



Cost to Government of Family Violence

Summary

The Royal Commission into Family Violence requested that the State provide information about the overall cost of family violence to the State. As articulated by the Commission, this request was designed to allow the Commission to understand the cost of family violence to State Government universal programs and services, outside the funding it specifically allocates to respond to family violence.

In preparing this information for the Commission the State has multiple challenges in compiling the data. Whilst the State provides services to people who experience or use family violence across a wide range of portfolios, there is no accepted and universal manner in which the information about this use is captured.

The difficulty in capturing this information is for a number of reasons. Primary amongst these is the way that data is captured and used by various services, programs or areas of Government. These difficulties include that some services do not inquire into the presence of family violence; others may inquire into the presence of family violence, but do not have a mechanism for flagging its existence in their data collection system; and others again do record the presence of family violence, but have case management systems which do not allow the mining of that data.

Ultimately, the State has compiled the attached information on the cost to the Government of family violence. However, there are strong reasons why this information should not be aggregated and presented as the total cost to the Government of family violence. These include:

- the different methodologies of the departments and agencies in collating this data, and associated costs;
- the clear gaps in the data provided; and
- the strong caveats attached to this information.

In addition, departments and agencies have applied difference approaches to the cost of service provision including, the inclusion in some instance of 'back of house' support.

This exercise has served to reinforce what the Commission has heard through evidence and submissions, that the State does not currently have a way of collecting and using data on its service users consistently across services, programs and areas. The Government is pursuing reforms to change the way that data is captured, stored and used across agencies and departments. In particular, it anticipates that the Commission will make recommendations on the necessity of flagging the presence of family violence across the databases of services that assist people who experience and use family violence.

Further, scoping work is currently being undertaken, led by the Department of Premier and Cabinet, on information sharing in response to recommendations from the findings of the Coroner into the death of Luke Batty. Part of this work will look at how that information is gathered and stored, as well as shared.



History of this Request

On 20 August 2015, the Commission requested that the State provide information on the overall cost of family violence to the State, comprised of:

1. The cost or funding of specialist programs:
 - a. Within Victoria Police; and
 - b. Delivered by other departments.
2. The cost of family violence to government funded services beyond specialist programs that is attributable to family violence, including but not limited to:
 - Victoria Police
 - Victorian Courts
 - Housing assistance
 - Homelessness programs
 - Health programs
 - Child protection statutory services
 - Family and community support services
 - Youth justice services
 - Drug treatment services
 - Legal assistance services
 - Corrections services

The Commission requested both the total cost of each program and the basis of the cost attribution to family violence, including the assumptions that have informed that attribution and any relevant proportions. On 28 August 2015, the Commission informed the State that it required the information for the time period 2009-10 to 2013-14.

On 7 October 2015, representatives from the Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPC), Department of Treasury and Finance (DTF), Department of Health and Human Services (DJR), Department of Justice and Regulation (DJR), Department of Education and Training (DET) and Victoria Police met with the Commission to discuss the request.

The Commission heard from all the affected departments and agencies about the issues and limitations in completing the task. In particular, DHHS raised the issue of a lack of flags in many of its databases. The Commission informed the departments and agencies that it required the information for the time period 2009-10 to 2013-14.

Cost Information otherwise provided to the Commission

The Commission has been provided with information about the cost to Government of family violence in a number of different ways, including:

- The information contained in Appendix B to the Government's submission to the Commission. This contains information about dedicated family violence funding in the 2015-16 Budget, 2014-15 Expenditure, and a snapshot at March 2015 of Government funded programs and services addressing family violence.



- Departmental responses to other Notices to Produce, which have requested funding details for specialist family violence programs from 2009-10 to 2013-14.
- Department responses to the Notice to Produce dated 24 August 2015, which requested funding over the forward estimates for family violence programs described in Appendix B to the Government's submission to the Commission.

Different methodologies by different departments

All departments and agencies have used different methodologies in preparing their data for production to the Commission. Nearly all agencies and departments have had to make significant assumptions in the way that they have calculated their costs.

The manner in which this data has been produced is detailed below. The differences between the way these figures have been collated and calculated can be clearly seen.

Department of Justice and Regulation

Corrections have provided a high-level estimated cost to the corrections system for 2013-14 and 2014-15.

Corrections have developed their estimated prison costs on the total number of prisoners discharged and the average episode for specific offences. Its estimated community corrections costs are based on the daily average supervised offender population.

In order to provide an estimated cost, they have made a number of offence specific assumptions, some based on reports of the Crimes Statistics Agency. Further, they have estimated the average order length for a community correction order.

The key limitation for Corrections applying to the estimated cost is that it is not possible to identify the number of prisoners and offenders who have an episode in custody or on a community correction order for family violence offences. This is because Corrections currently only record the most serious offence for which the prisoner or offender is sentenced.

It can be seen from the above that there are a number of assumptions which mean that these estimates should be treated very carefully. The overall caveat placed on these figures by Corrections in providing them to the Commission is clear: 'it should be noted in interpreting the figures provided that the large number of limitation and data gaps mean that it is not possible to know how close to accurate these figures are, or indeed whether it is likely to be an over or under estimation of the true cost of family violence to the corrections system.'

The **Magistrates' Court of Victoria** have provided a very high level assessment that reflects the Court's estimation that 32 per cent of their workload is family violence related across the following jurisdictions: Family Violence Intervention Orders; Personal Safety Intervention Orders; Family Law; Victims of Crime Assistance Tribunal; and Criminal.

The funding used in the estimate includes family violence program specific funding and a mix of funding components, some directly linked to core operations and others (for example capital works) that are not. The Court's estimation is based on the assumption that the entire funding amount is



necessary for the Court to deliver its services. A further assumption is that 20 per cent of the cases in the Criminal jurisdiction and the Victims of Crime Assistance Tribunal are family violence related. This assumption comes from current Court and Victoria Police data.

The **Victims Assistance Program** is funded by DJR to support victims of crime. These services are procured by DJR from non-government organisations. Currently there are seven service providers that employ over 100 case workers. These providers are required to record data for each service provided to clients, which includes the type of crime. As a result, DJR has been able to identify the volume of individual services provided to victims of crimes flagged as family violence.

DJR provide a number of caveats that should be considered in using the data. Most significant of these is the concern that applying the proportion of family violence services to the total cost of the program will not be an accurate estimation, due to the variation in complexity between matters. It may be that providing services to clients who have been victims of family violence crimes may be of a higher complexity and therefore require more hours or higher brokerage amounts.

Further, DJR notes that these estimated costs only include the contract costs for Victims Assistance Programs, not the internal costs associated with the management of the agreements with providers or the family violence services delivered by DJR (including the Victims Helpline and Victims Register).

The **Office of Public Prosecutions** has provided their estimated costs for providing Prosecution Services. They have calculated their costs by determining the proportion of prosecution matters that the OPP handed in each financial year that were flagged as family violence in their database. This proportion was then applied to the expenditure for each area of the OPP (this expenditure includes all costs for the area including salaries and briefing/contractor costs). Adjustments were then made to this proportion based on the different levels of family violence work undertaken or supported by each area of the OPP.

In preparing this cost estimate, the OPP has assumed that: the resources required in a family violence matter is in line with overall matters; and that not included any costs from their Executive or Corporate Support areas.

The **Child Witness Service** provided their estimated cost that 45 per cent of their costs could be apportioned to family violence, as 45 per cent of their new referrals involved a family violence incident. They relied only on new referrals and did not include any open cases.

Victoria Police

Victoria Police has provided a series of estimated costs which are based on 40-60 per cent of frontline police activities being related to family violence. They have provided a series of estimates that both include and exclude corporate and back office costs. Their series of estimates does not include capital costs.

Department of Education and Training

The Department of Education and Training has provided the data that they have available.



DET have not been able provide figures for the cost to **Student Support Services** of family violence, they can only provide the number of students with the phrase ‘family violence’ appearing in their case notes.

There are a number of **Maternal and Child Health** programs, including the Universal MCH service, MCH Enhanced and MCHLine.

For **MCH Universal**, the total costs apportioned to family violence from 2014-15 were not available. For 2013-14, the cost apportioned to family violence was determined by the number of family violence assessments recorded. These assessments were averaged to 15 minutes each and then the cost was allocated in that way. This does not take into account the natural variation in these assessments based on their complexity.

For **MCH Enhanced**, each instance of family violence was assumed to take 45 minutes, taking into account assessment, counselling and safety planning, cost was then allocated on this basis. Again, this does not take into account the natural variation in these assessments based on their complexity.

For **MCHLine**, there has not been any estimate provided for the cost apportioned to family violence from the total cost of the program. However, DET have provided the number of calls related to family violence in 2013-14 and 2014-15.

The **Primary School Nursing Program** has estimated its cost on the basis of a 30 minute assessment, follow up and referral following the disclosure by a child of family violence. The cost is taken from the mid-point of the salary of the nurse. The **Secondary School Nursing Program** uses a different data system which is unable to report on these fields.

Parentline has calculated the cost of family violence through the general cost per shift hour and then extrapolated that out through the cost per call in which family violence is report. They have provided a cost range per case, and the number of family violence related calls per annum, but not provided a total cost that can be apportioned to family violence.

Department of Health and Human Services

The Department of Health and Human Services have a number of programs, services or areas that have “flags” in their data collection system to capture the data that relates to family violence. These programs include **Family Services, Sexual Assault Services, Child Protection, Out of Home Care, and Hospitals**. In relation to these estimated costs, DHHS has provided the cost as a proportion of total cost based on the percentage of clients with family violence flagged as an issue.

DHHS also have a number of programs, services or areas that do not formally record information as to which clients, or service episodes, are related to family violence. Put another way, these services do not record family violence through the use of a data “flag”. These include **Public Housing, Youth Justice, Disability, Community Health, Ambulances, Drug and Alcohol Services, and Mental Health**.

There was no information available for **Youth Justice and Disability**.

In relation to **Public Housing**, DHHS has estimated the apportionment of cost due to family violence using prevalence rates from 2005-06 to 2010-11, as there is currently not an up to date flag for family violence in the public housing data.



In estimating cost to the **Community Health** services, DHHS has used prevalence rates from research conducted by VicHealth, the World Health Organisation and the Australian Institute of Criminology to determine the percentage of cost that should be attributed to family violence. Taking the percentages of women who seek assistance and applying this to the total cost, has a number of caveats. These include a lack of clarity as to what extent the services used as a proxy for community health services are representative of the extent family violence is related to all community health services. It assumes that the rates of family violence and use of services apply equally across all service usage. Finally, these costs only consider women seeking assistance for intimate partner violence, not other persons seeking assistance for other forms of family violence.

In relation to **Ambulance** services, there is no data available on the cost of family violence to non-emergency transport or paramedics (for treatment only, not transportation). For emergency transport, using research, DHHS was able to estimate a percentage that should be applied to determine the proportion of costs that should be attributed to family violence. There are a number of caveats, including that this only considers women seeking treatment for intimate partner violence, not other persons seeking treatment for other forms of family violence.

In relation to **Drug and Alcohol Services**, DHHS have estimated the proportion of cost attributable to family violence on the basis of research. DHHS also note the methodology lacks robustness, as it is based on staff reports of the average percentage of their clients. Again, this methodology only considers women seeking treatment that relates to intimate partner violence, not other persons seeking treatment that relates to other forms of family violence.

In relation to **Mental Health** service, DHHS have used research from VicHealth and Access Economics which estimates the percentage of the disease burden which can be attributed to mental illness due to family violence. However, DHHS include the caveats that it is not clear what proportion of disease burden is accounted for by DHHS services, and note that antecedents of family violence among mental health patients is likely to differ compared with the general population. Again, this methodology only considers persons seeking treatment that relates to intimate partner violence, not persons seeking treatment that relates to other forms of family violence.