

Fact Sheet 3:

The Specialist Sexual Assault Sector

This information is intended for specialist family violence practitioners working within the Victorian context to strengthen understanding, skills and confidence when responding to disclosures of sexual violence within the context of family violence.

Specialist Sexual Assault Services in Victoria

As part of the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management (MARAM) aligned risk assessment, family violence practitioners must explore the presence of **sexual violence**. Practitioners should remember that a victim survivor's disclosure of sexual violence may not happen immediately. Practitioners should therefore ask about sexual violence during initial assessment and be mindful of the need to revisit these questions in future engagements. As part of responding to sexual assault, family violence practitioners should also understand services provided by the Victorian specialist sexual assault services, and how and when to refer.

Specialist sexual assault services (SSAS) are available in **all regions of Victoria** to support victim survivors of sexual assault (recent or historical) as well as non-offending family members or friends. Services are also available to children and young people who exhibit harmful sexual behaviour. All SSAS are free and confidential and available to people of all ages, genders, sexualities, abilities and cultural backgrounds.

Find a specialist sexual assault service at
peak.sasvic.org.au/service-map



What do specialist sexual assault services offer?

- **24/7 crisis** care response following a recent sexual assault (<2 weeks)
- **therapeutic** counselling (recent or historic)
- **advocacy**
- **group** work
- **community** education
- **secondary** consultations to professionals, such as family violence practitioners
- **Financial Assistance Scheme** report writing for therapeutic counselling clients.

How is it delivered?

- **face-to-face**
- **telephone**
- **telehealth**
- **at satellite/outpost** sites



Who can access the services?

- **adult** victim survivors of recent or historic sexual assault, violence or abuse
- **adult** victim survivors of childhood sexual assault, violence or abuse
- **child** and adolescent victim survivors of sexual assault or abuse
- **children** who display harmful sexual behaviour
- **adolescents** (up to 18) who display harmful sexual behaviour
- **non-offending** family, caregivers and professional support of client groups above.

What is a crisis care response?

Crisis Care responses are available 24/7 at a unit inside a designated hospital called a **Crisis Care Unit (CCU)** or at a CCU within a **Multidisciplinary Centre (MDC)**. This appointment is available to a victim survivor of a recent sexual assault when they want to proceed with a **Forensic Medical Examination (FME)** or would like to meet with a **counsellor advocate** (from their local SSAS) to talk through their rights and options in person.

This appointment provides the victim survivor with a safe place to confidentially disclose their experience of sexual assault, receive crisis counselling support and advocacy, and make informed decisions regarding all options available to them. These options include **police reporting** (Sexual Offences and Child Abuse Investigations Team), receiving **general medical treatment** for injuries, **safety planning** and other **resources and referrals** relevant to their needs (for example, emergency housing, emergency relief money, sexual health referrals).



When relevant, the counsellor advocate will provide information on Forensic Medical Examinations (FMEs) including the purpose (to collect evidence to inform the investigation) as well as the approximate time limits to collect this evidence. The victim survivor is informed of the need to consult with SOCIT and a Forensic Medical Officer (FMO) to confirm that an FME can occur.

This requires:

- **the victim survivor** to make a disclosure to SOCIT and want the crime investigated
- **SOCIT** to form a reasonable belief that a sexual offence occurred
- **a forensic medical officer** to suspect there is retrievable forensic evidence, and by collecting it would be useful for the investigation.

To access or enquire about a crisis care response appointment call:

- **The local specialist sexual assault service** within business hours
- **The Victorian Sexual Assault Crisis Line (SACL)** after-hours, on weekends and public holidays - 1800 806 292
- **Victoria Police** - 000 or contact the local police station

The victim survivor is also informed that a general medical check by a GP or emergency department doctor can disturb forensic evidence if there is any.

However, urgent medical care must take priority over the collection of forensic evidence.

Subject to the decision making of the victim survivor, the counsellor advocate will coordinate the involvement of hospital medical, forensic medical and police attendance to the crisis response appointment.

What do I need to know about sexual assault counselling?

- All counsellor advocates are tertiary qualified and have undertaken specialist sexual assault worker training. Most are qualified in social work or psychology and use a range of evidence-based therapies under the supervision of a senior clinician.
- All new counselling clients must attend an intake appointment before they can be added to the wait list for regular appointments. Wait times can vary.
- The number of counselling appointments available varies at each SSAS. Contact the service during business hours to discuss further.
- You do not need a referral from a GP or Mental Health Care Plan to access support.
- You do not need to pay or use your health insurance if you are on a temporary visa.
- You do not need to use your NDIS funds if you have a plan.

Services are free for everyone.

Considerations before making a referral to the specialist sexual assault sector

1. **Is it a recent sexual assault** (within the last two weeks)? If so, the victim survivor can receive a crisis care response.
2. **Are there any immediate risk issues** (medical, mental health or safety concerns) that require immediate attention?
3. **Is the victim survivor aware of their reporting and support options?** Would they like to talk to a SSAS counsellor advocate about this?
4. **Is the victim survivor at serious risk of family violence?** Are they able to safely engage in therapeutic work right now.
5. **Will the victim survivor move to a different region?** This can impact which specialist sexual assault service they are referred to.
6. **Is a secondary consultation needed to clarify if a referral to a SSAS is appropriate?** If so, call the [business hours SSAS](#) or SACL (1800 806 292) after hours for crisis response information.

If proceeding with a referral, the family violence practitioner can support the victim survivor to self-refer or facilitate the referral with their consent.

Referrals to SSAS during business hours

Victim survivors can **self-refer** by calling [their local SSAS](#) during business hours. Sometimes third parties make the initial call on their behalf such as family, friends or a professional. If a third-party calls, the SSAS counsellor advocate will provide information and support to the caller but will also request to speak directly with the victim survivor.

The counsellor advocate is required to conduct an initial risk assessment, provide the victim survivor with information on their options and obtain informed consent to proceed with their choices.

At this point, the victim survivor may decide to schedule an appointment with the SSAS intake counsellor to discuss their support needs in further detail, or if they experienced a recent sexual assault, they may choose to receive a crisis care response.

In instances where the victim survivor is not present on the call but has provided consent for the family violence practitioner to make the referral, the following information will be requested:

- **name**, date of birth, pronouns, suburb, and contact details
- **accessibility**, communication, and cultural needs
- **whether** the sexual assault is historic or recent
- **current** safety concerns and if there is a current FVIVO if relevant
- **when** to contact the victim survivor, including whether it is safe to leave a voice or text message and identify as a SSAS
- **information** about the perpetrator/person using violence if known
- **if** they are a parent or carer with dependants currently in their care
- **if** the specialist family violence service/referrer will continue to provide support to the victim survivor
- **a** copy of the specialist family violence service MARAM aligned risk assessment and safety plan. This is emailed through to the SSAS (as prescribed under FVISS/CISS).

Find a specialist sexual assault service at
peak.sasvic.org.au/service-map



Referrals after-hours, Sexual Assault Crisis Line (SACL)

SACL operates from **5pm–9am** weekdays and 24 hours on weekends and on public holidays. Most sexual assault services divert their intake phone line to SACL at 5pm to 9am each weekday.

Calls to SACL during business hours will refer to a local specialist sexual assault service but it's important to [check the service map](#) to correctly identify your local service.

SACL is contactable directly on 1800 806 292.

SACL performs two main functions:

- **Crisis counselling** support
- **After hours crisis** response coordination following a recent sexual assault.

** SACL cannot book or cancel business hours counselling appointments at a local specialist sexual assault service. Please call the local SSAS in business hours.*

When organising an after-hours crisis response, the SACL will contact an on-call counsellor advocate from the area where the victim survivor is located to attend the designated hospital or MDC.

