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## Funding crisis in Ballarat looms as rising costs fuel surge in family violence

MS By [Michelle Smith](#)  
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Cost of living pressures are forcing more Ballarat women to stay in relationships where they experience family violence.

At the same time, uncertainty over funding is making it difficult for domestic violence support services to provide certainty about the programs that victim survivors need to build new lives.

Ballarat's WRISC Family Violence Support has seen an increase in service demand for victims of family violence with clients presenting with a heightened focus on essential needs including rent assistance, food and fuel relief, hygiene items, clothing, and bedding.



Karryne, Darcie, Yvette, Libby, Charlie, Bobbi and Tracy from WRISC Family Violence Support Ballarat walk against gender-based violence in November, 2024. Picture by Kate Healy

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"Programs are increasingly seeing women having to make decisions about remaining in relationships in order to meet cost of living pressures, including maintaining secure housing," said WRISC chief executive Robyn Reeves.

"Single women are presenting in homelessness more frequently. In addition, mothers are navigating increasingly complex family dynamics to ensure their children's practical and financial needs can be met within shared parental arrangements."

In a submission to the National Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commissioner, Ms Reeves said as a result of these barriers, [women and children](#) often lacked the stability needed to move beyond immediate crisis needs to engage in therapeutic support.

"This means many children remain in survival mode, which significantly impacts their ability to recover from and move forward after experiences of family violence."

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The number of family violence incidents in Ballarat [continues to grow](#).

According to the Crime Statistics Agency, police recorded 3020 family violence incidents in Ballarat in 2024-2025, up almost 16 per cent from the year prior.

There were 2439 family violence incidents per 100,000 population.

Ms Reeves said uncertainty over state funding for family violence services was putting additional pressure on the sector.

"There are a number of programs in the area around response to family violence that are often only funded on short-term contracts, it might be a couple of years or perhaps a very specific project. That method of funding does place immense pressure on people working in the sector.

"In addition to agencies not being certain of funding on an ongoing basis, the staff that are working in the field don't know if they're going to have a job after June 30."

### **Calls for certainty**

Victoria's family violence peak body Safe and Equal has called for certainty in funding ahead of the state budget 2026-27 on Tuesday, May 5.

"At the moment there's an enormous amount of funding that's due to lapse mid-year, around \$96 million in response services and \$22 million in prevention over multiple years, but it's a significant amount that will be lost if it's not renewed," said Marina Carman, executive director of prevention, advocacy and social change for Safe and Equal.

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The \$118 million, equivalent to about \$59 million annually, includes funding for case management, refuge operations, family violence crisis brokerage, support for those on temporary visas, the Personal Safety Initiative (PSI), therapeutic supports for children and young people, and the Central Information Point (CIP).

This funding loss places up to 156 jobs at risk across refuge and specialist family violence case management, resulting in a significant impact on service access across the state.



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"Even though there's been really great long-term commitment from the Victorian Government ... there's a large amount of money about to lapse but we know the problem itself is actually bigger than it has been previously and is growing," Ms Carman said.

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Ahead of the budget, Safe and Equal has called for the Victorian Government to reinstate the funding due to lapse, and increase investment to address family violence, particularly in primary prevention, early intervention, response, recovery, support of children and young people as victim survivors in their own right, and for safe, secure and affordable housing for victim survivors.

"We need to really significantly increase investment in family violence services just to meet current demands, and that's not even those who haven't yet reached out or aren't able to access a service."

Ms Carman said services realistically needed 50 per cent more funding to properly meet demand.

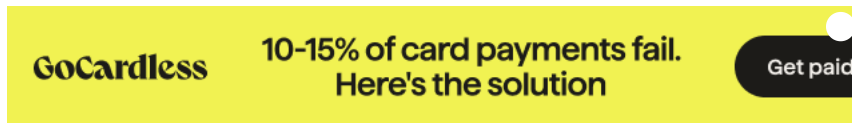
"I think why we are seeing that increase in reporting, some of it is financial pressures that families are under, there's probably a lag of mental health issues coming out of COVID, there's the growth in online misogyny, and gendered violence.

"But also there is a growing community awareness around family violence and that means that people are reaching out to services more and reporting to police, but if they're not then getting the support that they need, then that's not safe."

### Increased risk of violence

National Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commissioner Micaela Cronin this week warned that economic and global uncertainty created heightened risk for domestic, family and sexual violence

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"We know that when households face rising financial stress, housing insecurity, and instability, the risk of violence increases," Commissioner Cronin said.

"We also know that people are likely to experience violence for the first time in times of crisis like this.

"Governments must ensure that services are supported to respond, and that these elevated risks are considered in our efforts to support the community at this time."

*Affected by this story? There is help available.*

*If you or someone you know is impacted by sexual assault or family violence, call 1800RESPECT on 1800 737 732 or Lifeline on 13 11 14.*

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