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Ongoing demand for support services

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Specialist family violence services across Victoria are continuing to see increased demand and complex cases, a new state-wide report says.

Safe and Equal released its Measuring Demand and Capacity report this month, which focuses on the capacity of the specialist family violence sector.

It comes as Orange Door Colac is continuing to respond to hundreds of cases a year.

Meanwhile, Women’s Health and Wellbeing Barwon South West has reminded the Colac and district community to check in on their loved ones with the festive season running the risk of increased family violence incidents.

Safe and Equal’s new report analysed and shared insights on data collected through its Demand and Capacity Survey this year.

Key insights from the report showed specialist family violence services continued to operate in a context of “increasing complexity of needs and sustained systemic pressures, compounded by the ongoing housing and cost-of-living crises”.

The most reported referral pathway into case management was through The Orange Door.

Self-referrals were the second-most reported, representing a significant increase compared to the 2024 report.

A Department of Families, Fairness and Housing spokesperson said The Orange Door Colac continued to see demand, providing risk assessment, support and referrals into specialist family violence case management and other services.

“All women and children in Vic-

toria have the right to live safely, freely, and without fear of family violence,” they said.

At Colac’s Walk for Respect event in October, Orange Door team leader Emma Warton said Orange Door had worked with more than 600 cases of family violence across a 12-month period.

She said everyone had a role to play in ending family violence.

The Orange Door Barwon has received more than 61,700 referrals and provided support to more than 47,400 people, including more than 17,800 children, since opening in May 2018.

Safe and Equal’s new report also highlighted that workforce pressures in the industry remained persistent, with services reporting higher average caseloads and staffing shortages.

“Services operating in regional and rural areas described additional constraints, including the ‘impact of travelling from a regional area to access face-to-face training,’ and limited face-to-face training opportunities,” the report said.

Women’s Health and Wellbeing Barwon South West chief executive Jodie Hill said her organisation worked in partnership with specialist family violence services and was aware of the challenges.

“We need to be thinking about the people who are providing these services, they’re doing it most of the time with limited resources and funding and they do a really good job of it,” Ms Hill said.

“They are doing this kind of work because they really believe in it, feel it’s necessary and have a passion for doing something that is an amazing

service to their community. They are doing it with their whole heart.”

Ms Hill recognised that this time of year placed extra pressure on families due to increased costs.

“There will be people who will struggle to have a happy Christmas, to buy all the food and gifts and all those things we associate with Christmas,” she said.

“It creates that pressure, it creates that feeling of shame and disappointment, it adds to mental health concerns and tension within family groups.

“Those are the things that can exacerbate these kinds of incidents, it’s a challenging time.”

Ms Hill encouraged people to check in on family and friends across the festive season and be aware of specialist family violence services that are available to them.

Orange Door is a free, confidential service helping people who are experiencing or using family violence or need support with the care and wellbeing of children and young people.

The Colac service operates out of Colac Area Health in partnership with Meli, the Sexual Assault and Family Violence Centre and the Wathaurong Aboriginal Cooperation and provides a single co-ordinated entry point for people to access help.

If you are affected by this story and want to seek assistance, contact 1800RESPECT or 1800 737 732, the national sexual assault, domestic and family violence counselling service for people living in Australia.