

## Advocacy Summary: Developing a client-centered family violence system

### Why this matters

Inclusive, safe and effective support should be accessible to all people experiencing or at risk of family violence, through joined-up, family violence-informed community services.

Significant investment and effort has been directed towards making the family violence system more inclusive and accessible in Victoria. However, there continues to be a lack of systemically embedded, tailored, and inclusive family violence service options for people from marginalised groups, as well as children and young people. Due to the systemic barriers created by racism, transphobia, homophobia, ableism, ageism and other forms of structural marginalisation and the resulting distrust of institutions like police and child protection, people may not feel safe to access the family violence sector. Barriers to engaging with the service system persist and strengthening system responses to be safe and inclusive requires ongoing investment and attention.

We want all victim survivors to have somewhere that they feel is safe for them to seek support for family violence – whether that is at a family violence service, a targeted<sup>1</sup> family violence service or an allied service. We want children and young people to be seen and treated like victim survivors with individual needs by the whole system regardless if they present with a parent or alone. Regardless of where victim survivors access the system, we want them to receive a family-violence informed response that can support victim survivors holistically based on what they feel they most need to address in their life at that time. We also want victim survivors to be aware of, and able to get, support before they are in family violence crisis. We want them to have a say in the design of services to make sure the services fits their needs and we want them to have a say in how the system works as a whole to maximise the potential for safety.

We also need a comprehensive system that includes early intervention and recovery. We must reach those at risk and prevent them from ever needing to access the system, and we need a focus on long-term supports and therapeutic options to ensure victim survivors thrive into their futures.

### What we know

There is no one thing that will increase access to the family violence system and support services for victim survivors and create a truly client-centred system. To achieve this, we need a suit of initiatives that span individual practice with clients, organisational policies and procedures and structural policy and service

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<sup>1</sup> Targeted family violence services are specialist family violence services or programs – either at the statewide or local level – that provide support for victim survivors from specific communities, such as multicultural or LGBTIQ+ communities, older people and people with disability. These services provide responses such as case management, accommodation, therapeutic programs and other tailored programs.

delivery frameworks that can create an enabling environment for the client-centered practiced that family violence practitioners and victim survivors know works.

Work to make a client-centred family violence system must focus on all parts of the system such as justice, housing, child protection, legal and financial support services. Legislation, service frameworks and funding structures that support these parts of the system need to be adjusted to align to a goal of making a system that can focus on a victim survivor's need regardless of their background, age, ability or other characteristics or needs.

## Safe and Equal's position on this issue: recommendations and asks

### Access, inclusion and cultural safety

We need a suite of initiatives focused on making family violence services and the wider system accessible and safer for groups of victim survivors who we know face barriers to accessing the support they need or experience being excluded all together. These initiatives need to include more resourcing to help services and clients navigate discriminatory systems and to help services develop and align to practice frameworks designed to enhance cultural safety and accessibility. Resourcing for targeted family violence services also needs to be increased.

### Priority Actions

- Increase funding for Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations including a commitment to multi-year funding agreements
- Increase funding for targeted family violence services that provide support for victim survivors from specific communities, including multicultural communities, LGBTIQ+ communities, older people and people with disability, alongside a commitment to multi-year funding agreements
- Increase the number of funded intake points for regional and/or rural areas
- Enhance responses to victim survivors with disability by funding the Disability Family Violence Crisis Response Initiative ongoing and expanding the provision of Disability Practice Lead roles to every DFFH area ongoingly
- Fund specialist family violence services to align to culturally safe and sensitive practice frameworks by building their capability for this work
- Provide ongoing funding for Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and targeted family violence services to fulfil the expectations set out under MARAM regarding providing secondary consults to mainstream services and provide capability building to these services

- Utilise the five-year MARAM review to strengthen the intersectional lens in the practice guidance and risk assessment and management tools and approaches, including appropriate assessments for older people, people with living with disabilities, and people experiencing substance coercion

## Responses to children and young people

Children and young people continue to tell us that they feel invisible in our system. There are a number of practical solutions for how to improve the system's responses to children and young people including increases children and young people's voices in the system and service design, increasing resources and training to support family violence workers to work directly with children, and embedding work with children in key service frameworks, targets and funding structures.

## Priority Actions

- Convene and resource a policy mechanism involving all relevant stakeholders across specialist family violence services, child and family services, sexual assault services, youth services, child protection, out of home care and youth justice to align expectations and requirements for an effective response to children and young people experiencing family violence
- Investigate the legislative mandate and regulatory frameworks to determine what, if any, legislative or policy change is required to enable specialist family violence services to work with independently presenting young people in the 15-18 age cohort
- Work with relevant peak bodies to review, redefine, and recalculate family violence service delivery targets to accurately reflect the frontline work undertaken with children and young people and all other client cohorts
- Support and fund ongoing implementation of the MARAM Child and Young People Framework, tools and practice guidance to embed it across specialist family violence services and allied sectors
- Resource the specialist family violence sector to develop a tailored service model for children and young people experiencing family violence that is in alignment with the Family Violence Case Management Program Requirements and MARAM and articulates benchmarks and standards for working with children and young people that reflects and further improves best practice in program design and workforce development
- Systematically map the statewide footprint of children and youth-specific frontline practitioners across specialist family violence services, with a view to securing critical staff capacity and clinical knowledge, supporting senior practitioners with deep expertise in working with children and young people and fostering cross-pollination of expertise

- Work with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to scope and design an Aboriginal Child Protection Notification System to reduce unnecessary removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children
- Invest in the development and long-term sustainability of targeted programs for children and young people experiencing family violence (e.g. MCM FV case management, work in refuge etc)
- Utilise and continuously enhance platforms for partnering with children and young people with lived experience
- Ensure that the development of outcomes frameworks and the design of evaluation initiatives include children and young people with lived experience of family violence

## Lived experience

Being led by the experiences of victim survivors from marginalized groups needs to be a central part of the development of all the above initiatives. Significant work and insights can be drawn from both victim survivors and community led services and organisations. These voices and insight can guide system reform and create a more client-centered family violence response system.

## Priority Actions

- Resource Safe and Equal to continue embedding lived experience of the family violence system into system design and development through Safe and Equal's Expert by Experience Survivor Advocate Group
- Increase the presence of children and young people's lived experience in service and system design and delivery to strengthen responses to children and young people. This could be done via working with the specialist family violence, youth and other relevant sectors to develop a children and young people engagement framework for family violence services
- Resource front-line services to embed lived experience voices in their service delivery, including (but not limited to) consistent client feedback mechanisms

## Allied sectors

We know that victim survivors will seek support not only from specialist family violence services but also from other parts of the community services sector. This means that we need allied services to be family violence informed enough that they can identify family violence and provide an initial response and then be resourced to seek secondary consultations from specialist family violence services so that a person receives holistic support regardless of where they present.

## Priority Actions:

- Ongoing funding to embed MARAM across prescribed workforces to ensure that victim survivors of family violence can access a safe response, regardless of where they present in the system

- Provide an uplift in funding for specialist family violence services to engage in partnership building and secondary consultation processes with allied workforces

## Early intervention

Our system is currently operating almost exclusively in crisis response due to limited funding compared to demand. We know that when we are able to link people in with services and information prior to family violence crisis, people experience better outcomes and increased safety.

We want to see increased priority and investment into early intervention – including greater support for targeted outreach and interventions to address and minimise risk and the escalation of violence. Increased early intervention capacity will not only help avoid people entering family violence crisis but will also help mitigate the life impacts of family violence by helping victim survivors avoid homelessness and poverty, and limit the capacity of people using violence to enact systems abuse.

### Priority Actions:

- Establish a clear framework and actions to strengthen early intervention programs and initiatives, building on current work being undertaken (particularly that being undertaken by specialist family violence services)
- Build sector awareness and input into proposals submitted to the Early Intervention Investment Framework, either independently or through government departments, with a focus on addressing housing including Safe at Home and providing comprehensive support for recovery for victim survivors
- Increase funding and availability of family violence financial counsellors, and support co-location and other collaborative models to support victim survivors to get early advice on financial risks of family violence and how to mitigate these
- Increase funding and availability of community legal services that can provide support to victim survivors on a range of issues, including family law, child protection, civil and criminal matters
- Increase funding and availability of programs and initiatives aimed at increasing access to education and well-paying employment opportunities for victim survivors, to help victim survivors achieve economic independence and wellbeing, and reduce gender income inequality

## Recovery

In Victoria, there is currently no dedicated funding stream for long-term recovery supports, increasing the risk of intergenerational trauma and the likelihood of children and young people who have experienced violence growing up without the opportunity to heal. We need investment into building the evidence base around what works to promote and support long-term recovery for adults and children, and funding to deliver these kinds of services.

### Priority Actions:

- Invest into building the evidence base for long-term recovery services, by funding research and evaluations of initiatives
- Increase funding for existing/promising therapeutic interventions, including therapeutic case management
- Invest into interventions for children and young people, recognizing that early intervention and recovery for young people is key to breaking intergenerational family violence