



Victoria Police Submission to the Royal Commission into Family Violence

Introduction

Victoria Police welcomes the opportunity the Royal Commission into Family Violence provides to examine policing interventions and the broader system responses to the scourge of family violence.

We recognise this is a unique environment for considering holistic change with:

- an Australian-first Royal Commission;
- a dedicated Minister for the Prevention of Family Violence;
- the prioritisation of family violence at the state and national levels; and
- a groundswell of community support for – and expectation of – reform.

We have therefore used this occasion to challenge ourselves on the fundamentals of the existing system and to think creatively – but responsibly – about potential future directions.

Victoria Police understanding of the focus of the Royal Commission

Victoria Police understands the Royal Commission's Terms of Reference and Issues Paper have a future focus on ensuring that Victoria has a system that:

- reduces the incidence of family violence;
- hold perpetrators to account; and
- supports victims in an effective, efficient and sustainable way.

Specifically, the Terms of Reference require the Royal Commission to:

- provide practical recommendations to stop family violence;
- establish best practice for prevention, early intervention, victim support, perpetrator accountability;
- have systemic responses to family violence;
- better integrate and coordinate efforts; and
- recommend how best to evaluate and measure results.

Victoria Police notes the significant focus on changing community attitudes to family violence.

Our submission aims to support the Royal Commission by drawing on our work and experience in responding to family violence over the last decade to advise:

- what works, and why;
- what is not working, and why; and
- what system improvements can be made in the short, medium and longer term.



Inputs to the submission

To prepare this submission, we have canvassed diverse sources of information and advice, including:

- previously identified proposals for reform;
- consultation with frontline police and senior managers across the organisation;
- knowledge of approaches to family violence used elsewhere;
- experience of approaches to other community safety priorities; and
- analysis of police intelligence on the current and emerging environment.

Where there are gaps in our knowledge and approaches, we signal this to the Royal Commission and offer suggestions for redressing them.

Approach

We have based our submission on a consideration of what the system would look like:

- if we started with a blank page; and
- knowing what we know now about the incidence of family violence; and
- based on best practice.

The result is that Victoria Police strongly supports many aspects of the existing system, but also identifies areas where we see opportunities to re-examine and re-imagine the ways in which policing and other services respond to family violence. Underpinning our approach is an argument for a principles-based system that sets explicit shared goals and priorities for the continual improvement of the system across all service sectors.

The structure of our submission is as follows:

- Case for a principles-based system
- Principle 1: The system is victim-centric
- Principle 2: The system holds perpetrators to account
- Principle 3: The system is effective
- Principle 4: The system is efficient
- Principle 5: The system is dynamic
- Appendix A: Summary of proposals
- Appendix B: Family Violence – The Current Victorian Environment
- Appendix C: Family Violence – Victoria Police Reforms and Responses
- Appendix D: Family Violence – Victoria Police Future Directions

Case for a principles-based system

Most of the services that make up the family violence system operate under a guiding mission and objectives. For Victoria Police, these are:

Mission: *A safe, secure and orderly society by serving the community and the law*

Objectives: *Preserving the peace, preventing offences, detecting and apprehending offenders, protecting life and property, and helping those in need of assistance*



While these are important in shaping our respective service priorities and delivery, they do not lend themselves to a collective approach that focuses equally on the performance of the system and of its components. For this reason, Victoria Police advocates complementing our organisational principles with overarching principles that guide the operation and evolution of the family violence system.

We believe a principles-based foundation for the system supports the focus of the Royal Commission as it:

- ✓ is **future-proof** - facilitating a continuously improving system, rather than merely addressing the specific issues of this moment;
- ✓ **unifies focus and effort across sectors** – enabling best use of respective knowledge, skills and resources;
- ✓ **sets clear priorities and directions for system development** – creating a common understanding of where to target innovation, improvement and investment; and
- ✓ **provides a strategic focus for tactical decisions** – assisting each organisation to determine the services they need to deliver and the partners they need to engage.

Our submission proposes a system that reflects the following principles:

- Victim-centric;
- Perpetrator accountability;
- Effective;
- Efficient; and
- Dynamic.

For Victoria Police, the ultimate test and guiding principle is that the system is providing safety to victims and not re-victimising them in that process. The other principles should therefore be read in the context of supporting a victim-centric approach.

The following sections outline the features that would characterise a system operating to these principles and opportunities for improvement in the short, medium and long term.¹ We offer the opportunities as the basis for consultation and discussion, and where possible, have drawn comparisons with existing models to demonstrate that the proposals are feasible, valuable and, in many cases, an extension of existing practice. A summary of our proposals is provided in Appendix A (p.31).

¹ We have defined 'short term' as within 1 year, 'medium term' as within 2-3 years and 'long term' as within 4-5 years.



Principle 1: The system is victim-centric

Victoria Police believes the needs, views and safety of the victim should be at the centre of the family violence system. This principle should hold true for any agency that a victim contacts within the system and for any process that impacts a victim under the system.

Features

A victim-centric system would have the following features:

- Place victim safety as its number one priority
- Enable victim views and issues to inform the service response
- Enable a first response at the earliest point of contact; 'any door is the right door'
- Intervene early in the level/cycle of harm
- Provide tailored and sustained support
- Respond to the specific needs of child victims
- Provide multiple options for reporting family violence and seeking help
- Assist victims to strengthen their protective factors and reduce their risk factors

Opportunities for improvement

The following initiatives would re-orient the system around the victim.

Short term (within 1 year)

Provide safety tips for initial contact with victims

Victoria Police recognises the first time a victim discloses their experience of family violence may not be to police or support services that directly relate to family violence. In some instances, the initial disclosure may be to broader community services (e.g. GPs or financial counselling services), or to friends or other family members. In keeping with the notion of 'no wrong door', it is important these initial contact points or points of disclosure are equipped to recognise the risks and on-refer the victim, or to provide preliminary advice and information on safety, navigating the service system and the various avenues for assistance (see education/training proposed under *Principle 3: Effective*).

This information should represent practical tips and user-friendly guidance that is accessible to everyone, such as:

- sources of help and support, and how victims can access them;
- guidance to others, such as family and friends, about what they can do if they suspect family violence is occurring;
- information about cyber safety (e.g. location settings that may enable a perpetrator to track a victim);
- potentially high-risk situations (e.g. child custody handovers);
- the processes and options within the civil and criminal justice systems; and
- reporting options (discussed further below).

We recognise that while much of this information already exists, there is an opportunity to better promote a single source of wisdom (e.g. *The Lookout* website) as a centralised repository. Importantly, it is not expected that everyone can become experts in family violence, and so the provision of this information and the capacity to direct victims to relevant information, is critical.



This information should be readily available to any service that may reasonably be expected to have contact with a victim, including those that deal with the known risk factors for family violence (e.g. drug and alcohol services, mental health services, maternal and child health services) and those with whom victims may have contact (e.g. GPs, dentists, hospitals, public libraries). As well as raising awareness of the dynamics and presentations of family violence among services in the broader sector, the aim of this initiative is to empower and equip victims with information that enables them to make decisions and take control of their situation.

Develop sector-wide risk categorisations for consistent assessment and management

The Common Risk Assessment Framework is used by police and other services to assess the level and nature of risk in family violence incidents. Importantly, the Framework guides the identification of risk, through determining vulnerabilities and other factors (e.g. pregnancy, access to weapons) that may contribute to determining the level of risk in a given context. The Framework functions as an assessment guide that underpins relevant agencies' intake and assessment processes, and assists in decision-making and risk management.

There is not however a consistent sector-wide translation of risk indicators into categorisations (e.g. high, medium, low). While there is significant work occurring to refine the system's identification and management of 'high risk', this effort is also required for other levels of risk. At present, the actions to be taken in response to risks are in response to the individual factors identified, and are necessarily determined within the context of the relevant services' remit. We see value in developing a categorisation matrix from the factors identified in the Framework to guide decision-making in a multi-agency context and improve universal understandings of different risk categories.

A victim-centric approach would be to differentiate the assessments into categories and provide a set of management/response options tailored to each category of risk. This would necessarily need to be applied contextually by different services, as police and support services perform different functions. This would mean that situations where there are minimal protective concerns would be assessed and subject to a proportionate response, while a matter assessed as high risk would necessarily trigger a more intensive response with additional support options available. This would help to improve the way system demand is managed by targeting response in the first instance.

While we do not advocate a rigid or prescriptive approach, and recognise that risk changes quickly, with potential for escalation, we believe that categorising would have multi-agency benefits. When combined with the standardisation of risk definitions, factors and responses proposed under *Principle 4: Efficient*, a categorised risk assessment model would enable the system to better understand the expected response at different levels of risk and to bring greater consistency in the way risk is managed. Importantly, having an agreed categorisation matrix would help to ensure victims are appropriately channelled into relevant services in the first instance, reducing the need for multiple system contacts where unnecessary. This would also facilitate multi-agency discussions about victim safety as everyone would share a single understanding of a particular category.

Categorising the risk assessment in this way would enable the system to:

- evaluate the range of options available for each category of risk and expand on them where necessary (discussed elsewhere);
- free up specialist services to focus their interventions on the situations that require immediate, decisive action;
- enable early action on behaviours that are problematic and, if left unaddressed, have the potential to escalate; and
- simplify the risk assessment and management process for frontline staff.



Triage the service response to child victims

Building on the proposal to categorise the assessment of situations according to low, medium and high risk, Victoria Police sees the value in triaging situations where children are present or affected. It is widely accepted that witnessing or experiencing family violence can have long term detrimental impacts on children, including the vulnerability to suffering or perpetrating family violence themselves later on in life.

At present, the response options available to police are limited to mandatory reports to Child Protection where there are protective concerns, or referral to Child FIRST where there are more general concerns. This two-doorway system means Child Protection may receive a large volume of referrals that require their assessment before being deemed below their service threshold and that divert their resources from responding to cases that do merit their intervention (there is a high rate of reports that do not proceed to investigation, suggesting there are a number of reports that are not meeting the child protection threshold). By comparison, police refer relatively few matters to Child FIRST and there is potential to improve referrals to this non-statutory pathway. We understand parental consent is a requirement for engagement with Child FIRST, and some police may be reluctant to refer a child knowing a parent may not consent to engage. At present, police are expected to make decisions about this pathway in the field, sometimes with limited information.

Victoria Police therefore suggests a single entry point for the referral of child victims, enabling Child FIRST and Child Protection workers to apply their respective powers and expertise to jointly assess the needs of each child victim and determine the most appropriate service pathway. This would ensure all child victims receive a timely initial assessment and are more likely to be directed appropriately in the first instance, and that a family does not end up with a Child Protection record that is not warranted.

Importantly, a 'single doorway' approach would enable both services to refer the child to the other so that interventions can be escalated or downgraded as appropriate.

Develop additional reporting options

Victoria Police knows and remains concerned about the extent of under-reporting of family violence and the tendency that when it is reported, it is typically after the victim has already been experiencing family violence for an extended period. We know some of the barriers to reporting are a sense of helplessness or shame symptomatic of the abuse of the perpetrator (see *Principle 5: Dynamic* for suggestions about changing community attitudes), a lack of knowledge about the service system and their options (see below) and an inability or reluctance to make contact with police or other authorities.

We could therefore create additional mechanisms for reporting, such as:

- enabling third party reporting whereby a victim could disclose to a nominated agency that has reporting arrangements with Victoria Police. This option is already being trialled in relation to reporting allegations of racism via the Victorian Equal Opportunities and Human Rights Commission (VEOHRC) or the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service (VALS); and
- introducing online reporting whereby victims could securely email police. For example, an online reporting tool is used in Queensland and New South Wales for matters of sexual assault.

These options would benefit victims who do not want to be seen entering a police station or talking to police, have language or impairment issues, or who do not live within easy access of a police station. While contact with police would eventually be required in order to take action, these options would enable a victim to work up to this stage, to do so with support, and to discuss options for meeting with police.



Promote a central, anonymous advice line

To further assist victims to seek help early and in a way that meets their needs, Victoria Police sees a value in a well-known advice line that protects their identity while being able to provide answers to their questions/concerns and guidance about the options available to them. Ideally, the service would be multi-lingual and disability friendly (e.g. TTY network).

We understand many of the support agencies already offer a phone service and there are central advice lines at state and national levels (e.g. the *Safe Steps* and the *Victims of Crime Helpline* in Victoria and *1800 Respect* nationally). So there is the potential to link these services for access via a well-publicised central number, with a menu of options for customised service (e.g. a specific language or teletext) or specific service (e.g. counselling, advice, referrals, system information).

A central point of contact would also facilitate consistent messaging to victims about services and options, and provide a focal point for agencies such as Victoria Police to provide basic information about policing interventions.

Provide communication aids, interview supports and evidence giving supports

Once we engage with victims, we need to make sure they are able and supported to participate effectively in processes that impact them. For victims with communication barriers (e.g. speaking, writing, comprehending), Victoria Police already utilises interpreters and Independent Third Persons and intends to introduce the use of communication aids such as storyboards under our Accessibility Plan. There are also special hearing provisions that enable police to use Visual and Audio Recording of Evidence (VARE) to record the statement of victims of sexual assault or child abuse to reduce the need to re-tell every aspect of the incident in court. There is also provision for the victim to be cross-examined offsite or behind a screen in order to avoid direct contact with the offender. These provisions could be applied in any family violence matter going to court. There is also an opportunity to improve and facilitate the greater use of accredited interpreters (both multi-lingual and Auslan) for court proceedings.

Ensure support services are accessible and provide continuity of care

Victoria Police recognises the importance of accessible and continuous support services in assisting victims and the challenge of meeting the enormous demand and often complex needs of individuals. A victim-centric system should provide 'wrap around' seamless support, so that victims are provided with, rather than having to seek out, relevant support. Continuity is an important aspect of this, and may impact on whether victims stays engaged with the system. We therefore consider investment in these services to be a high priority for the system and have directed our thoughts to proposals that can help to free up resources that could be redirected to this end.

Investing in increasing the services available also provides an opportunity to make sure:

- services are available 24 hours, seven days a week, across the state;
- services are physically accessible to victims with a disability;
- there are supported accommodation options for victims who are dependent on a carer, including maintaining the victim in their home and providing a live-in carer;
- services can accommodate children with their parent, including male children; and
- there are services that can provide support or facilitate access from the point of initial contact through to the conclusion of justice processes, rather than the victim having to re-tell their story at each point in the system.



Medium term (within 2-3 years)

Strengthen professional accountability

The inclusion of a broader range of professionals in the Common Risk Assessment Framework training (see *Principle 3: Effective*) provides an opportunity to strengthen its application in a professional context. Victoria Police suggests that given the extent of under-reporting of family violence, and the dynamics it involves, it is worth considering the professional obligations and expectations that should apply to certain professionals (i.e. those who may reasonably come into contact with victims, such as psychologists, general practitioners, paramedics).

Accordingly, in addition to developing additional reporting options for victims (mentioned above), there is merit in considering how professions which may reasonably come into contact with victims could be required to act to support the victim. The Royal Commission could consider a range of forms that this requirement could take, from a professional standard oversight by the relevant regulatory body to a mandatory reporting scheme. The aim would be that when victims disclose their experience, they can be assured they will receive a response.

In many situations, the fear and intimidation of the perpetrator makes it challenging for victims to disclose their experiences. We also recognise some victims feel unable to disclose their experience due to uncertainty about what will occur in the aftermath. In other instances, professionals may suspect something is wrong, but perhaps feel ill-equipped to know how to help. Any consideration would therefore need to take into account potential unintended consequences, such as discouraging victims from seeking assistance or disclosing for fear of mandatory action being taken.

Introduce online case tracking for victims

Victoria Police appreciates that being kept informed of the progress of their case and retaining a sense of control over the decisions they make are two critical factors in the engagement and recovery of victims. Accordingly, a secure web-based system that is updated by response agencies (i.e. police, courts, corrections, human services) would enable victims to check matters such as court dates, court outcomes and the status of an order, and may include links to relevant forms, advice and contact persons.

The existing Victorian site *The Lookout*, or the Tasmanian Government's *Safe At Home* site, are good examples of easily understood information that may be provided to all parties involved in a family violence matter, and could be extended with a capability to look up the status of a case, using a unique identifier. This functionality could be a component of the secure online system for real-time information sharing referred to under *Principle 4: Efficient*.

Enable police to issue intervention orders in the field

At present, when faced with a family violence incident, police have a range of civil options available, depending on an assessment of the current and future risks, and choosing an option that will provide the most appropriate response to an incident. The available options are: a Family Violence Safety Notice, an Application and Warrant for an intervention order, an Application and Summons for an intervention order, or an application for a Family Violence Interim Intervention Order.



Police Sergeants may currently issue a Family Violence Safety Notice where immediate protection of the victim is required to ensure the safety of the victim, their property, or to protect a child subjected to family violence. Apart from providing immediate protection to a victim, once it is served this document becomes a summons for the respondent to attend court and commences the standard intervention order process. The Family Violence Safety Notice is an effective, proven process with appropriate legislative and policy safeguards to deal immediately with family violence incidents, albeit only as a temporary measure.

Hearing the matter at court currently entails the victim and perpetrator attending (although in some instances not everyone attends court, which can contribute to adjournments and delays), spending time in close proximity, possibly needing to re-attend if the matter cannot be finalised on the day (e.g. if an Interim Order is issued) and in the majority of cases, agreeing to the Intervention Order without any challenge and in the same terms as the original Family Violence Safety Notice.

Necessarily supported by the enhanced risk categorisation suggested earlier under *Principle 1: Victim-centric*, Victoria Police strongly advocates enabling police to issue intervention orders during the initial response (and therefore discontinuing with the Family Violence Safety Notice process). This would better safeguard the victim and immediately hold the perpetrator to account by:

- enabling police to apply specific conditions that are tailored to the behaviours of the perpetrator and the circumstances of the victim (e.g. ranging from determining an appropriate exclusion zone that takes immediate effect to referring parties to attend assessment for relevant interventions);
- enabling swift action on the behaviours of concern;
- enabling immediate service of the order if the perpetrator is present, thereby providing instant and lasting protection to the victim (and reducing high risk, unnecessary contacts prior to, and at, court);
- enabling police to act immediately on any breach of the order; and
- sparing victims further impacts such as the time, travel and contact with the perpetrator or attending court where neither party contests the terms of the order.

In making the order, police would use the standardised and updated Common Risk Assessment Framework discussed earlier and again under *Principle 3: Effective* and *Principle 4: Efficient*, whereby police would differentiate the level of risk and response according to assessment criteria that have been agreed across the system. The terms of police-issued intervention orders would therefore fall within an explicit framework that has been developed collaboratively and supplemented by a Victoria Police Family Violence Centre of Learning to deliver a range of education programs to police members, tailored to rank, role and career stage. This would be a best practice hub based at the Victoria Police Academy dedicated to developing and embedding family violence learning throughout Victoria Police.

The victim and the perpetrator would reserve the right to appeal the order at court. Otherwise, neither party would need to attend a court. For the perpetrator, this means they could continue to accept a police-issued intervention order without it being an admission of guilt in any legal proceedings. For victims in particular, this would overcome difficulties many have in attending suburban or regional courts due to public transport, employment and child care issues and the constraints each court has in terms of security and support service space.

For the system, freeing police from preparing matters for court, attending court (sometimes on multiple occasions), and locating the perpetrator in order to serve the application or interim or final order, would enable them to focus more intensely on at-risk and high-risk families. The court would be freed from the volume of administrative applications and uncontested orders in order to focus on hearing appeals, family violence charges and overseeing compliance with conditions (discussed further later).

Jurisdictions such as Tasmania allow police-issued intervention orders.



Enable police to vary intervention orders in the field

Currently, police cannot vary an intervention order that is already in place. As an extension of enabling police to issue intervention orders in the field, Victoria Police recommends permitting police to also vary intervention orders in the field. Through active management and regular reviews, or in response to a family violence incident this would allow police to respond immediately to changed circumstances, including any escalation in risk, and to ensure the conditions in place are relevant and reasonable (e.g. a perpetrator needs to enter an exclusion zone in order to go to work) and with a victim's safety our paramount concern. As proposed under *Principle 2: Perpetrator accountability*, police (and courts) would have the ability to set scalable conditions that become progressively more restrictive or revised in response to changes in risk and breaches. We anticipate that the most common use of this power might be to add an exclusion condition where there is not already one in place.

As with police-issued intervention orders, the variation would come into effect immediately and be open to appeal to the court by either the victim or the perpetrator.

Reconfigure court processes and infrastructure to minimise victim re-traumatisation

In addition to reducing the need for victims to attend court for matters that are not contested, Victoria Police supports any measures that can be taken at court to minimise further traumatisation of the victim. These measures at all courts could include:

- providing separate spaces for victims and perpetrators to avoid them being required to sit within close proximity of each other while they wait for their case to be heard;
- private rooms for all services (including prosecutors) to conduct interviews;
- remote facilities at court so witnesses can give evidence from another location;
- a simplified language understood by all, so victims are clear they have one order in place that will last until it expires, is varied or appealed;
- provision of court support for both victims and perpetrators who can explain the process, explain any decisions that have been made and their implications, and direct/oversee either party to follow-up support; and
- defining specific session times (e.g. morning and afternoon sessions) for attending court hearings so that victims and perpetrators are not in court at the same time.

Long term (within 4-5 years)

Develop a Risk Register

As a person enters into a new relationship, they are generally only aware of their partner's history based on what that person tells them. Recognising that a person may have concerns about certain attitudes or behaviours that their partner starts to display, or what they might start to hear from other sources, the Royal Commission may consider a legislative regime based on the English 'Clare's Law' (Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme) approach and establish a risk style register and recognise 'the right to ask' and 'the right to know' about a person's offending background.

After a successful Home Office pilot program this disclosure scheme has been implemented across the United Kingdom. The 'right to ask' applies to an individual who seeks information on any safety risks their partner may pose to themselves or to others (e.g. children). There is an administrative framework and safeguards that govern this process, including any information released is confined to specific safety risks (e.g. history of violence, sexual assault, child abuse) and in the United Kingdom model you may use this information to make decisions about your personal safety (or for your family) but it is an offence to further disclose this confidential information to others.

The 'right to know' enables police to advise the person of known safety risks. Again, the circumstances are tightly prescribed and will typically occur in the course of responding to a similar incident (e.g. police called to a family violent incident would advise the victim of any previous incidents recorded) or if police receive intelligence indicating an individual, or their children, are at risk of harm.



With strong safeguards on information release, clear criteria on which perpetrators to record in the Register, and guidance to victims about how to act on such information, such an initiative could break the all too common pattern of perpetrators harming successive partners and avoid exposing unwitting adults and children to known perpetrators of family violence. If linked to processes such as employment checks, it could also indicate the suitability of a person for a carer, guardian or disability support worker role.

Given the Register could comprise information from a variety of sources, consideration would need to be given to which agencies would need to be involved in managing the process.



Principle 2: The system holds perpetrators to account

While Victoria Police and other agencies have undertaken considerable work to identify and intervene against the perpetrators of family violence, the rate of re-offending and the harm caused to victims indicate that further measures are required.

Features

A system that holds perpetrators to account would have the following features:

- Recognise the power and gender inequality that underpins family violence offending
- Does not blame the victim
- Prevents family violence from re-occurring / escalating
- Justice responses are swift, proportionate, flexible, safety focused

Opportunities for improvement

The following initiatives would strengthen the consequences for perpetrators.

Short term (within 1 year)

Broaden the range of response options

An effective and holistic risk assessment model requires an equally effective and holistic risk management model. This would mean supporting the proposed categorisation model referred to under *Principle 1: Victim-centric* whereby the risk assessment framework is complemented with a range of response options tailored to each risk category. Based on the existing response options, Victoria Police suggests there needs to be additional responses to non-physical violence where there are minimal protective concerns and to non-intimate partner family violence (discussed further below). Particularly at the low risk end of the spectrum, providing relevant responses that address the harmful behaviour should enable early intervention on behaviours that have the potential to escalate and serve to preserve specialist interventions for high risk situations. Victoria Police recognises behaviours have the potential to escalate quickly and that risk escalates unpredictably in some situations, and therefore the need for multi-agency information sharing referred to throughout this submission is all the more pertinent.

Attach tailored conditions to intervention orders

The existing conditions on an intervention order are relatively stagnant and while conditions can be added at the discretion of the Magistrate, there is room to make orders more tailored to the situation. For example, if a perpetrator presents with a drug and alcohol issue, this should be reflected in the conditions so it can be addressed as a priority alongside family violence. Attaching program completion requirements (similar to a Community Corrections Order) to intervention order conditions would provide an additional layer of accountability while also aiming to address underlying factors contributing to the dynamic. Likewise, where physical, verbal or written contact between the perpetrator and the victim heightens the risk of further harm and exacerbates the trauma experienced by the victim, contact should be limited to written forms (e.g. text, email or letter) or to nominated public places where contact can occur with safeguards.

Similarly, police at present are limited to ticking the box for a fixed suite of conditions, with tailoring beyond these a matter for the court. Police are reliant on the courts to set more holistic conditions that address the risk factors and exacerbating factors of the perpetrator's behaviour well after an incident and consider the imposition of conditions at their discretion.



With the proposed ability to issue intervention orders in the field, using a standardised and updated Common Risk Assessment Framework and response matrix, police could access a broader range of conditions equivalent to the court, to set conditions that address safety, risk factors and therapeutic needs. They would be able to set these conditions immediately and based on the circumstances they have encountered, as well as any other relevant information available to them (e.g. via a secure online case management system, see *Principle 4: Efficient*). If the perpetrator is present, police could discuss the conditions and explain their requirements, to lessen the likelihood of further violence or a breach. Police could also verify the proposed conditions adequately address the victim's needs and safety concerns, while prioritising safety and allowing the system to take responsibility and hold the perpetrator accountable, where necessary. As mentioned previously, both the victim and the perpetrator would have the ability to appeal to the court if they did not agree with any of the conditions.

Introduce scalable conditions

In addition to attaching tailored conditions to intervention orders, Victoria Police suggests adding new parameters for supervision and control within intervention orders, to ensure victim safety is protected if offending continues, escalates or is deemed high risk (e.g. Community Protection Orders include an express monitoring power). These could be included at the time an order is made, or be considered as part of a tiered response if behaviour continues. The intention would be to recognise that if the original order is not being adhered to, tighter parameters may be required to protect the victim and make it clear to the perpetrator there are consequences to ongoing behaviour (e.g. program completion requirements as referred to above, if not included initially).

Make criminal offences arising from family violence incidents 'show cause' offences for the purposes of the *Bail Act 1977*

The consideration of bail immediately after a person is charged with an offence is a legislative tool that can be leveraged to impose conditions on perpetrators or to keep a perpetrator in custody prior to their court hearing. The *Bail Act 1977* has a presumption in favour of bail for most accused, except in some circumstances where the accused must 'show cause' why they should be granted bail.

The Act recognises in some cases an accused who is charged with contravening a family violence intervention order and has a history of violence is required to 'show cause' why they should be granted bail. Expanding these provisions to include all accused who are alleged to have committed any offence within a family violence context (e.g. assault, threats to kill) would require perpetrators to establish why they should be granted bail, rather than placing the onus on police to prove why they should not. This change would recognise the seriousness of family violence offending and make it easier for police and courts to hold perpetrators to account, either by imposing stricter bail conditions or remanding them in custody pending their court hearing if they failed to show cause as to why they should be released.

Enable broader sources of evidence to be led in court

In many cases, criminal prosecutions for family violence-related offending depend on having direct evidence available to the court from victims themselves. If a perpetrator contests charges arising from a family violence incident, the success of the prosecution will often depend on whether the victim is able to present evidence in court and withstand cross examination by the perpetrator or their legal representative. We believe this places considerable pressure on the victim and shifts the burden of holding perpetrators accountable on to the victim, who must be willing and able to withstand the invasive court process. In line with *Principle 1: Victim-centric*, it is important victims are not re-traumatised by the criminal justice process.



Moreover, many cases do not proceed to full prosecution because there is not independent evidence of the offending and the victim is reluctant to engage with the prosecution. This means that some perpetrators are not being held accountable through the criminal justice system for their behaviour, which further reinforces a sense that their behaviour is acceptable and places many victims at serious risk of further violence. There are many legitimate reasons why victims choose not to support a prosecution including being afraid of further violence from the perpetrator in retribution, pressure from the perpetrator or their friends and family to withdraw a statement, or unwillingness to engage in a protracted court process.

Victoria Police recommends amending the rules of evidence to better support victims of family violence, including allowing a victim's statement to be submitted as evidence, even if the victim does not appear in court to provide that evidence directly, allowing police to give hearsay evidence of what a victim has told them about the violence, and further consideration of some circumstantial evidence. This would complement the suggestion for reconfiguring court processes and infrastructure to minimise victim re-traumatisation suggested under *Principle 1: Victim-centric*.

We also support applying a model similar to the 'Whole Story' approach used in sexual offending, to family violence. Under this approach, the emphasis would shift from the victim's actions and the tendency to make victims account for their reactions, to understanding how the offender made them react or behave in the way they did through fear and intimidation. In a family violence dynamic where a relationship is ongoing, and abuse may have occurred and escalated over time, with manipulation, intimidation and threats a key characteristic, a more holistic view of the situation would be beneficial. In particular, there is often misunderstanding of why victims choose to remain in relationships, and this can become an undue focus that detracts from holding perpetrators accountable. The concept could be applied to family violence investigations and court matters in recognition of the similar style of relationship-based dynamics that occur and would allow greater understanding of offending patterns and shift the focus from victim justification, to perpetrator accountability.

Medium term (within 2-3 years)

Introduce scalable sentencing

As a complement to the specialised court suggestion and to reflect community frustrations and victim concerns, the Royal Commission may consider recommending scaled sentencing options that respond to escalation in offending. Without wanting to be prescriptive about sentencing practices, it may be viable to remove some sentencing options where contravention offences continue unabated. This would enable a 'tightening of the net' where the behaviour does not fall within the range of the existing indictable offence of persistent contravention. This would reflect the need to escalate the response if offending continues or escalates, rather than continuing to issue the same sanction in response to repeated behaviour (e.g. the option of a financial penalty in sentencing could be removed). Importantly, rather than prescribing a sentencing regime which would limit judicial flexibility, this option would see some lower level sanctions fall away if offending continues.

Improve legislative responses to perpetrators aged under 18 years

At present, there are few options for police to respond to family violence risks posed by perpetrators aged under 18 years. The existing options available for adult perpetrators such as Family Violence Safety Notices and holding powers, do not apply to this group, creating a gap in our capacity to respond effectively and early in a potential cycle of offending. Whilst police can charge the perpetrator where appropriate, the only protective mechanism available in most instances is an application for an intervention order.



Victoria Police recognises the need for a two-pronged effort in this context:

- strengthening legislative provisions to enable police to respond immediately to perpetrators under 18 during initial response is essential. This might involve considering a range of options, ensuring police are equipped to respond to the level of risk identified; and
- developing a state-wide network of youth-specific support options that police can refer to would enable the system to more effectively respond to the underlying drivers of adolescent violence. In particular, alternative accommodation for young people, where necessary, is important in enabling police to intervene at the time of crisis and take steps to protect the victim. Youth-specific support services that can help to address emerging risk and inter-generational cycles would also be a critical enabler of reducing future violence.

Incorporate family violence risk factors in relevant decision-making processes

Victoria Police believes the behaviours involved in family violence are relevant considerations in other decision-making processes and police would benefit from changes to the following legislation/policy in order to better protect victims:

- **access to firearms** - the legislation only permits police to seize firearms at a location belonging to the perpetrator. In rural locations, there may be a number of firearm licence holders who store their firearms at the location that the perpetrator can access and police are unable to remove access to all firearms to eliminate this source of risk to a victim;
- **criminal history checks** - Most family violence crimes are not separately identifiable as family violence offences during criminal history checks. A whole of government and national approach would be required to provide consistent information through services such as the National Police Certificates and criminal history data obtained from the CrimTrac system. For example, a perpetrator may be found guilty of a range of specific criminal offences committed in a family violence context, however their criminal history will not immediately identify the circumstances surrounding this conviction as it appears in the same way as a conviction arising from a non-family incident. Identifying criminal prior convictions or family violence orders that have arisen from family violence situations will assist in determining the nature of a perpetrator's prior violence history in a specific context and may be of assistance to courts, employers and statutory agencies who assess people based on their prior criminal history (for example, working with children and vulnerable groups, Victorian Taxi Accreditation, security licences, or the Victorian Institute of Teaching); and
- **packaged liquor licensing** – As the Victoria Police *Policing Alcohol Harm in Victoria 2014 - 2024* and *Reducing Alcohol Related Harm Strategic Approach 2014-2017* outline, the accessibility of alcohol has increased significantly in the last 20 years in Victoria. This is particularly evident in the increase in packaged liquor outlets by more than 80% from 1993-2008. While packaged liquor outlets comprise around 10% of licensed premises, they supply about 75-78% of alcohol consumed in our community. It has been estimated that alcohol is involved in 40% of family violence incidents. For example, the Southern Metropolitan Region Assistant Commissioner is championing work with the South East Metro Council Alliance on a model to reduce alcohol-related harm in the community through research into the impact of packaged liquor density.



Principle 3: The system is effective

Victoria Police believes the elimination of family violence is the ultimate measure of system effectiveness. On the path to this goal, the system should intervene consistently and decisively to respond to harm and the perpetrators of harm, and respond with compassion and support that encourages victims to seek help at the earliest opportunity.

Features

An effective system would have the following features:

- Prevents family violence from occurring
- Provides responses that are multi-disciplinary and coordinated
- Ensures that programs/supports are available, accessible and evaluated

Opportunities for improvement

The following initiatives would make the system more reliably effective.

Short term (within 1 year)

Update the Common Risk Assessment Framework to reflect the range of relationships, harms and risks now under the definition of family violence

The Common Risk Assessment Framework is the cornerstone of the existing system and is utilised by agencies to assess the risk to victims and inform safety planning. However, there is scope to update the Framework to reflect the past decade of practice and experience, including:

- developing risk assessment indicators and tools for non-intimate partner violence;
- reflecting the findings of the *Victorian Systemic Review of Family Violence Deaths – First Report*;
- re-working the Children’s Common Risk Assessment Framework to better assist justice personnel in assessing the risk to children and embedding this in risk assessment intake processes across the system;
- incorporating indicators for new and emerging risks such as technology-assisted family violence;
- incorporating indicators for specific communities (e.g. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, GLBTI, culturally and linguistically diverse, people with a disability);
- evaluating the adequacy of the indicators for identifying non-physical forms of family violence;
- enabling risk assessments to be updated if further incidents occur (rather than conducting a new one each time) to provide a more complete context for decision-making;
- introducing a commensurate framework for risk management, such as the categorised matrix mentioned under *Principle 1: Victim-centric* so that all relevant services categorise risk consistently (e.g. identification of a particular threshold of risk, such as high risk, has universal meaning across services and prompts specific responses in reaction to that specified level of risk); and
- considering how to identify the primary aggressor in situations where this is unclear or where indications may be that both parties have contributed to an incident.

Ensuring the Framework reflects the definition of family violence under the *Family Violence Protection Act 2008* would be the basis for the proposed broader standardisation of definitions and practices discussed under *Principle 4: Efficient*.



Prioritise service development to address existing gaps

Police refer most victims and perpetrators of family violence to the Department of Health & Human Services (DHHS) funded family violence service providers. These referrals are governed by the DHHS and Victoria Police Family Violence Referral Protocol 2015. However, referrals for male victims of family violence are made to the Department of Justice & Regulation Victims of Crime Helpline, which facilitates the provision of services to these victims.

While the Protocol will be renegotiated later this year and we make suggestions for the formal and ongoing review of the service sector profile under *Principle 5: Dynamic*, Victoria Police experience is that there are a number of pressing current service gaps. The existing scope and definition of family violence is mismatched against the available service sector responses, making it challenging to provide targeted interventions.

For Victoria Police, enhancing the existing specialist family violence support services to reflect demand is a priority, along with addressing the following gaps:

- **Female perpetrators** – the number of female perpetrators has increased over the last decade and currently many of the services accept referrals for both women who are victims and women who are perpetrators as well, however this is not consistent across the state;
- **Adolescent perpetrators** – while there are pilots underway, there is a lack of statewide service availability for young people. Young perpetrators are not eligible to attend men's behaviour change programs, and these are not designed with a youth-specific intervention in mind. Targeted youth services that acknowledge the growth in this cohort of perpetrators are necessary to ensure inter-generational cycles of family violence are not continued into the future;
- **Non-intimate partner perpetrators** – for example, in some instances the compounding factors of isolation, financial dependence and limited mobility can make an elderly person vulnerable to abuse. In some instances, elder abuse is recognised separately from family violence, and there needs to be better recognition of the needs of these victims;
- **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, CALD, people with a disability and GLBTI victims** - Victoria Police does not generally make alternative referrals for specialist services outside of the Protocol and the Protocol relies on the mainstream provider to identify whether a specialist service is more appropriate. At present, the links between the mainstream and specialist services are variable and not always seamless;
- **Crisis accommodation options** – Accommodation options for women, men who use violence and young people who are violent remain limited and not all are available 24/7; and
- **Regional services** – While there is a state-wide network of family violence services, there is an opportunity to improve access and availability of responses in rural and regional areas. Having to travel to access support may be a challenge for some victims, and there may be additional barriers where significant distances are involved. A victim-centric system would provide services which focus on reaching out to victims. In some areas, enhancing service availability in rural and regional areas may mean bolstering existing outreach to enable greater coverage of existing services and reducing travel time for victims.



Provide ongoing education/training for agencies that deal regularly with families on family violence dynamics and identifying risks

The Common Risk Assessment Framework has an associated training package and updates for the agencies involved in assessing the level and nature of risk in family violence incidents. The aim is to ensure that all practitioners maintain a contemporary understanding of family violence dynamics and risk indicators. Victoria Police intends that this training will be at the heart of the education programs developed and delivered by the proposed Victoria Police Family Violence Centre of Learning.

While we recognise that parts of the health and community service sector already receive this training, formalising the training as part of professional development for relevant sectors, and expanding it to be consistently applied in others, may be beneficial. For instance, we consider it would be worthwhile to provide an abridged, context-specific training package for those broader community services that may reasonably be expected to have contact with a victim, such as the professionals referred to under *Principle 1: Victim-centric*. Providing this form of professional development would assist personnel in identifying the early signs of family violence and understanding the information required by the family violence response agencies such as police. It could also provide guidance on how to raise the issue with a victim and the context for the possible victim responses. Similar training and education is progressively being rolled out across sectors on topics such as recognising and responding to mental health issues and suicide prevention.

Medium term (within 2-3 years)

Roll out specialist courts

It is our experience that the courts are under considerable pressure from escalating and often complex demand, and yet are a service with a clear commitment to innovating, as demonstrated by the Family Violence Court Division operating at the Ballarat and Heidelberg Magistrates' Courts; the Specialist Family Violence Services operating at Melbourne, Frankston, Werribee and Sunshine Magistrates' Courts; and the Fast Tracking pilot underway in the Dandenong Magistrates' Court.

We suggest establishing a Specialist Court in every Magistrates' Court headquarter location to provide a dedicated and educated response to victim management (i.e. 'one court, one judge'), with the following features:

- a gazetted Magistrate trained in family violence;
- Victoria Police Civil Advocates dedicated to prosecuting family violence matters;
- applicant and respondent support workers;
- safe waiting spaces and remote witness facilities;
- access to duty lawyers;
- an 'own motion' power to impose or vary current intervention orders, or to reinstate or re-enliven expired / cancelled intervention orders, against a perpetrator when they hear separate criminal charges that identify family violence issues requiring redress; and
- a compliance monitoring function (e.g. where an order includes program completion requirements as per an earlier suggestion).

The court could be supported by enhanced rules of evidence and procedure, potentially drawing on effective models in other court lists (e.g. Assessment and Referral Court). This would enable a less adversarial process and a free environment in which victims can narrate their story rather than being cross-examined, thereby building victim confidence in the process.

A system in which police have the authority to issue intervention orders in the field would enable more court time to be spent on those matters that are complex or require a contested hearing. The capacity to target court resources more effectively towards these matters should result in better victim outcomes and fewer returns to court for variations.



Introduce a 'whole of family' approach

Agencies across the service sector will typically have contact with individuals within a family but may have limited or no knowledge of other agencies involved in providing services or the other relevant issues. For instance, police may have contact with a young person who is out on the streets during school hours, unaware the child may be a client of DHHS or they are coping with a family situation that is harmful. Similarly, a service involved in providing mental health or substance misuse treatment to a perpetrator may not know they have come to police attention as a result of the harm they pose to themselves or to others.

Victoria Police therefore strongly supports the efforts being made at a local, regional and state-wide level to acquire a more holistic picture of the families at-risk and highest risk, and to respond collectively, under the coordination of a lead agency. This focus would require organisational cultural and practice changes and the following enablers:

- the authority and capacity to share information that would identify the families requiring an integrated response (see *Principle 4: Efficient*);
- a framework for determining the appropriate lead agency (see *Principle 5: Dynamic*); and
- a secure case management system that would enable authorised personnel to gain an holistic picture of the family context and to provide updates on interventions in place (see *Principle 4: Efficient*).

Roll out integrated service delivery models

Victoria Police has undertaken significant structural and cultural reform over the last decade to develop and participate in cross-sectoral models of service delivery. The models range from more formalised coordination to co-delivery of services. Examples include:

- **Multi-Disciplinary Centres** involving co-located specialist police Sexual Offences & Child Abuse Investigation Teams, DHHS Child Protection, Centres Against Sexual Assault counsellors/advocates, and Forensic Medical practitioners in order to provide a one-stop-shop for victims of sexual assault;
- the **co-location of Victims Assistance & Counselling Program workers** at nominated police stations to provide victims with easy and timely access to support, and to improve police understanding of the services available;
- the **Youths at Risk** coordinated management of the top 10 at-risk youth in a Division with the police Family Violence Investigation Team; DHHS housing, health, disability and child protection services; Department of Education & Early Childhood Development, local council youth services; and alcohol, drug and family violence agencies. The collaboration involves developing case management plans with clear agency accountabilities and actions for intervention with both the child and family. There are also processes to prevent contagion of other children who engage with the identified youth in school or home environments;
- the **Juvenile Affected Family Member pilot** involving police, Child Protection and Corrections Victoria cross-referencing the police database (LEAP) with the Child Protection system (CRIS), with input on offender risk provided by Corrections Victoria data holdings. Each family is risk assessed by each agency and interventions are based on their risk profile. The risk parameters include a history of repeat family violence offending (three or more offences in the preceding 12 months), involvement of a juvenile victim, a record of violence and any incidents where a person of interest was the subject of a mental health assessment. Any identified juvenile victims who may be exposed to family violence are the subject of active risk mitigation. Matters are formally closed when the assessed risks have been resolved or are no longer active;



- **Police And Clinical Emergency Response (PACER) units** involving a police member and a mental health clinician operating as a secondary response unit to provide multi-disciplinary assistance to divisional vans. In addition to providing onsite or phone response, the PACER units develop and deliver joint training to their colleagues; link individuals with a broad range of public and community services that meet the individual's specific needs; identify and provide an escalated response to high-risk individuals; and plan coordinated service responses to individuals with complex needs;
- **Taskforce Alexis** provides a local coordinated response to family violence, mental health, youth and crime prevention issues. The 24-person taskforce comprises a Family Violence Team, Mental Health Team and a Proactive Team co-located at the Moorabbin Police Complex. The taskforce also involves a Family Violence Key Worker (a qualified social worker funded by the Salvation Army), a Mental Health Clinician (part of the PACER model with Monash Health) and a police intelligence practitioner. The taskforce meets monthly with key external partners to coordinate responses and case conference responses to vulnerable families; and
- the **Family Violence Accelerated Justice Outcomes** pilot involves police and the Dandenong Magistrates' Court working to stipulated timelines for setting Mention Court dates for family violence matters (i.e. the next sitting day or weekend court for remand hearings, within seven days of charging an offender or arrest on warrant for any offence relating to or stemming from family violence for bail hearings, and within four weeks of offender processing for a summons).

Victoria Police intends to continue to develop, test and roll out integrated service delivery models with its partner agencies and would welcome ideas on different models. For us, the critical aspects in rolling out integrated service delivery models are:

- the rigorous evaluation of the costs and benefits of different models;
- adequate infrastructure to support the models (e.g. office space, vehicles);
- the right expertise available to make the most of the combined services (e.g. sufficient intelligence and analytical capabilities).

Long term (within 4-5 years)

Provide intensive support to break the cycle of inter-generational family violence

The VicHealth report, *Preventing Violence Before it Occurs* (2007), outlines the detrimental impacts on children and young people of exposure to violence in the family, including mental health issues, behavioural and learning difficulties and for boys particularly, of perpetrating violence as adults. As children were present at 34% of family violence incidents police attended in 2013-14², the potential exists for inter-generational family violence to persist without concentrated intervention.

We have included a reference to this issue as a long term matter to signal the importance of evaluating the effectiveness and adequacy of the proposed short and medium term service developments, such as the triaging of responses to child victims, the creating of youth-specific perpetrator interventions and the measures designed to increase confidence to report. We would propose the governance and accountability frameworks include specific measures relating to child victims to validate that our interventions are succeeding in firstly, reducing the overall number of child victims and secondly, reducing the number who go on to have multiple contacts with the system, either as a victim or as a perpetrator.

² Victoria Police Crime Statistics 2013-14.



Principle 4: The system is efficient

Victoria Police believes stronger connections between agencies within the system will provide victims with more timely and less burdensome responses, capitalise on each agency's knowledge and skills, and make better use of available resources by removing duplicate, redundant and bureaucratic processes. This would give agencies greater capacity and capability to target their services to the most at-risk victims and high-risk perpetrators.

Features

An efficient system would have the following features:

- Victims do not need to repeat their story to each agency or at each point
- Agencies record information once and add to it throughout the process
- Responses are timely, tailored and targeted
- Responses are not burdensome or duplicated
- Definitions, practices and processes are standardised

Opportunities for improvement

The following initiatives would introduce efficiencies that make better use of existing knowledge, skills and resources across the system.

Short term (within 1 year)

Standardise risk definitions, factors, assessment and management

Victoria Police strongly believes that a system that speaks the same language is more able to effectively *operate* as a system. Currently, while there are tools and approaches in place across agencies, such as the Common Risk Assessment Framework, there remains differing organisational understandings of risk, trigger points, escalation patterns and appropriate interventions (e.g. what one agency may consider a significant change in circumstances may not be considered as significant by another).

These differences impede a seamless transfer of knowledge and skills between agencies, resulting in considerable duplicate or redundant effort across the system that could be redirected to directly serving the victim and addressing the perpetrator. One such example is the six page L17 form that police complete for every family violence incident. The form comprises 20 criminal and non-criminal abuse classifiers with 39 risk indicators for the victim and perpetrator. It takes police considerable time to complete, depending on the number of parties involved and the complexity of the incident. A categorised approach may be more efficient and provide better consistency in multi-agency responses. There is therefore a pressing need to determine the minimum information required by each agency, at each point of contact and for each jurisdiction (discussed below).

In addition, the update of the Common Risk Assessment Framework suggested under *Principle 3: Effective* will aid standardisation by producing an agreed set of risk indicators, categorised into levels of risk and with specified minimum responses. Complementing this would be an agreement on trigger points and escalation patterns, particularly where certain factors may be precursors to homicide or serious violence. Building on the learnings from the *Victorian Systemic Review of Family Violence Deaths - First Report*, the Framework should include factors which may indicate escalation or risk. While the Framework already indicates some high risk flags, these should be reviewed and updated if necessary, to reflect the learnings of the past decade.



Determine the minimum information required at each point in the system

Many of the suggestions in this submission are premised on services in general, and frontline personnel in particular, having ready access to the best information available on which to base their decisions. While this need is not new, nor confined to responding to family violence, Victoria Police recommends breaking down what is actually meant under the banner of “information sharing” and clarifying what capabilities are required to support the effective use of information.

For us, the first step is for each agency to articulate the minimum information they require and they could contribute for the purpose of responding to family violence. It is our experience in other areas, such as responding to incidents involving people with mental health issues, that a lack of clarity about minimum information requirements can result in misperceptions about the level and type of information sought, and consequently, misapprehensions about whether that information can be released. Hence, for Victoria Police, the minimum information we require includes:

- **previous/existing contacts** – is the person already a client of another system? This would indicate they have identified issues and there is an agency providing support. We do not need to know the details of that support;
- **incident details** – what is the nature of the incident/s involving this person? This would give police a sense of whether the situation is protracted, escalating or improving;
- **known risks** – are there any triggers or behaviours that police need to take into consideration when responding? Are there any effective communication/response strategies that police could use to de-escalate a situation?
- **associates** – who else is in a family-like relationship with the person? This would give police context if they have interactions with, say, the partner, child or disability support client; and
- **existing commitments** – are there any orders, or similar, in place that police should be aware of? Examples could be Family Law Court orders, program completion requirements, out of home care.

In return, there is minimum information that Victoria Police could provide, such as:

- **known safety risks** – for example, propensity for violence, apparent drug or alcohol misuse, access to weapons. Generally speaking, we would not provide criminal history information;
- **associates** – for example, whether police have had contact with other people in a family-like relationship with the person; and
- **existing commitments** – for example, bail conditions or intervention order conditions.

The next step would be to determine the minimum information required at different points in the system, including:

- **early intervention** – what information do response agencies require to act on the early signs of family violence?;
- **police intervention** – what information do police require to determine the right mix of criminal, civil and referral responses?;



- **court intervention** – what information do courts require in order to rule on family violence matters? As indicated above, we suggest the rules of evidence could be broadened to allow different information to be led. Conversely, it is also our experience there is information provided by the victim that should be protected from open court (e.g. personal, medical or psychological issues). Where a victim is concerned that their disclosures may be shared with the perpetrator, this may inhibit their reporting; and
- **post-court intervention** – what information do oversight bodies (e.g. Community Corrections, the courts, police) require to determine compliance with commitments? Who else should be notified of compliance issues?

The third step would be to determine the minimum information that needs to be shared across jurisdictions, such as:

- commonwealth and state (e.g. there can be multiple and conflicting orders in place); and
- civil, criminal and therapeutic.

The final step would be identifying the enablers required to give effect to this information sharing. In addition to the legislative and technical enablers we discuss below, Victoria Police would need to increase its intelligence, analytical and digital forensic analysis capabilities.

Improve the processing and management of family violence matters

At present, a primary police response unit (e.g. a divisional van with two police members) will attend a family violence incident, deal with any immediate safety or welfare issues, take down some preliminary details and then return to the police station to complete the necessary paperwork (e.g. the L17). The police members may also require the perpetrator and/or the victim to also attend to give a statement. In all, this process typically takes hours, during which time the divisional van is unavailable to respond to other calls for assistance or undertake proactive duties within their response zone.

We therefore see an opportunity to improve the use of police resources and the service that we provide to the parties involved and the wider community through:

- **police-issued intervention orders** would enable an immediate response to a family violence issue and provide protection to a victim. There would also be considerable time and resource savings in not having to reproduce the same material for various services and processes (e.g. child protection referrals and court documents) and savings when police are not required to attend court (sometimes on multiple occasions);
- **specialised processing and management functions** so the divisional van police members could return to patrol duties and wider policing functions across their response zone. A model of Offender Processing Teams has been previously trialled in several police divisions whereby the first response police members complete an initial investigation and then transfer all subsequent actions to processing teams. Evaluations of this model found the timeliness, quality and comprehensiveness of the processes improved significantly. Similarly, the Advancing Investigation Model in use across Victoria Police enables the first response police members to provide a handover package for further investigation by police specialists. In the family violence context, a specialist response function (including other relevant agencies) may manage complex or combination criminal offending to provide a better service to victims of family violence. If supplemented with additional intelligence and analytical capability, this would have the added benefit of detecting at-risk and high-risk situations at the earliest opportunity, and streamline the information-sharing and coordination with partner services; and



- **victim support** to commence meeting the victim's welfare and information needs immediately. We already have models of victims support workers co-located in police stations (see *Principle 3: Effective*) and they have proven to be invaluable in providing timely and expert assistance to both the victim and to police. Furthermore, if the victim did not already have support in place, this initial contact could form the basis of the continuity of care referred to under *Principle 1: Victim-centric*.

Remove the requirement for personal service of intervention orders

Family violence legislation requires personal service of intervention orders, that is, that parties are personally handed the order either before they leave court, or subsequently by police. In many instances, service by police requires multiple attempts to locate the person, in the midst of general policing duties. Some perpetrators deliberately evade police, resulting in a significant amount of time being expended on document service. This avoidance delays the execution of protective mechanisms, posing a risk in circumstances where there is no existing protection in place for victims.

While police-issued intervention orders (discussed under *Principle 1: Victim-centric*) would alleviate many of these occurrences by allowing immediate service and effect, the legislative ability for alternate methods of service, such as email, social media or registered post to be used in the first instance, would benefit those instances where an order could not be served immediately. This would also reduce the need for police to make application to the court for substituted service.

Importantly, the removal of the requirement for personal service would not necessarily mean all service would have to occur by other means. For example, in instances where a person is known to have a cognitive impairment or language barrier, they could still be served personally, to ensure they understand the order. The intention is not to require use of alternative means, simply to remove the current need for personal service.

Medium term (within 2-3 years)

Establish a pro-release information sharing regime

Having determined the minimum information required (see above), family violence response agencies require clear and simple legislative support for routine disclosing, storing, using and destroying that information. Information sharing has been a difficult issue within the system for some time, with uncertainty about what information can be shared, when and with whom, and with limited processes in place to support information sharing and data protection.

The various agencies in Victoria that hold information and intelligence that would help in identifying and assessing the risk of family violence occurring, are currently prevented from sharing this information due to the high threshold requirements. The existing Information Privacy Principles require a risk to be 'serious and imminent', or related to a primary purpose before agencies may share the information. Victoria Police must also adhere to the law enforcement data principles before releasing or sharing information.

Victoria Police asserts that defined parameters for and a positive culture of information sharing should be embedded across the family violence system. Models in other jurisdictions have a presumption of data sharing unless exceptional circumstances apply. Creating this presumption would require legislative reform and ideally, a national approach as the states are responsible for family violence systems, while the Commonwealth is predominantly responsible for family law decisions.



Despite reforms in recent years, there is still little alignment between these two systems. Information sharing between state-based courts, police and the Federal Court system is extremely limited; orders in one court are often made with little knowledge of the orders in another court and in some cases are contradictory (e.g. intervention order conditions and child custody arrangements). This is particularly problematic for victims who are required to navigate both systems, and often receive different results based on similar fact circumstances and equally as challenging for police who are required to enforce these conditions (e.g. access to custody orders that present as a considerable risk factor in family violence).

While there have been advances in concepts such as the National Domestic Violence Order Scheme and other areas, greater consistency is required between the states on the approach to dealing with family violence and easier recognition of interstate orders when victims of family violence relocate.

Establish common datasets and reporting

Victoria Police welcomes the recently announced proposal for a Family Violence Index that would bring together relevant information on the incidence of family violence and the responses of the service system from a range of sources. To date, police data has been the primary source of information on the incidence and characteristics of family violence, with other sources, such as victims surveys and client numbers, used to indicate the potential scale of under-reporting and the pressures on the service system. However, we know there are other sources of information that could provide a more complete picture on the true extent of family violence reporting. For instance, Victoria Police understands the state-wide crisis accommodation service last year responded to more than 55,000 telephone enquiries. Not all of these telephone enquiries would have resulted in risk assessments or victims who would have reported the family violence to police, and so would not be reflected in the police statistics.

This has implications for system planning and service development as decisions are made based on incomplete data and with almost no ability to determine whether the same victim or perpetrator is being counted (and receiving services) by more than one agency. Having common datasets where like-information is collected against an agreed set of criteria, should enhance the capacity to identify trends in the system, by allowing us to track how and when people access services. While there is significant public data and analysis of reporting levels, there is ad hoc information available about service engagement rates and outcomes. Including this information in reportable datasets may better enable us to see when and why people engage/disengage, to inform future service planning. Without this information, it is challenging to identify points of failure or opportunities for relieving bottle-necks.

This de-identified data should also be reported in a consistent manner so agencies can determine the areas of overlap and dependency, and the community can gain a clearer sense of the magnitude and characteristics of family violence. There are existing mechanisms that could assist with this proposal (e.g. the Crime Statistics Agency) as well as other proposals in this submission that would assist in determining who should drive this effort (see the governance framework proposed under *Principle 5: Dynamic*).

Long term (within 4-5 years)

Establish a secure online system for real-time information-sharing, risk assessment and case management

Victoria Police welcomes the rollout of high risk panels state-wide and suggests that a multi-agency case management system supported by legislation and information sharing provisions would enhance this process. While case management can occur without a secure online system, it depends on face to face interaction that is time consuming and not always viable in non-metropolitan areas, and the written or verbal transmission of isolated items of information between parts of agencies. The effectiveness of face-to-face sharing is also highly dependent on continuity of staff and personalities, making consistency more challenging to achieve.



A shared information system that covers responsible agencies, not only in the field of family violence, would enable real time information sharing and the development of a dynamic risk tool that is updated as circumstances change or further information becomes available. Tasmania offers a workable model of multi-agency case management.

While legislative reform and a case management system will ultimately drive information sharing in the long term, bringing together analysts from all agencies that hold information in one central location to share and analyse intelligence holdings could also improve the identification of at-risk family members and the targeting of high risk perpetrators at the earliest opportunity.



Principle 5: The system is dynamic

Victoria Police believes the future system should be self-sustaining – that we should not need to hold Royal Commissions in order to understand and improve the system. There are examples in areas such as road safety and emergency management of good models for a ‘safe systems’ approach that is integrated, multi-disciplinary and responsive to changing demands and, most importantly, have significantly reduced harm over time.

Features

An effective system would have the following features:

- Respective roles and responsibilities are clear, formalised and utilised
- Responses evolve as needs and knowledge change
- Patterns of demand drive service sector development
- Best practice is identified, shared and implemented
- Service capacity and capability keep pace with new harms

Opportunities for improvement

The following initiatives would embed sustainability and agility in the system.

Short term (within 1 year)

Establish an interim accountability framework

In its final report, the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission recommended the establishment of an implementation monitor to oversee and assess the implementation of the Royal Commission’s recommendations (Recommendation 66). The State adopted this recommendation, creating a Governor in Council appointment and legislative framework to support the independent monitor’s work.

Victoria Police considers this to be a sound approach and advocates a similar model being implemented following the conclusion of this Royal Commission. The implementation monitor would report the State’s progress on recommendations to the Victorian Parliament and after an agreed timeframe (e.g. 3–5 years) would hand over the reporting function to the Victorian Auditor General or the peak advisory body proposed below to report on the implemented ‘business as usual’ components, other key performance indicators and identified opportunities for system improvement.

Establish a governance framework

Responding to family violence is a complex issue with a range of government and non-government agencies more than willing to assist a person or family in need. Each agency responds with a ‘can do’ attitude to address a specific need or identified gap and they do their best with the finite resources they have at their disposal. However, a successful response to family violence in Victoria must have a sound governance and support framework to ensure services are targeted, effective and accountable.

Victoria Police considers examples of such frameworks already exist, such as in the state-wide approach to emergency management. Established in the 1960s, our State Disaster Plan has evolved to a legislative and policy framework to manage our planning / preparation, response and recovery from emergency events in Victoria. While there have been gaps in these systems and processes, many of these issues were closely considered by the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission following the 2009 bushfires, and the resultant legislative and policy recommendations have now created an effective governance and accountability framework.



Applying this framework to the family violence system, could look as follows:

- a dedicated Minister for the Prevention of Family Violence has the focus on the creation and strategic direction, without direct line control over the service delivery agencies;
- an agency to act as the peak family violence advisory body in Victoria, responsible for providing advice to the Minister on whole of government policy and strategy, and the implementation of that policy and strategies;
- documented roles and responsibilities for the response agencies within the family violence system (see below) that articulate which agency would take the lead in coordinating multi-agency responses, what information and services agencies would share, and other aspects of integration; and
- regular desktop exercises to test the adequacy of systems, responses and training in response to challenging scenarios.

A formal framework with enduring roles and responsibilities and a requirement to monitor and report on the performance of the system would drive a dynamic family violence system.

Undertake a sustained, branded community education campaign

The Royal Commission has emphasised the importance of changing community attitudes and behaviours in driving down the incidence of family violence. Victoria Police acknowledges the role that sustained and recognisable community education campaigns have played in significantly reducing harms such as road trauma, smoking, suicide and depression. In each of these examples, the campaigns have been based on:

- quality research and evidence on the specific problem;
- information about the risk factors, warning signs and symptoms;
- advice about what individuals and the community can do to stop/reduce the harm;
- visible leadership by a champion (e.g. the Assistant Commissioner for Road Policing);
- information about the responsible agencies; and
- dynamic messaging through regularly updated campaigns.

Victoria Police believes family violence merits a similar campaign and has outlined the planks that could be put in place to support such a campaign (e.g. data collection and recording, centralised research, performance indicators and system leadership).

Medium term (within 2-3 years)

Develop one doctrine for all family violence agencies

As outlined above, the emergency management network does not rely on a single agency to deal with all aspects of an emergency incident. We know that responding to family violence cannot be addressed completely by any one agency in isolation.

The Victorian emergency management community relies on the Emergency Management Manual Victoria as a single source doctrine to create an integrated network to effectively respond to emergencies. This document creates role clarity and accountability by nominating control agencies and key support agencies for each emergency, even though each agency may only deal with one component of an incident (or prevention, mitigation or recovery). The regular updating by contributions from all agencies creates a living document to respond to emergency issues as they arise.



The Victorian family violence agencies could consider a similar doctrine. In addition to providing a coordinated approach to managing family violence issues, and ensuring current service gaps are covered, this document would provide all agencies with consistent definitions (e.g. there are currently various definitions of a 'child' in relevant legislation and different risk assessment matrices used by agencies). The development of such a document would provide a flexible, yet consistent approach to preventing, managing and responding to family violence issues. It would also obviate the need for multiple protocols between agencies, covering different aspects of service delivery.

Set system performance indicators

One of the key tenets of any effective and efficient system is that the sum of its parts is effective. While individual components of the family violence system have been evaluated and tested over the past decade, with refinements to program models and pilot testing of initiatives, there has been little capacity to holistically test the system. The absence of systemic measures of effectiveness compounds the difficulties in assessing the performance of the current system, and should be a priority for development.

Using the common datasets and reporting referred to under *Principle 4: Efficient*, identifying what effectiveness and efficiency looks like, what makes for positive victim outcomes, and linking victim outcomes with perpetrator accountability, would provide a basis for measuring the performance of the system as a whole. The capacity to systemically measure outcomes requires longitudinal analysis using established benchmarks and performance indicators. More broadly, if we are able to determine which programs are effective, the most ideal times for particular interventions, and the determinants of positive outcomes, a more efficient system can be planned and monitored, ideally by the aforementioned identifiable central authority.

Central to embedding a system focus is the articulation of clear targets, goals and outcomes to communications expectations and guide activity; it is the meat to the bones of a principles-based system. Ideally, they would be medium to long term accountability measures that provide agencies with certainty and encourage sustainable improvements, rather than quick-fixes or work-arounds.

An example of what this would look like is:

Outcome:	Reduced incidence of family violence
Goals:	Victims are no longer victimised Perpetrators no longer offend
Targets:	Increase confidence to report family violence Decrease repeat offending

We would see the proposed family violence system leaders as setting the strategic directions and measures by which they can monitor progress. The response agencies would then demonstrate how their services and outcomes contribute to these directions.

Conduct annual assessment of trends, demand and outcomes against the service sector profile

A core benefit of the Royal Commission is the opportunity to have the community and the service providers come together to produce an holistic understanding of how and when family violence is occurring, which responses are working well and which require improvement, and the outcomes for which we should be striving. As is already apparent, this is a mammoth undertaking and cannot be undertaken regularly.



Victoria Police has therefore focused on ideas for how to make this sort of focus and collaboration routine, ongoing and productive. Through the proposed governance framework, and using the standardised and integrated information generated by the system, we believe it would be possible to annually assess the performance of the system, the strategic directions and goals, and the priorities for further action. The assessment would be against the cross-sector accountability framework outlined above. Provided there is also flexibility introduced into the system (see below), this should enable resources and effort to shift in line with contemporary priorities and emerging best practice.

Long term (within 4-5 years)

Introduce flexibility in funding and accountability measures to respond to shifting priorities and emerging best practice

A dynamic system requires agile agencies that can swiftly adapt their services to changed priorities and new demands, and flexible approaches to resourcing and measuring services that facilitate collaboration. The existing system is based on each agency being funded directly to deliver a range of services, to specified targets. For some agencies, such as DHHS, this funding is both for its internal operations and to fund community-based service providers. Any initiative to coordinate, collaborate or co-deliver with other agencies must therefore come from a re-prioritisation of agency funds (i.e. taking people, time and resources from one activity to give to another). The ability to re-prioritise resources is dependent on the other competing priorities. In addition, agencies can be slow to change their services owing to the need to identify and assess alternative models, pilot/trial new approaches, evaluate the results, and determine the implementation requirements.

Dynamism could be introduced into the system through:

- specifying shared outcomes, instead of throughput measures;
- specifying outcomes that are client-based, rather than service-based to encourage the moulding of services around the client and the focus on clients at highest risk
- pooling resources for multi-agency interventions;
- shifting resources across the system to where they can have the earliest benefit and as priorities change; and
- undertaking and disseminating ongoing research on emerging issues and trends in family violence, alternative interventions and evaluations of best practice so that agencies can shorten the time and process for adapting their services.



Appendix A: Summary of proposals

	Victim-centric Victim safety is the priority Victim views/issues drive service response Intervene early in cycle/level of harm Provide tailored and sustained support Address the specific needs of child victims Provide multiple options for reporting/seeking help Assist victims to strengthen protective factors/reduce risk factors	Perpetrator accountability Recognises role of power and gender inequality Does not blame the victim Prevents FV from re-occurring/escalating Justice responses are swift, proportionate, flexible, safety focused	Effective Prevents FV from occurring Responses are multi-disciplinary and coordinated Programs are available, accessible and evaluated	Efficient Victims tell their story once Agencies record information once and add to it Responses are timely, tailored and targeted Responses are not burdensome or duplicated Definitions, practices, processes standardised	Dynamic Roles and responsibilities clear, formalised and utilised Responses evolve as needs/knowledge changes Patterns of demand drive sector development Best practice is identified, shared and implemented Service capacity and capability keep pace with new harms
Short term (within 1 year)	Provide safety tips for initial contact with victims Minimise contact where high risk Develop sector-wide risk categorisations for consistent assessment and management Triage responses to child victims Develop additional reporting options Promote a central, anonymous advice line Provide communication aids, interview supports, evidence giving supports Ensure support services are accessible and can provide continuity of care	Broaden the range of response options Attach tailored conditions to intervention orders Introduce scalable conditions Make criminal offences arising from family violence incidents 'show cause' offences for the purposes of the <i>Bail Act 1977</i> Enable broader sources of evidence to be led in court	Update the Common Risk Assessment Framework to reflect the definition of family violence Prioritise service development to address existing gaps Provide education/training for agencies on family violence dynamics and identifying risks	Standardise risk definitions, factors, assessment and management Determine the minimum information required at each point in the system Re-engineer processes to simplify and streamline Improve the processing and management of family violence matters Remove the requirement for personal service of intervention orders	Establish an interim accountability framework Establish a formal governance framework Undertake a sustained, branded community education campaign
Medium term (within 2-3 years)	Strengthen professional accountability Introduce online case tracking for victims Enable police to issue intervention orders in the field Enable police to vary intervention orders in the field Re-configure court processes and infrastructure to minimise re-traumatisation of victims	Introduce scalable sentencing Improve legislative responses to perpetrators aged under 18 years Incorporate family violence risk indicators in relevant decision-making processes	Roll out specialist courts Introduce a 'whole of family' response Roll out integrated service delivery models	Establish a pro-release information sharing regime Establish common datasets and reporting	Develop one doctrine for all family violence agencies Set system performance indicators Conduct annual assessment of trends, demand and outcomes against the service sector profile
Long term (within 4-5 years)	Develop a Risk Register		Provide intensive support to break the cycle of inter-generational family violence	Establish a secure online system for real-time, information sharing, risk assessment and case management	Introduce flexibility in funding and accountability measures to respond to shifting priorities and emerging best practice



Appendix B: Family Violence – The Current Victorian Environment

The 2012 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Personal Safety Survey suggested more than 2% of Victoria's adult population is a victim of intimate partner violence in any given year,ⁱ and the full volume of family violence victims (which would include child and elder abuse, emotional and financial abuse, and harassment and controlling behaviours) is likely to be much higher. In Victoria, we know a family violence homicide occurs every ten days.

Victoria Police is responding to a growing proportion of family violence with a near doubling of reports over the past five years, likely due to growing community confidence and an enhanced police response. A crime was detected in nearly half of incidents in 2014, and family violence crime now represents nearly one in six of all offences in Victoria.

Moreover, reports of family violence are slowing, despite family violence remaining heavily underreported. In 2014, the increase in the number of family violence incidents reported to police was the lowest since 2010.

Intimate Partner Violence

Intimate partner violence is by far the most common form of family violence, with nearly two thirds of family violence incidents between current or former partners in 2014.³ After justice procedures offences, family violence crimes between intimate partners were most frequently assaults, property damage offences, and harassment offences. However, intimate partner violence accounts for a disproportionate number of rapes and abductions / kidnaps.

Research indicates intimate partner violence is predominantly perpetrated by males against female partners or ex partners, with gender equality being the primary driver.ⁱⁱ Victoria Police data supports this. Relationship separation and pregnancy / new birth were the most commonly flagged family violence risk factors in 2014.ⁱⁱⁱ

Under-reporting of intimate partner violence

Despite considerable reporting increases, intimate partner violence remains heavily underreported. Comparing the volume of distinct victims of intimate partner violence in 2014 against those reporting intimate partner violence in the most current ABS Personal Safety Survey^{iv} suggests more than two thirds of violence perpetrated by an intimate partner is not reported.

Underreporting impacts Victoria Police's ability to understand family violence, with volume and demographic trends reflecting reports. This intelligence gap means resources may be misallocated, creating an environment where family violence can occur undetected.

Research suggests women born overseas are less likely to report violence, likely due to language and cultural issues,^v a lack of trust in government services^{vi} and concerns over how family violence reports will impact immigration status.^{vii} Indigenous victims are often unwilling to report against Indigenous perpetrators due to a cultural acceptance of violence, a fear of bringing shame to family and community,^{viii} and barriers to engagement with support services.^{ix} Geographic and social isolation, a culture of self-reliance, and limited access to support services are major impediments for rural victims of family violence.^x

Research also suggests that women are, on average, assaulted between three and seven times before they report the violence to police;^{xi} however, after five assaults a woman is increasingly unlikely to report. This suggests an extremely narrow window for reporting, highlighting the importance of removing reporting barriers and providing an approachable and effective police response, as well as working closely with family violence stakeholders.

³ Any family violence between current or former intimate partners.



Female offenders under-reporting of intimate partner violence

The number of female offenders of intimate partner violence nearly doubled over the past five years, and approximately one in five offenders were female in 2014. Female perpetrators use physical violence less frequently than males, employing non-physical abuse such as verbal or psychological violence. This is highlighted by the higher level of female offender involvement in intimate partner violence incidents where no criminal offence has been detected compared to family violence crimes.

Impact of social attitudes and substance abuse to intimate partner violence

Although many factors contribute to the prevalence and severity of intimate partner violence, three factors are key ingredients to the current figures:

- **Gender inequality**
 - Unequal gender attitudes contribute to relationships characterised by controlling and possessive behaviours and create a culture where family violence is condoned or encouraged.^{xii}
- **Drug use**
 - Increased significantly since 2011 in Victoria, primarily due to the growing popularity of methamphetamines.
 - Over the past five years, the number of intimate partner violence incidents involving drugs has nearly tripled, and drugs are now suspected of being involved in one third of all incidents (up from a quarter of incidents in 2010).
- **Alcohol**
 - Over a quarter of all families in Australia experience harm from the drinking of a family member and this harm is likely to be persistent for at least half of these families.^{xiii}
 - Alcohol was listed as a risk factor in a high volume of intimate partner violence incidents in 2014, and although this is lower than in 2010, it still represents an increase over the past five years.

Repeat and high risk violence

Repeat violence represents the largest part of Victoria Police's family violence workload with the proportion of repeats increasing. The number of recidivist offenders also increased in 2014. The demographics of recidivist offenders are consistent with family violence offenders in general; with offenders more likely to be male offenders aged under 25 years.^{xiv}

Notably, more than a quarter of offenders in 2014 were also recorded as a family violence victim at some point over the past three years. This highlights the potential for family violence to entrench violent behaviours and lead to cyclic and retaliatory offending.

Identifying high risk violence

In recent years, family violence homicides have occurred without prior police contact and with little warning serious violence was imminent. Research shows, for example, that half of all filicides in Victoria occur where no intimate partner violence was reported and child abuse was not evident.^{xv} However, serious family violence rarely occurs without prior contact with professionals who may be able to identify^{xvi} or intervene in^{xvii} the violence. Research indicates nearly 90% of families involved in cases of filicide in Victoria had previous contact with a professional or agency with relevant expertise, and had typically had contact with a range of professionals or agencies. Only 7% of these families had contact with police.^{xviii}

Analysis of Victoria Police data also indicates high risk family violence⁴ is becoming more common with the number of incidents attended by police that featured 'increasing severity / frequency' increasing.

⁴ 'High risk family violence' is any family violence that has the potential to escalate into the commission of a serious crime.



Intervention Orders as a deterrent

Improvements to issuing, managing and the enforcement of Family Violence Safety Notices and Intervention Orders have been central to Victoria Police's enhanced response to family violence. However, research indicates that solely focussing on these mechanisms for resolving repeat or high risk family violence situations have a limited deterrent effect. Interstate research^{xxix}, and a review of the 2012 ABS Personal Safety Survey^{xxx}, highlights a significant proportion of instances where victims have experienced further violence, despite intervention orders being issued. Sentencing statistics show a similar trend, with the number of contravention charges growing at a faster rate than the number of intervention orders issued.^{xxxi}

Despite these shortcomings, intervention orders are valuable as injunctive action, for identifying perpetrators at risk of committing repeat violence, and for empowering strict enforcement. Further, research also indicates they reduce under-reporting: a New South Wales study demonstrated an active intervention order increased the likelihood subsequent family violence would be reported to police.^{xxxi}

Child victims

The number of children listed as victims of a family violence crime have increased nearly threefold increase over the past five years. Children are the largest single age group of protected people in intervention order applications,^{xxiii} and are increasing at a rate faster than other age groups. It is likely these increases reflect police and judicial policy changes aimed at enhancing the protection of children, rather than a significant increase in the actual volume of child victims.

Child presence during family violence can lead to future offending and victimisation

Children who are present during family violence incidents are at a higher risk of being a victim or perpetrator of family violence in the future,^{xxiv} and negative attitudes towards women is more common among people who witnessed or were subjected to violence as a child.^{xxv} In 2014, children were present in one third of family violence incidents; however, the 2012 ABS Personal Safety Survey indicates children are likely present in a greater proportion.^{xxvi}

Further, children can be seriously impacted by family violence even if they are not the immediate victim or do not witness physical violence themselves.^{xxvii} The cumulative impact of a child's repeat exposure to family violence may be as serious as direct victimisation,^{xxviii} which should be considered when identifying and managing high risk situations.

Under-reporting of child abuse

Children are unlikely to report abuse while it is occurring, generally disclosing in adulthood.^{xxix} Surveying of children in Victoria indicates 1.1% of children reported being a victim of abuse, and 3.1% reported witnessing violence.^{xxx} Victoria Police statistics do not reflect this prevalence. New disclosure laws introduced in 2014 are likely to increase the level of third party reporting, but proactive tools and mechanisms for identifying high risk situations (such as the JARAPP) are also required.

Children are overrepresented as the victims of family violence sex crimes

Despite accounting for less than a quarter of Victoria's population, more than six in ten victims of a family violence sex offence in 2014 were children. Despite this overrepresentation, it is highly likely family violence related sex crimes are heavily underreported.^{xxxi} The vast majority of family violence related child sex offenders are male; however, the proportion of female offenders is higher than for non-family violence sex crimes.



Females offending against children is disproportionate

Although females account for only just over one quarter of distinct family violence incident offenders, just over two in five of all family violence incidents involving a child victim were perpetrated by a female offender in 2014. Three quarters of these crimes were assaults, highlighting the unique relationships and expressions of violence within family violence situations. Nonetheless, males remain more likely to offend against children, and females are more likely to offend against their partner than their child.

Alcohol a key driver of child abuse

Research indicates alcohol abuse harms over a million children (22% of Australian children) and is associated with 15% to 47% of child abuse cases each year.^{xxxii} Alcohol has also been found to be a factor in more than half of fatal child abuse cases.^{xxxiii} Family violence incidents that involved alcohol and child victims increased in 2014. Alcohol has been identified as a key issue across family violence and other crime issues, highlighting the need to strengthen relationships with partner agencies to enhance alcohol related responses.

Parent Victims

Family violence incidents perpetrated by children⁵ against their parents has more than doubled in the past five years. The most common pattern is a male offending against their mother (more than half of these incidents); however, female offending against either parent was also well represented. The offending was not limited to adolescents, with the average offender age being 23.

Family violence perpetrated by a child against a parent is less likely to result in the offender being charged with a criminal offence (possibly due to parents being unwilling to pursue investigations against their children). Nevertheless, child offenders were over-represented for assaults highlighting the ease of which child parent family violence can escalate.

Drug use is a key driver of child parent family violence

Under one third of all family violence incidents perpetrated by a child against a parent in 2014 involved drugs. Nearly all the perpetrators where drugs were involved were 18+ years and almost half were aged 25+, suggesting it is more likely to be dependent drug users seeking to finance their drug habit rather than children experimenting with drugs.

A history of family violence also a key driver

A high percentage of children who perpetrated family violence against a parent in 2014 had been a previous victim of family violence, highlighting the potential for family violence against a child to have ongoing ramifications.

Victims with a disability

Although research indicates people with disabilities are almost twice as likely to experience family violence as those without,^{xxxiv} Victoria Police statistics do not reflect this prevalence. 18.5% of Australians identify as having a disability,^{xxxv} but only a small proportion of family violence incidents in 2014 were marked with a 'presence of a disability' flag. The low number of family violence incidents involving an individual with a disability likely results from the significant reporting barriers they may face (including communication, sensory and intellectual barriers, feelings of shame and deservedness, and fears that a change in circumstances will lead to worse living conditions such as institutionalisation).^{xxxvi}

⁵ 'Children' is not a reference to the age of the individual. It is a description of their relationship to the AFM.



Carer patient family violence is a unique subset of family violence that is heavily underreported. A small percentage of all family violence incidents in 2014 identified a carer as the perpetrator, possibly due to few being aware that a disability carer can be considered a perpetrator of family violence under the *Family Violence Protection Act 2008*.^{xxxvii} In addition to being in a privileged position to perpetrate violence against their patients, carers can also commit unique forms of family violence, including withholding support or medication, and threatening institutionalisation.^{xxxviii} Developing appropriate mechanisms for reporting incidents would improve current levels of underreporting.

Family violence in Indigenous communities

National research indicates Indigenous Australians are overrepresented as victims and offenders of family violence.^{xxxix} Indigenous Australians are also over-represented as recidivist offenders and repeat victims. Research also suggests family violence among Indigenous communities is heavily under-reported.^{xi}

Greater prevalence of family violence in Indigenous communities means children are more commonly affected. A recent survey indicating Indigenous children are four times more likely to be a victim of family violence, and five times more likely to witness it.^{xii} 7% of Indigenous children were in out of home care in mid-2014 (predominantly due to family violence risks) compared to less than 1% of non-Indigenous Australian children.^{xiii}

The drivers of Indigenous family violence include a range of complex social and systemic factors and highlighting a single driver will oversimplify the issue. Systemic disadvantage (high unemployment, poor housing, low income and education) and substance abuse (according to one study of homicides in Australia, the majority of intimate partner homicides in Indigenous society (87%) are alcohol related^{xliii}) are exacerbating factors. Cultural attitudes towards family violence must also be considered, particularly in relation to perceptions of the inevitability of such violence,^{xliv} and responses to violence when it occurs.^{xlv}

Rates of family violence in rural areas

Although metro areas account for more than twice as many family violence offences than rural areas, on a per capita basis rural areas account for 65% more offences. Rural areas are particularly overrepresented for sex (non-rape) offences, with nearly two and a half times more offences per capita than in metro areas. Recent research reflects this, with women in rural Victoria more likely to be a victim of family violence than those in metropolitan areas,^{xlvi} and children more likely to report having witnessed or been subject to violence.^{xlvii} The relative prevalence of firearms in rural Victoria has also been raised as increasing the risk of serious family violence in rural areas.^{xlviii}

A culture of masculinity, rigid gender roles and privacy are likely to contribute to the prevalence of family violence in rural areas.^{xlix} Financial stress is another contributor, with rural areas facing greater economic challenges. Isolation may also play a role, both in failing to regulate behaviours and considerable under-reporting.ⁱ Despite the greater level of prevalence in rural areas, the NSCSP suggests those living in metro areas are more concerned about family violence, highlighting the need to educate rural areas on what constitutes family violence and how to access support services.

Unequal gender attitudes more prevalent in CALD communities

Immigrants to Victoria often come from countries with lower levels of gender equality and more rigid gender roles, contributing to incidents of family violence. Research indicates people from non-main English speaking countries, especially those recently arrived, have a lesser understanding of what constitutes violence, have lower gender equality views, and are more supportive of violence.ⁱⁱ Research also suggests these attitudes are more pronounced among Victorian populations (compared to other Australian states).ⁱⁱⁱ Family violence within CALD communities is likely to be a growing issue in coming years due to recent and predicted migration.



Growing unemployment and higher levels of family violence

Unemployment is a known risk factor for family violence,^{liii} and unemployment is rising in Victoria and forecast to increase. From a low of less than 5% in 2011, unemployment in Victoria increased to 6.8% in November 2014^{liv} and may continue to rise until 2016 / 17.^{lv} Analysis of Victoria Police data indicates unemployment is already a growing issue in family violence incidents. Children are also at a heightened risk in family violence situations involving unemployment, with one third of fatal child abuse cases in Victoria between 1994 and 2013 involving an unemployed perpetrator,^{lvi} more than five times the actual unemployment rate.

Unemployment is also likely to increase under-reporting. Research indicates women are less likely to report family violence if they are unemployed.^{lvii} Unemployment also leads to increased isolation, which Victoria Police statistics suggest is the fastest growing risk factor for family violence victims over the past five years.

Research also shows young men are more likely to hold pro violence attitudes toward women, especially young men who are experiencing multiple forms of disadvantage.^{lviii}

Technology - creating new forms of family violence

The widespread use of mobile phones has made it easier for perpetrators to harass, stalk and intimidate their victims. Over the past five years, intimate partner violence related harassment offences have increased more significantly than any other offence category. Although these offences predominantly relate to phone calls, text messages and emails, there were also several instances of tracking devices being used.^{lix} Fewer Australians consider harassment by repeat phone contact as a form of intimate partner violence when compared to 2009.^{lx} Similarly, 39% of survey respondents believed it was acceptable to track a female partner by electronic means without her permission, and 15% believed electronic tracking was not a serious issue.^{lxi} As technology becomes more affordable and readily used, family violence incidents involving these technologies will increase.



Appendix C: Family Violence – Victoria Police Reforms and Responses

A Brief History of Family Violence Reform within Victoria Police

In late 2001, Victoria Police conducted a comprehensive review into violence against women. The findings of the review were published in August 2001 in *A Way Forward: Violence Against Women and Children Strategy*. Over the last 14 years Victoria Police has invested significant resources and worked hard to implement the 25 recommendations of the original strategy and to develop a consistent and comprehensive response to family violence and violence against women and children.

Victoria Police has taken the following key steps over the last decade to improve our response to family violence and sexual assault:

- Developing, implementing and regularly updating the Code of Practice for the Investigation of Family Violence (from 2004);
- Developing and implementing the Sexual Assault Code of Practice 2005;
- Introducing the risk assessment and risk management report (the L17) for all reported incidents of family violence (2004);
- Creating specialist family violence roles – Family Violence Advisors (2004) and Family Violence Liaison offices (2004 onwards). As at February 2015, there are 17 Family Violence Advisors across the state and Family Violence Liaison Officers in every 24 hour police station (approximately 180);
- Establishing the sexual offences multidisciplinary teams in 2006 and piloting a new model of investigators for sexual offences known as SOCIT (Sexual Offences and Child abuse Investigation Teams);
- Introduction of Family Violence Teams (2007 onwards). Currently at 32 Teams across Victoria;
- Developing referral protocols with the Department of Health and Human Services for family violence (2005);
- Seeking additional legislative powers - Holding Powers (2006) and Family Violence Safety Notices (2008);
- Realigning the Sexual Offences and Child Abuse Coordination Office (SOCACO) to the Victoria Police Crime Command in 2008;
- Implementing the *Family Violence Protection Act* (2008);
- Decision by Victoria Police to roll out the SOCIT model statewide (2008);
- Developing Violence Against Women and Children Strategies (2002 and 2009);
- Launching the Enhanced Family Violence Service Delivery Model (2011-2014);
- Incorporating Family Violence as a key Blueprint priority item (annual business plan) for Victoria Police (2012-2015);
- Co-chairing the rollout of the Risk Assessment and Risk Management (RAMP) panels across Victoria (2015);
- Appointment of Australia's first Family Violence Assistant Commissioner, Dean McWhirter (2015); and
- Establishment of the Victoria Police Family Violence Command (2015).

More detailed achievements appear in the following table:



Date	Action
Late 2001	Chief Commissioner announced a new focus on the incidence of violence against women as a major priority for Victoria Police.
May 2002	Recommendations of <i>Violence Against Women Strategy: A Way Forward</i> adopted. Violence Against Women Review Team formed to help facilitate changes within Victoria Police.
4 June 2002	Chief Commissioner makes a public announcement on the new police strategy to combat violence against women. Strategy covered police attitudes, policies and processes surrounding violence against women after extensive consultation with the State Government's Office of Women's Policy, welfare groups and refuge centres, plus broad internal consultation.
1 Aug 2002	Inaugural meeting of Statewide Steering Committee to Reduce Family Violence (SSCRFV). Co-chaired by Victoria Police and the Office of Women's Policy. Wide representation from key government and peak NGOs.
25 Aug 2004	Victorian Law Reform Commission Sex Offences: Final Report tabled in Parliament.
1 Sept 2004	Launch of the <i>Code of Practice (CoP) for the Investigation of Family Violence</i> featuring: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ introduction of interim Family Violence Risk Assessment and Management Process (VP form L17A) to supplement Family Violence Report (VP form L17); ▪ an organisational wide training program implemented by Regional Training Officers for all operational staff - Constables to Senior Sergeants (Within 18 months six and a half thousand members attended training).
2004	10 Sergeants are appointed as full time Regional Family Violence Advisors.
2004	Family Violence Liaison Officers are available at all 24 hour police stations.
2005	Release of the Code of Practice for the Investigation of Sexual Assault.
March 2005	Establishment of the Statewide Advisory Committee for Sexual Assault (DoJ).
June – Dec 2005	The development and dissemination of comprehensive referral pathways between Victoria Police and Family Violence Services (including specific protocol).
Oct 2005 – Oct 2006	Indigenous Violence Against Women and Children Public Awareness Campaign.
Nov 2005	Public release of the <i>Reforming the FV System in Victoria (Whole of Government document)</i> .
9 Dec 2005	Launch of the Code of Practice Tool Kit. This incorporated the merger of the Family Violence Report and the Family Violence Risk Assessment and Management Report into the VP Form L17 and available on LEAP. Additionally, merged the Application for Intervention Order (Summons or Warrant) and other miscellaneous enhancements.
Late 2005 – June 2006	Development and implementation of Holding Powers Legislation.
March 2006	Victorian Ombudsman's Report into improving responses to allegations involving sexual assault released.



Date	Action
May 2006	<p>State Budget provided \$34.2 million to the Sexual Assault Reform Strategy (SARS), a package of measures designed to improve the criminal justice response to victims of sexual assault. Included in the funding were two initiatives led by Victoria Police:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Establishment of two sexual assault Multidisciplinary Centres (MDCs) in Frankston and Mildura ▪ Establishment of two Sexual Offences and Child Abuse Investigation Teams (SOCITs) to be located within the above mentioned MDCs. <p>Other initiatives funded as part of SARS include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sexual Offences Lists in the Magistrate's, County and Children's Courts ▪ Specialist Sexual Offences Unit (SSOU) within the OPP ▪ Child Witness Service ▪ Forensic Nurse Network ▪ Various legislative changes.
June 2006	Victoria Police and NSW Police establish the Australasian Policing Forum on Family Violence on behalf of all Australasian Commissioners of Police. First conference held in June 2006 in Sydney, followed by the second conference in Melbourne in Aug 2007 and a third conference in Alice Springs in March 2008.
January 2007	Opening of the Frankston and Mildura sexual assault Multi Disciplinary Centres.
June 2006 – June 2007	Development of a model for family violence safety notices. Agreed by the Attorney General in June 2007.
July 2006 – Ongoing	Implementation and management of the Sex Offences and Child Abuse Investigation Team (SOCIT).
2008	Movement of SOCA Coordination Office to Victoria Police Crime Command.
2008	Sexual Assault and Child Abuse Investigation Team commenced operating out of Frankston Multi-Disciplinary Centre.
July 2008	Commencement of the Indigenous Protocol Project (Pilot).
December 2008	Introduction of the <i>Family Violence Protection Act (2008)</i> , including the introduction of Family Violence Safety Notices.
July 2009	Deakin University complete an evaluation of the Sexual Offences and Child Abuse Investigation Teams / Multi-Disciplinary Centre model.
2009	Victoria Police Corporate Committee approve the establishment of Sexual Offences and Child Abuse Investigation Teams across the organisation.
November 2009	Launch of <i>Living Free from Violence: Upholding the Right – Victoria Police's strategy to reduce Violence Against Women and Children</i> .
Early 2010	Establishment of the Victoria Police Violence Against Women and Children Steering Committee.
May 2010	State Budget allocates funding for an additional Multi Disciplinary Centre in Geelong.
December 2010	Launch of the 2 nd Edition of the <i>Code of Practice for the Investigation of Family Violence</i> .
Mid 2011	Establishment of the Sexual and Family Violence Division with a dedicated Superintendent in Victoria Police Crime Command.
November 2011	<p>Launch of the Enhanced Family Violence Service Delivery Model (internal document)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Expand Family Violence teams ▪ Develop strategies for repeat victims and recidivist offenders.
April 2012	Establishment of Taskforce Astraea to combat online child exploitation.



Date	Action
May 2012	State Budget allocates funding for three sexual assault Multi Disciplinary Centres as a direct response to the findings from the Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children Inquiry.
June 2012	Finalisation of Protecting Children Protocol between DHS and Victoria Police.
July 2012	Opening of the Geelong sexual assault Multi Disciplinary Centre.
Nov 2012	Edition 2 v2 <i>Code of Practice for the Investigation of Family Violence</i> released.
2013	Establishment of Taskforce SANO to investigate allegations arising from the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into Child Abuse and then the Royal Commission for child abuse.
Oct 2013	Koori FV protocols launched in Ballarat.
Nov 2013	Koori FV protocols launched in Darebin.
Dec 2013	Chief Commissioner Ken Lay holds the Breaking Men's Silence Forum attended by Community leaders to bring attention to issue of men's responsibility to prevent violence against women and children.
March 2014	Release of the 3 rd Edition of the <i>Code of Practice for the Investigation of Family Violence</i> .
July 2014	Chief Commissioner Ken Lay is one of three male leaders involved in the ongoing Herald Sun media campaign to bring attention to the realities of Family Violence in Victoria.
July 2014	Victoria Police Blue Print Year 3 2014-2015 released. One Blue Print Project is to: Implement a family violence policy that enhances frontline focus and service delivery effectiveness, appropriate resource allocation and support a more effective whole of Victorian Government response.
Sept 2014	Opening of the Dandenong sexual assault Multi Disciplinary Centre.
November 2014	Chief Commissioner Lay announces VHREOC review of sexual harassment and sexism in Victoria Police, contributing to the primary prevention of violence against women.
December 2014	Chief Commissioner Lay announces the establishment of a Family Violence Command in Victoria Police and the appointment of a dedicated Family Violence Assistant Commissioner.
March 2015	Appointment of Assistant Commissioner Dean McWhirter as the head of the newly established Family Violence Command.

How Victoria Police Currently Responds to Family Violence

The Victoria Police response to family violence is governed by the *Code of Practice for the Investigation of Family Violence* (Code of Practice), applicable legislation and the Victoria Police Manual. Our three main priorities in responding to family violence are to:

- Maximise the safety and support to those involved;
- Identify and investigate incidents of family violence and prosecute persons accused of criminal offences arising from family violence; and
- Assist in the prevention and deterrence of family violence in the community by responding to family violence appropriately.



Risk Assessment and Risk Management

Police action is determined by a risk assessment conducted when police respond to an incident and a subsequent risk management plan. A Risk Assessment and Risk Management Report (VP Form L17) is completed for every incident of family violence reported to police. The primary purpose of the report is to help guide police through a complex process which includes:

- Identifying and recording the most relevant evidence based risk factors and indicators;
- Ensuring decisions by police or others regarding the safety and welfare of Affected Family Members are well informed;
- Making a structured assessment on the likelihood of future family violence; and
- Determining the most appropriate risk management strategy.

The risk assessment process undertaken by police is consistent with the Common Risk Assessment Framework that is used widely across the Victorian family violence system.

Options Model

The Code of Practice establishes an Options Model for responding to family violence. The Options Model sets out three actions that police can take when responding to an incident:

- Refer parties to appropriate support agencies;
- Apply for family violence intervention orders, or issue family violence safety notices to protect the victim and any children;
- Pursue criminal charges against the perpetrator.

The risk management strategy taken by police must be based directly on the most current risk assessment. Under the Options Model, police are guided to pursue either one, or any combination of these actions.

Criminal Action

A key responsibility of police in reports of family violence is the pursuit of criminal charges, where appropriate. If criminal charges are considered, police have five options:

- Charge and remand
- Charge and bail
- Charge and summons
- Intent to summons
- No further police action (NFPA) following submission of a brief for non-authorisation.

Criminal options do not replace the need to pursue civil options. If there are sufficient grounds to make application for a Family Violence Intervention Order then police must pursue that course of action in conjunction with criminal and referral options. Depending on the circumstances, attending police may request assistance from Victoria Police specialist units.

Civil Action

Where a family violence incident indicates the safety, welfare or property of a family member is endangered, the attending officer may make an application for a Family Violence Intervention Order under the *Family Violence Protection Act 2008*. There are several options available and the appropriate course of action depends upon the assessment of present and future risks and circumstances of the case. The options available include:

- Family Violence Safety Notice
- Application and Warrant
- Application and Summons
- Application for a Family Violence Interim Intervention Order
- Vary an existing order.



Family Violence Safety Notices are the most common civil action taken by police. These notices enable police to place immediate restrictions on the perpetrator, in a similar form to an intervention order. The notice is issued by a senior police member and is in place for up to 5 business days. The notice is also an application for an intervention order and acts as a summons to appear in court. Most safety notices result in the issuing of a final family violence intervention order by a court.

Referral Options

Police must refer all persons involved in family violence incidents to appropriate specialist family violence support agencies. Across Victoria, specialist support agencies receive dedicated funding from DHHS to manage police referrals. There are two referral options:

- Formal referrals - police provide a copy of the parties' details directly to specialist support services, who proactively make contact with the referred person
- Informal referrals – police give the parties the contact details of appropriate agencies and encourage the parties to make contact with those agencies independently.

In addition, police also have dedicated pathways to report at risk children to Child Protection within DHHS to fulfil mandatory reporting options. Where the risk to children is lower, but still of concern to police, referrals are made to Child First.

Specialist Police Resources

There are several specialist family violence roles within Victoria Police to address the issues associated with family violence. Victoria Police currently has: 32 Family Violence Teams; 17 Family Violence Advisors and Family Violence Liaison Officers at 24 hour police stations.

Role of Family Violence Teams

The role of Family Violence Teams will vary across the state. The core roles may include:

- Immediate specialist response to a family violence incident
- Secondary response unit in support of primary units
- Proactive investigations and case management of recidivist offenders, repeat Aggrieved Family Members and high risk clients
- Investigation of criminal offences, including breaches of intervention orders.

Family Violence Advisors

The role of the Family Violence Advisors is to:

- Provide a focal point for the interface between operational police, Family Violence Liaison Officers and local agencies
- Ensure operational police are aware of the issues and impact of family violence and violence against women upon Aggrieved Family Members and the general community
- Establish and maintain formal consultative community networks and represent Victoria Police at appropriate forums relating to family violence
- Coordinate, develop and conduct training workshops to operational police in consultation with the Family Violence Coordination Unit and Divisional Training Officers
- Maintain a relationship with the Sexual and Family Violence Unit, Crime Command and state wide integrated family violence service governance structures
- Research and identify local issues, trends and incidents of family violence in the community and develop initiatives and strategies to break the cycle of family violence.



Family Violence Liaison Officer

The Family Violence Liaison Officer at each 24-hour police station in Victoria is a supervisor and is responsible for the following activities within their station or area of control to:

- Provide a consistent and coordinated approach to family violence
- Monitor and report on family violence, including adherence by members to the Code of Practice
- Provide a station contact point for local referral agencies
- Maintain relationships between police and other agencies
- Coordinate further responses for Aggrieved Family Members where issues of re attendance or multiple attendances exist.



Appendix D: Family Violence – Victoria Police Future Directions

Strategic direction and organisational reform

The Victoria Police response to family violence has changed dramatically since the early 2000s, driven largely by the development of the *Victoria Police Code of Practice for the Investigation of Family Violence* and the reforms associated with the implementation of the *Family Violence Protection Act 2008*. However, there remain areas of our response that we need to re-examine and re-design.

The first step in doing this was to establish the Family Violence Command in March 2015 as a central point of accountability for family violence within Victoria Police. Victoria Police is the first jurisdiction in Australia to create a dedicated command to focus on family violence. Led by Assistant Commissioner Dean McWhirter, the new Command will consist of analysts, advisors, investigators and police specialising in family violence matters.

The priorities for the Family Violence Command are:

- Acting on the recommendations arising from the Royal Commission into Family Violence;
- Evaluating, identifying and rolling out good practice;
- Developing a model for frontline service delivery for family violence;
- Clarifying the functions and responsibilities of specialist family violence roles;
- Enhancing training for family violence specialists and general duties police;
- Improving risk assessment and risk management processes within Victoria Police;
- Identifying service delivery gaps for policing family violence; and
- Increasing the intelligence and analytical capability for policing family violence.

ⁱ Australian Bureau of Statistics. Personal Safety Survey, Australia. 2012 December. ABS cat no. 4906.0.

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