

Family Violence Funder Network Review

The role of philanthropy in Victoria following the Royal Commission into Family Violence

October 2025

Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners

Acknowledgement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

Safe and Equal is based on Wurundjeri Country. We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the traditional and ongoing custodians of the lands on which we live and work, and we pay respects to Elders past and present. We acknowledge that sovereignty has never been ceded and recognise First Nations peoples' rights to self-determination and continuing connections to land, waters and community.

Honouring Victim Survivors

Safe and Equal acknowledges the strength and resilience of adults, children and young people who have experienced family violence and recognises that it is essential that responses to family violence are informed by their expert knowledge and advocacy. We pay respects to those who have not survived and acknowledge the lasting impacts of this preventable violence on families and communities.

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About Safe and Equal

At Safe and Equal, we work towards a world where everyone is safe, respected and thriving, living free from family and gender-based violence. We are the peak body for Victorian organisations that specialise in family and gender-based violence across the continuum, including primary prevention, early intervention, response and recovery. We are an independent, non-government organisation.

Our work prioritises the safety of all people experiencing, recovering from or at risk of family and gender-based violence. While we know that most family violence is perpetrated by men against women and children, we recognise that family violence impacts people across a diversity of gender identities, social and cultural contexts, and within various intimate, family and other relationships. We apply an intersectional feminist lens in our work to address the gendered drivers of violence, and how these overlap and intersect with additional forms of violence, oppression and inequality.

As a peak, we work with and for our members to prevent and respond to violence, building a better future for adults, children and young people experiencing, at risk of, or recovering from family and gender-based violence.

About William Buckland Foundation

The William Buckland Foundation aims to improve the lives of disadvantaged Victorians through grants that support better housing, health, education and employment outcomes. They also fund initiatives that build resilience in rural and regional communities.

While many philanthropic organisations have been involved in this program, the William Buckland Foundation were one of the founding funders of the Family Violence Philanthropy Collaboration Project, and were the sole funding partner for the most recent funding cycle, ending in September 2025, and providing backbone support for the Funders Network.



Summary & Project Context

This report marks the end of a funding cycle, and aims to provide a short review of an important, innovative and aspirational project, where philanthropists stepped forward following Australia's first Royal Commission into Family Violence in 2015.

The Family Violence Philanthropy Collaboration Project:

Established in 2018, this project was led by Safe and Equal (known as Domestic Violence Victoria at that time) that acted as a bridge between the specialist family violence sector and the philanthropic community. The project was generously initially funded by Gandel Philanthropy, the Ross Trust and the William Buckland Foundation. It was a direct response to the Commission's recommendation that improving family violence outcomes requires a coordinated response across government and the community.

The aspiration was to bring together philanthropic and corporate funders, government stakeholders and family violence sector representatives to 'grow the philanthropic pie' for those experiencing, or at risk of, family and gender-based violence. The goal being to create better and lasting impact due to the unique approach of providing co-designed and collaboratively funded innovative projects, that support systemic change and improved family violence outcomes for all Victorians.

The Family Violence Funders Network:

A central outcome of the Collaboration Project was the development of the Family Violence Funders Network, which was timely due to a groundswell in interest, and also funding, from the philanthropic community. This was the first time a funding network had been established that directly focussed on the issues of family and gender-based violence, and new relationships were developed, learning was accessed, and most importantly projects were funded and improvements were made to the lives of those at risk of, or experiencing, family violence.

The model included opportunities for information sharing and networking – such as an annual summit event, and a number of in-person and online meetings throughout the year. There were occasional guest speakers where specialist family violence organisations could showcase their work, and Safe and Equal maintained a focus on updates that were intersectional and relevant to the Network in order to inform and inspire. Finally, there was a regular email bulletin sent to interested stakeholders.

Testimonials from Network Members



Anthony Costa
Foundation

'Working to end Family Violence is a key focus area for our Foundation and being connected to the FV Funders Network has strengthened and enhanced this.'

The areas that have been most beneficial to us have included information to improve the education and knowledge of the philanthropic community, as well as networking, peer-learning and opportunities for collaborative funding.

There is certainly a future need for a network such as this, but it might be time to rethink the purpose and vision of the group'.

- **Cynthia Scherer, General Manager**

"It provided a valuable platform for engagement, shared learning and importantly, intentional funding opportunities"

Historical Network member



'As the Australian Communities Foundation (ACF) is an intermediary organisation, the Network has been so helpful to help build a picture of the sector and to provide information back to Fund Advisors interested in the space. Most of the funding that we give is 'donor-advised', so the philanthropy team at ACF have to rely on funder's networks like this to really get the insights and knowledge about what is going on. We've also found the opportunity to identify collective funding opportunities has been one of the most important things for our participation in the Network'.

"It highlighted the power of funder collaborations, and has influenced us to think about how we work with other funders"

Historical Network member

- **Gabby Lam, Philanthropy Lead**

Learnings & Impact

1. Lives have been improved for those that live in fear

The significant core funding provided over the years, is believed to have informed over \$1,700,000 investment from philanthropic partners into family violence projects, and this has supported activities to prevent violence, to intervene at an early stage, and to provide specialist response for victim survivors of family violence.

2. Collaborative funding creates space for new initiatives

Over the years the members of the Network pulled together when the opportunity arose and provided collaborative funding for some initiatives. Thus new partnerships were formed, and new ways of working, alongside a shared sense of purpose. For example, a number of funders enabled the introduction of the Embedding Lived Experience program at Safe & Equal which continues to evolve in 2025.

'I am currently overseeing the completion of a report evaluating the last 5 years of Embedding Lived Experience at Safe & Equal. This project has taught us, and the wider specialist Family Violence sector, so much. While we have much more to learn, this report will form part of our ongoing commitment to evolve thoughtfully, remain accountable, and strengthen survivor advocacy through continuous learning and reflection. We are grateful for all philanthropic support for this important work'.

- Helen Batho, Safe & Equal

3. Increased knowledge and understanding of the issues and needs

Tackling family and gender based violence is highly complex. It touches on so many other social issues such as housing, physical and mental health, and child and family welfare to name just a few. Having an umbrella peak body that provides the latest sector updates and learnings to the philanthropic community has supported targeted and impactful decisions regarding funding.

4. Strong networks are a benefit during a crisis

In 2020, when Australia and the world was hit by the global Covid pandemic, and the incidences of violence increased, the Network enabled a fast and coordinated response by the philanthropists involved. This wouldn't have been possible if these relationships hadn't already been developed around a common goal.

5. Each funder has their own interests and priorities

We have found that, despite the fact all funders have unique ways of working, interests and priorities, they have all been linked by their desire to tackle this complex and tragic issue. Funders have happily worked together that have a national or regional focus, as well as different funding models.

Where From Here?

Redefinition of the role and purpose of the Family Violence Funders Network

Things have changed since 2016. While many of the Royal Commission's recommendations remain relevant, not all of them do. Additionally, we have lived through a global pandemic, there is increasing volatility and uncertainty, and technological change continues to create opportunities and challenges. While a number of philanthropists are still interested in staying involved in a funding network focused on family violence, it is clear there would be a need to redefine both the role and purpose of a group such as this.

A need for backbone funding

Facilitating and managing the Family Violence Network takes time and effort, and this impacts on Safe and Equal's internal capacity. While there isn't currently backbone funding, to provide the glue for this network to thrive, we are still considering what the future of this Network could look like, and are open to conversations with organisations interested in supporting this initiative.

Opportunity for a nationally focused network on these issues

Following feedback from the philanthropic community, there could be an opportunity to adapt this model and look nationally, rather than just have a state-based focus. Sadly, while progress has been made in many areas, the need unfortunately continues. We know that failing to intervene early is expensive, and these impacts are only increasing in Australia. Intervening too late now costs the federal government \$22.3 billion per year, which is an increase of 40% in just 5 years. But the figures don't tell us anything about the real experience of living in fear.

Thanks and Acknowledgements

Since the Royal Commission we would like to thank and acknowledge the wide range of organisations and philanthropists that have been connected to the Family Violence Philanthropy Collaboration Project and the Funders Network. We are grateful for their generosity, their involvement and their commitment to seeking new and impactful ways to tackle family and gender-based violence in Victoria.

In particular we would like to mention those who have continued to be involved in 2024-2025, as this review marks the end of this funding cycle, including: Anthony Costa Foundation, Australian Communities Foundation, Foundation for Rural & Regional Renewal, Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation, Melbourne Women's Foundation, Paul Ramsay Foundation, Regenerate.

A final mention and acknowledgement of the William Buckland Foundation, for having the vision to provide funding to start this initiative in 2018, and to have continued to be an active and supportive partner over the years.