Violence (N.T.V.). N.T.V. is the peak body for organisations and individuals working with men to end violence and abuse towards family members in Victoria and New South Wales.

In the Phase 1 program, the participants are offered support and challenge in taking responsibility for their behaviour. In the first ten weeks, the men learn to break the pattern of their violent behaviour and invited to consider a range of abusive, controlling acts and the consequences they have for women, children, and other community members. In this group, participants learn the necessary skills to improve the safety situation for others. In the second ten weeks, the Program challenges their old behaviours and belief systems. The course deals with a range of destructive behaviours and explores gender roles. It also challenges the participant to question existing personal attitudes and feelings, contributing to his current behaviour. Using the strategies taught helps the participant take more profound responsibility for his behaviour.

Men who show they have an understanding of the Phase One Program and who have demonstrated and acknowledged how their old beliefs and behaviours have harmed others can continue their journey of change with the Phase Two Program. The Phase 2 level is also rarely completed in a school semester (minimum of 20 weeks). Participants are often encouraged to repeat this level until they are confident, they can maintain consistency with their new behaviour.

Depending on the participant's participation and commitment to the Phase One Program and the feedback Heavy M.E.T.A.L. receives from the partner/family and invitation is made to the Phase 2 Program. Communication skills (which include listening, assertiveness, and responding skills) are taught and explored in this Phase. Phase Two is for men who want to continue their self-development and enhance a solid foundation in behaviour change to provide a safe environment for themselves and their families.

The process of behaviour change is a long one, and participation is no way predictive of positive change. At the same time, there is evidence that men can and do modify their behaviour. Research over the longer-term demonstrates that it is exceedingly difficult to predict which men will sustain positive change or for how long. Simultaneously, the study indicates the benefits to women and children is to engage participants as long as possible. The longer a participant engages, the longer they are being held accountable to implement change, and the higher the chance of them sustaining long term change.

For this reason, all participants who enrol in the Heavy M.E.T.A.L. Program are strongly encouraged to achieve their goals in changing their behaviour to commit to complete both Phase One and Phase Two of the Heavy M.E.T.A.L. program. The average participant engages with the Heavy M.E.T.A.L. Program for two years, and often this is due to the participants choosing to continue past the minimum 20-week requirement.

Since the Royal Commission (R.C.) and changes to policy and recommendations to services the Heavy M.E.T.A.L. Program have been affected in the following ways:

Post the 2016 R.C.; the Heavy M.E.T.A.L. Program has become a non recognised provider of Men's Behaviour Change (M.B.C.) programs and, therefore, does not receive referrals from N.T.V. due to Family Safe Victoria (F.S.V.) validation.

F.S.V. has construed the R.C. recommendations around sharing client information to exclude non-government funded programs that have impeded the Heavy M.E.T.A.L. Program's ability to help reduce the loss of life due to Family Violence.

- ... By F.S.V., interpreting the R.C. recommendations for sharing client information was compulsory for government-funded programs. It excluded private organisations they have influenced N.T.V decision to recognise the Heavy M.E.T.A.L program.

- ... Due to the presentation of this ruling with sharing of information and, because the Heavy M.E.T.A.L. Group is not government funded, it is no longer recognised nor approved by No To Violence (N.T.V.) to receive client referrals.
- ... The Heavy M.E.T.A.L. Program had recently passed a meticulous N.T.V. audit before F.S.V collaboration with N.T.V.
- ... Despite the Heavy M.E.T.A.L. meeting with F.S.V. in 2019 to discuss and explain their concerns with such a decision. Their recommendation was to uphold their decision to exclude non-government funded programs. Aforementioned to this, the Heavy M.E.T.A.L Program had been recognised by N.T.V as a Non-Government Funded provider of Men's Behaviour Change Programs for 15 years.
- ... Since 2019, N.T.V. has not endorsed the Heavy M.E.T.A.L. Program due to the F.S.V. sanctions regarding the sharing of information which the Heavy M.E.T.A.L. service was always prepared to do if required.
- ... At the N.T.V pre-training workshops, for implementing the new recommendations by the R.C, it was highlighted the sharing of client information was compulsory for government-funded programs and an option for private services.

In summary, construing this one recommended R.C. change has impacted the Heavy M.E.T.A.L Program's long-serving ability to reduce the gap where government-funded services were unable to assist. F.S.V. interpretation and endorsement have directly impacted women and children's safety; whose partners are on these waiting lists. An example of services would be the likes of Relationships Australia – Kew, who have a current wait time of approximately nine or more months before a participant can join their Behaviour Change Program.

The contradiction to this interpretation is that during this time, DHHS and Corrections Victoria have referred urgent clients to the Heavy M.E.T.A.L. Program and have provided funding. These services do this because of Heavy M.E.T.A.L.'s ability to engage participants immediately and knowing the Program's reputation of holding men accountable for a much longer time than most government-funded programs.

Before the R.C recommendations, N.T.V and F.S.V were aware of Heavy M.E.T.A.L.'s existing policy and procedures regarding sharing information and confidentiality. The Heavy M.E.T.A.L. Program follows the ethical guidelines set out by the Australian Counselling Association, where participants are made aware that all personal information gathered by Heavy M.E.T.A.L. Group during their attendance with remain confidential except when:

- (1) A court subpoena the information; or

(2) Failure to disclose the information would place the participant or another person at risk;
or

(3) Requested by the Department of Health and Human Services-Child Protection.

Further, there is a prerequisite for any participant who is enrolled with the Heavy M.E.T.A.L Program to sign an agreement disclosing partner/ex-partner current contact details, etc. The participant is made aware via the contract, and in the initial assessment session that a Heavy M.E.T.A.L Team member will contact their partner/ex-partner. Other services, e.g., Police and DHHS, are engaged when there are concerns regarding their partner/ex-partner or children's well-being.

N.T.V has been very keen to reinstate the Heavy M.E.T.A.L Program, particularly after completing their thorough audit process. Not until F.S.V. changed their perspective of the sharing of information guidelines and using it as a way to exclude non-funded government services will N.T.V be able to reinstate the Heavy M.E.T.A.L. Program as a recommended service provider of Men's Behaviour Change Programs.

Ideally, preventing family violence is to encourage men to take responsibility for their behaviour before the problem escalates to violence, relationship breakdown, separation, Police, or Court intervention. There is currently a common thread in the Family Violence Sector and from clients reporting government-funded programs refusing to accept Men who are not mandated by the court to attend their Program. For the same reasons already mentioned, these services are not referring these men to the Heavy M.E.T.A.L Program. Self-referred men who ideally acknowledge they want to change their behaviour and ask for help are not supported. Due to the long waiting list and the inability to meet the demand, the suggestion made is that these services have a self-interest in what a mandated participant is worth to them in dollar value from the government funding pot, compared to what a self-referred client is worth.

Before the R.C., the Heavy M.E.T.A.L. service helped and engaged men who were mandated from the court and helped reduce the waiting list. The Heavy M.E.T.A.L. Program once received praise from the Dandenong Magistrates Court on the excellent work for the community. Because of this statute stance on R.C.'s recommendation, the courts do not recognise any services not listed on N.T.V.'s indorsed list of Behaviour Change Program Services.

The long waiting list for men to engage in programs impacts women and children, as well the waiting list adds to the cost of the burden of disease to the community and Mental Health. It's in the government's interest to support the Heavy M.E.T.A.L. Program as the more men who engage in programs, the less the cost to government and the community.

The current cost to the government for a male participant to attend a funded program for 20 weeks is more than \$4000 per participant, not including the expense for Police, Court, and

any other services that assist in getting a perpetrator of Family Violence to engage with Men's Behaviour Change Programs.

The Heavy M.E.T.A.L. Program is the only program that offers a 40-week program. The Program challenges men to be accountable for their abusive behaviour and empowered to break the pattern of their violent behaviour.

To help reduce the impact of Family Violence on women and children, reduce waiting lists and cost to government consideration needs to be given to modify the sharing of information rule to include reputable services like the Heavy M.E.T.A.L. Program.

To discuss this matter further, please do not hesitate to contact the writer, David Nugent the Director/Founder/Senior Practitioner of the Heavy M.E.T.A.L. Group Pty Ltd either by Phone on 0401766877 or by email: hvymetal@bigpond.net.au

Thank you for this opportunity to share our concerns regarding the Family Violence sector's interpretation of the recommended guidelines, and on behalf of the community, we trust a decision will include the Heavy M.E.T.A.L. Group services.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D Nugent', with a stylized flourish at the end.

David Nugent.
Heavy M.E.T.A.L. Group Pty Ltd