

SAFE+EQUAL

Standing strong
against family
violence

Victorian State Budget **2026-27**

Submission

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.

About Safe and Equal

Safe and Equal is 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. Our vision is a world where everyone is safe, respected and thriving, living free from family and gender-based violence.

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. 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.

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Introduction

Family and gender-based violence in Australia is a national crisis. Over the last few years, family violence related deaths have started to rise,¹ with more than one woman being murdered every week last year.² Victoria Police call-outs for family violence related incidents have increased nearly eight per cent from last year,³ and since the full network of the Orange Door was established in 2022, the number of cases opened has increased by nearly 20 per cent.⁴ This reporting underrepresents the true extent of family and gender-based violence in our communities, particularly the experiences of missing and murdered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women,⁵ as experiences of family violence continue to be underreported.

To achieve a world where everyone is safe, respected and thriving, living free from family and gender-based violence, the Victorian Government must invest in ongoing, long-term funding for primary prevention initiatives, early intervention, specialist family violence response services and programs that support recovery. Investment in supporting children and young people as victim survivors, and comprehensive housing solutions – from crisis accommodation to permanent, secure housing – are also needed. A lack of continued commitment and funding jeopardises both immediate and long-term outcomes for victim survivors and threatens to erode progress achieved to date.

Victorian specialist family violence services continue to report unsustainable demand and increasing complexity in their work, with little capacity to respond to need beyond immediate crisis or to provide early intervention or recovery support. The housing crisis is forcing victim survivors to choose between living with violence or becoming homeless. Primary prevention initiatives continue to be funded below the scale needed to achieve societal change.

Despite this mounting pressure, nearly \$118 million in funding (approximately \$59 million per year) for family violence response and prevention is at risk at the end of the 2025-26 financial year. If this money is not made ongoing, this reduction will undermine sector capacity in primary prevention and a range of specialist family violence response services. This risk exists at a time when we need a strengthened and expanded system response to support children and young people, alongside people and communities who continue to be structurally excluded from our systems. This cannot be achieved within current resourcing levels. We need to do more than just maintain capacity in the system; we need to increase it.

¹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) (2025) *Family, Domestic Family Violence: Domestic Homicide, Has it changed over time?* <https://www.aihw.gov.au/family-domestic-and-sexual-violence/responses-and-outcomes/domestic-homicide#changed-over-time>

² The Red Heart Campaign (2025) *Australian Femicide Watch Database: Mapping Femicides*, The Red Heart Campaign, <https://australianfemicidewatch.org/database/>

³ Crime Statistics Agency Victoria, S.G. of V. (2024). *Family Incidents*. [online] www.crimestatistics.vic.gov.au. Available at: <https://www.crimestatistics.vic.gov.au/crime-statistics/latest-victorian-crime-data/family-incidents-2>.

⁴ Crime Statistics Agency Victoria, S.G. of V. (2023). *Family Violence Data Tables*. [online] www.crimestatistics.vic.gov.au. Available at: <https://www.crimestatistics.vic.gov.au/family-violence-data/family-violence-data-tables>; Victorian Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) (2025) *Orange Door Sector Reports June 2024-July 2025* (unpublished)

⁵ There are no current and complete figures for how many women and children are killed each year. Many deaths go unacknowledged as family or gender-based violence, including missing people or deaths that are still being investigated - so the number of people murdered is likely higher than reported figures.

We cannot afford to lose momentum, and it is imperative that the Victorian Government equips a system that can support every victim survivor (adults, children and young people) from all communities and backgrounds with safety, housing, and comprehensive pathways to recovery, both now and into the future. Addressing family and gender-based violence demands coordinated, sustained financial investment across interconnected social policies across the family and gender-based violence continuum.

To this end, the 2025-26 Victorian State Budget must recognise and prioritise investment across three key priority areas:

- **Priority 1:** Secure funding for family and gender-based violence primary prevention, early intervention, response and recovery
- **Priority 2:** Support children and young people as victim survivors in their own right
- **Priority 3:** Ensure safe, secure and affordable housing to facilitate recovery from family violence

Priority 1: Secure funding for family and gender-based violence primary prevention, early intervention, response and recovery

With \$118 million in funding (\$96 million in response and \$22 million in prevention, approximately \$59 million annually) due to cease at the end of the 2025-26 financial year, specialist service delivery, prevention efforts and the safety and wellbeing of victim survivors will be impacted. In addition, funding to support relevant wage and indexation increases across the community services sector is also due to end at the end of 2025-26 which will further exacerbate financial uncertainty for organisations and job insecurity for staff.

This is core system funding from the reforms implemented as part of the Royal Commission into Family Violence. This should not be about reinstating lapsing funding; family violence funding saves lives, must be made ongoing and increased to meet growing demand. Short term funding cycles, fixed-term contracts and last-minute extensions undermine program stability and staff retention, resulting in disrupted services and diminished program quality and effectiveness across response and prevention efforts. Successful initiatives risk being scaled back or discontinued, potentially recommencing only after contracts are renewed and staff replaced. These cycles erode community trust and create inefficiencies, as organisations devote substantial resources to advocacy and securing additional funding rather than direct service or program provision.

Sustainable and increased investment in specialist family violence services

Specialist family violence services provide critical interventions for victim survivors and play a key role in building a specialist informed system. These services are saving lives. They offer skilled and expert family violence support, including navigating complex systems with victim survivors, offering protective hiding and supporting their journey to safety and

recovery. Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) provide critical community-led responses, and targeted services provide support for victim survivors across a range of communities, including multicultural, ethno-specific and faith-based, LGBTIQ+, older people, people with disability, and people in the sex industry to navigate systemic discrimination and respond to the unique ways family violence is perpetrated against people who are part of these communities.

Despite specialist family violence services' vital role, approximately \$96 million is set to expire at the end of the 2025-26 financial year. This 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. For example, we estimate that without continuation of this funding, approximately 73 family violence case managers will lose their jobs, an estimated 14,500 victim survivors per year will lose access to crucial services, and provision of comprehensive, wrap-around supports will be restricted.

This potential funding reduction comes amid rising demand and mounting pressures. Data from Safe and Equal's 2025 Measuring Specialist Family Violence Demand and Capacity Survey (2025 Demand and Capacity Survey) shows 42 per cent of organisations now operate waitlists for case management.⁶ While victim survivors at the highest levels of family violence risk are prioritised, a quarter of services who responded to the survey reported that these victim survivors may still wait up to 10 days to access case management. By comparison, victim survivors assessed at lower levels of family violence risk may wait up to 30 days to receive support.⁷

The 2025 Demand and Capacity Survey also found that family violence case managers are already working above capacity, with 65 per cent of services stating that staff worked overtime to manage workload. Nearly 70 per cent of services reported that workload and demand had impacted retention and staff wellbeing in their services and 64 per cent of services reported that they had at least one vacancy, with services reporting an average of two full-time equivalent (FTE) staff being vacant during the survey reporting period.⁸ This is an increase in vacancies from last year, suggesting that workload is already negatively impacting retention rates and undermining recruitment campaigns.

If funding is not continued and case management positions are lost, remaining staff will be put under further pressure to respond to demand, which will likely increase staff attrition rates due to fatigue and burnout. This will in turn further increase wait times for victim survivors to access specialist support. Workforce initiatives in recent years that attract, retain and develop the family violence workforce have been positive; however, sustained investment is needed in workforce wellbeing, professional development, and career progression to maintain these gains and ensure ongoing quality services for victim survivors for years to come.

⁶ Tassone, J (forthcoming) *Measuring Specialist Family Violence Service Demand and Capacity Report 2025*, Melbourne: Safe and Equal.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

The reduction in capacity in the specialist family violence sector will have a disproportionate effect on systemically marginalised victim survivors who already face structural barriers to accessing services. If funding is lost, ACCOs and targeted services will be directly impacted, with their capacity reduced. Responses from targeted family violence services⁹ in the 2025 Demand and Capacity Survey found that the mainstream sector is already struggling to fully respond to urgent safety needs in marginalised communities. It also found that targeted services are under immense pressure, responding to high volumes of self-referrals and referrals from mainstream services that are increasingly at capacity.¹⁰ A reduction in capacity across the system means that wait times will increase and family violence risk is likely to escalate while waiting for a service.

All indicators of increasing demand across the system point to the need for an increase in core funding for the specialist family violence sector. Based on data from The Orange Door, Crime Statistics Agency and the 2025 Demand and Capacity Survey, in addition to maintaining all existing funding within the system, specialist family violence services need a minimum uplift of 20 per cent in ongoing core funding.

Victim survivors from all backgrounds and communities should have a choice in where they access support. Increased funding must be provided to ACCOs to provide culturally appropriate and safe services. Alongside this, targeted family violence services need ongoing and increased funding, recognising the additional time and resources required to address systemic harm. At the same time, mainstream services must remain accessible, safe, and culturally appropriate for all who seek support.

Recommendations

The 2026-27 State Budget must:

- Ensure sustained core funding for family violence response services and brokerage. This includes continuation of the \$96 million resourcing that is due to cease at the end of 2025-26, with a minimum annual allocation of \$48 million. Funding should be indexed and made permanent to maintain current service access for victim survivors
- Continue workforce initiatives for the family violence sector that support attraction, retention and workforce wellbeing
- Increase ongoing core funding for specialist family violence services (mainstream and targeted) by 20 per cent, in recognition of increasing demand across the system. Funding allocation should also take into account the additional time and resources required by targeted services to address systemic harm and navigate structural barriers to services
- Increase funding for ACCOs undertaking specialist family violence work in line with the Yoorrook Justice Commission's report recommendations

⁹ Targeted family violence services are designed to support victim-survivors from specific communities, including multicultural, ethno-specific and faith-based, LGBTIQ+, older people, people with disability, and people in the sex industry, by addressing distinct needs at local or statewide levels.

¹⁰ Tassone, J (forthcoming) *Measuring Specialist Family Violence Service Demand and Capacity Report 2025*, Melbourne: Safe and Equal.

Strengthen primary prevention initiatives to stop violence before it starts

Primary prevention initiatives engage people across their life cycle and in different settings where they live, work, learn, socialise and play. Primary prevention work is powerful because it is grounded in hope and the belief that change is possible.

Victoria has established a proud legacy of community-level primary prevention activity and activism to further establish a system of organisations and initiatives, with overlapping interests in working to prevent family and gender-based violence. In the *Foundations for Action* report released in 2024, Safe and Equal identified and described a broad and multi-disciplinary cohort of skilled primary prevention practitioners and organisations leading and delivering this work across a range of sectors, settings, communities and locations. This includes work being undertaken in women's health services, family violence and sexual violence services, in schools, councils, TAFEs, sports settings, universities, community-led services and organisations, community services, sexual health services, corporate settings, and research.¹¹

In mid-2026, a funding package of \$22 million – over \$10 million per year – across the primary prevention system is due to cease. This money includes funding for the Women's Health Services Network, and support for local government prevention efforts through the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) and Safe and Equal's statewide primary prevention workforce development program, which supports primary prevention practitioners and organisations through training, communities of practice, events and resources.¹² The suite of initiatives supported by the Women's Health Services Network and MAV across the state, combined with the capacity building of Safe and Equal, represents a substantial body of work in the primary prevention space that has a multiplying effect on the impact of other primary prevention activity. Losing this funding would be a significant blow to this emerging sector at a time when primary prevention work is becoming increasingly important.

There are also a wide range of groundbreaking community-led initiatives being delivered in Victoria by and for LGBTIQ+ communities, migrant and refugee communities, women with disabilities and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to address the drivers of violence against their communities. This work needs to be sustained and built further. Particularly, the Yoorrook Justice Commission made a recommendation for greater government investment and supported sector infrastructure to advance prevention initiatives.¹³ This means valuing and investing in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led services and organisations to acknowledge their role in preventing family violence, recognising self-determination, cultural safety and community decision-making power.

¹¹ Safe and Equal (2024) *Foundations for Action: Understanding the primary prevention workforce in Victoria*. Melbourne: Safe and Equal, <https://safeandequal.org.au/resources/foundations-for-action-understanding-the-primary-prevention-workforce-in-victoria/>

¹² Safe and Equal (2024) *Statewide Prevention Workforce Development Program: Summary Evaluation Report 2023 – 2024*, Melbourne: Safe and Equal, <https://safeandequal.org.au/resources/statewide-prevention-workforce-development-program-summary-evaluation-report-2023-2024/>

¹³ Yoorrook Justice Commission (2025) *Yoorrook Truth be Told*, Melbourne: Yoorrook Justice Commission, <https://www.yoorrook.org.au/reports-and-recommendations/reports>

Sustained, ongoing investment is essential for achieving the goals of primary prevention in the short- and long-term. We must retain and strengthen existing work and the existing workforce and build upon the work already being done if we are ever going to achieve a society without family and gender-based violence. Without continued, long-term investment, we risk losing foundational knowledge, capacity and momentum towards cultural and societal change.

A continued focus on workforce development in primary prevention should also be prioritised, including the implementation of the actions outlined in *Safe and Equal's Foundations for Action* report along with the forthcoming Prevention Capability Framework. This must include actions to improve recruitment, knowledge and skill development, leadership development and connection to support a dispersed workforce that faces substantial backlash and resistance.

Recommendations

The 2026-27 State Budget must:

- Provide sustainable and ongoing funding for key organisations with funding due to end, including the Women's Health Services Network, to ensure ongoing delivery of primary prevention activities across the state, support for local government prevention efforts through the Municipal Association of Victoria, and Safe and Equal's statewide primary prevention workforce development program
- Sustain and increase investment in community-led prevention for LGBTIQ+ communities, migrant and refugee communities and women with disabilities
- Increase investment and work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led services and organisations to implement violence prevention recommendations from the Yoorrook Justice Commission
- Continue to prioritise and support a comprehensive approach to primary prevention workforce development across the state, through implementation of the Prevention Capability Framework and recommendations outlined in the *Foundations for Action* report

Coordinate and increase investment across the continuum

Eliminating family and gender-based violence requires sustained investment across the continuum, including prevention, early intervention, crisis response and recovery. Early intervention and recovery remain under-resourced parts of the system, receiving insufficient policy attention and targeted funding. As demand for crisis services increases, resources are diverted away from these critical areas, limiting the system's capacity to prevent escalation and support long-term recovery.

A 2025 Safe and Equal survey of its members about their early intervention work revealed that early intervention is often under-resourced, inconsistently funded, and frequently embedded in broader programs not specifically designed for this purpose. This results in service and program instability, staff burnout, and missed opportunities to scale effective approaches. There are many examples of existing early intervention work that is being done in overlapping ways with primary prevention (for example, community-led prevention, work

in councils and schools) and with specialist family violence services, services for people who use violence, legal services and services for children, young people and families.¹⁴ This work must be built upon and coordinated in future to build and maintain a system of effective early intervention.

Recovery support, which is essential for rebuilding the lives of victim survivors, also remains under-prioritised. Access to family violence-informed therapeutic counselling is important, but also only once piece of the puzzle. Financial counselling, wellbeing support services and legal services are critical enablers of recovery which must be available long-term, as we know that family violence can have significant long-term financial and legal impacts on victim survivors long after family violence ends. Similarly, affordable health care and housing are necessary as the physical and emotional health impacts of family violence and housing insecurity can be long-term if not appropriately addressed. However, these systems are chronically underfunded, and many victim survivors are unable to access the support they need.

An increased focus on children and young people and investment in early intervention initiatives for priority communities also offers opportunities to break intergenerational cycles of violence through early intervention and recovery responses; however, funding for such initiatives remains limited and insecure. Existing work in the specialist family violence sector, sexual violence and harmful sexual behaviour sector, children and family services and work with adolescents using violence in the home could be scaled up to break cycles of intergenerational violence among children and young people who have experienced violence.¹⁵

Similarly, many priority communities have developed innovative initiatives that integrate primary prevention, early intervention, response and recovery to meet the needs of their communities and address their experiences of family violence in the context of wider systemic discrimination and oppression.¹⁶ These initiatives should be expanded.

Recommendations

The 2026-27 State Budget must:

- Increase investment in family and gender-based violence early intervention and recovery, and support coordination and cross-sector collaboration to strategically advance this work
- Target early intervention and recovery initiatives for children and young people experiencing family and gender-based violence to disrupt intergenerational trauma and violence
- Commit to sustainable, long-term funding for ACCOs and targeted services that work with priority communities to expand and develop culturally safe, community-led family and gender-based violence early intervention and recovery initiatives

¹⁴ Hewitt, S & Carman, M (2025) *Early intervention in family and gender-based violence: Scoping paper*. Melbourne: Safe and Equal, <https://safeandequal.org.au/policy-and-advocacy/research-reports/>

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

Priority 2: Supporting children and young people as victim survivors in their own right

Specialist family violence services witness first-hand the profound harm inflicted on children and young people, who are not merely bystanders of family violence but victim survivors in their own right.¹⁷ Experiencing family violence puts children at significant risk for both immediate and long-term health, developmental, and wellbeing challenges.¹⁸ Without appropriate intervention, these negative impacts can persist throughout life and result in substantial costs to individuals and families, and ultimately the government.¹⁹

Specialist family violence services are committed to supporting children and young people as victim survivors. However, the current family violence system remains primarily designed for adults. Consequently, children and young people often report feeling overlooked and invisible.²⁰ Meaningful support and recovery for children and young people requires comprehensive, systemic reform alongside investment.

Aboriginal children, due to the ongoing effects of colonisation and discrimination, are twice as likely to experience family violence compared to non-Aboriginal peers, which is a leading factor in family separation and placement in out-of-home care. The Yoorrook Justice Commission's reports document the intersecting effects of family violence, homelessness, poverty, and systemic racism on Aboriginal children's involvement in child protection.²¹ Efforts to improve responses for children and young people must also acknowledge the structural violence faced by Aboriginal families. This includes direct funding to Aboriginal communities to facilitate self-determination and maintain children's connections to culture and kin.

We also know that children and young people from systemically marginalised groups have distinct needs and experiences of marginalisation from adults. For example, research into the experiences of children and young people from culturally and racially marginalised

¹⁷ Commonwealth of Australia (2022) *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032*, Canberra: Department of Social Services, <https://www.dss.gov.au/system/files/resources/national-plan-end-violence-against-women-and-children-2022-2032.pdf>; Gillfeather-Spetere, S & Watson, A (2024) *In their own right: Actions to improve children and young people's safety from domestic, family and sexual violence*, Sydney: Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS), <https://www.anrows.org.au/publication/children-young-peoples-safety/>

¹⁸ Arai, L, Shaw, A, Feder, G, Howarth, E, MacMillan, H, Moore, THM., Stanley, N & Gregory, A (2019) *Hope, Agency, and the Lived Experience of Violence: A Qualitative Systematic Review of Children's Perspectives on Domestic Violence and Abuse. Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, vol. 22, no. 3, pp.427-438. Doi: 10.1177/1524838019849582; Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) (2018) *Research summary: The impacts of domestic and family violence on children*, Sydney: ANROWS, <https://www.anrows.org.au/publication/research-summary-the-impacts-of-domestic-and-family-violence-on-children/>; Noble-Carr, D, Moore, T & McArthur, M (2021) The nature and extent of qualitative research conducted with children about their experiences of domestic violence: Findings from a meta-synthesis, *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, vol. 22, no. 4, pp. 928-943. Doi: 10.1177/1524838019888885.

¹⁹ Carlson, J, Voith, L, Brown, JC. & Holmes, M (2019), Viewing children's exposure to intimate partner violence through a developmental, social-ecological, and survivor lens: The current state of the field, challenges and future directions, *Violence Against Women*, vol. 25, no. 1, pp.6-28. Doi: 10.1177/1077801218819345.

²⁰ Fitz-Gibbon, K, McGowan, J & Stewart, R (2023) *I believe you: Children and young people's experiences of seeking help, securing help and navigating the family violence system*. Melbourne: Monash Gender and Family Violence Prevention Centre, Monash University, https://bridges.monash.edu/articles/report/I_believe_you_Children_and_young_people_s_experiences_of_seeking_help_securing_help_and_navigating_the_family_violence_system/21709562?file=39221033

²¹ Yoorrook Justice Commission (2023) *Yoorrook for Justice: Report into Victoria's Child Protection and Criminal Justice Systems*. Chapter 3: Early intervention and prevention. Melbourne: Yoorrook Justice Commission, <https://www.yoorrook.org.au/reports-and-recommendations/reports/>; Yoorrook Justice Commission (2025) *Yoorrook for Transformation: Third Interim Report, Volume 1*, Melbourne: Yoorrook Justice Commission, <https://www.yoorrook.org.au/reports-and-recommendations/reports/yoorrook-for-transformation-third-interim-report-volume-1>

(CARM) migrant backgrounds who experience family violence has documented that these children and young people have unique needs and experiences that can exacerbate their experiences of family violence and result in exclusion from support services.²²

Similarly, children and young people who identify as part of the LBGTIQA+ community experience family violence in unique ways. To respond to all children and young people as victim survivors of family violence, family violence services and the broader service system need to understand the unique experiences of systemic discrimination as distinct from those of their parents and other adult victim survivors. This will require targeted investment in capability building across the service system.

Children and Young Person's Family Violence Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management (CYP MARAM) guidance

The forthcoming statewide CYP MARAM guidance will strengthen child-centred family violence practice in Victoria. It aims to support practitioners to better identify and respond to children and young people affected by family violence.

Effectively embedding the guidance will require significant organisational development, workforce capability building, and sustained funding to enable all prescribed agencies, regardless of organisational or geographic context, to meet MARAM requirements. Ongoing commitment from the Victorian Government on MARAM implementation is vital to ensure services remain aligned to best practice and the evidence base, enabling effective support for children and young people experiencing family violence.

In the context of system and funding limitations, many specialist family violence services are working with children and young people. The 2025 Demand and Capacity Survey indicates that approximately 20 per cent of service areas providing case management and 67 per cent providing refuge have dedicated staff or teams for children and young people.

Further, just over 7,000 children were supported in addition to the 10,500 adult victim survivors supported in the survey reporting period. This means that children and young people account for approximately 40 per cent of the victim survivors that case management services support. However, services report that most activities to provide dedicated support to children and young people are funded through uncoordinated, piecemeal resourcing that is short-term and insecure, either via time-limited government or philanthropic funding.²³ This creates an insecure, ad hoc, and unsustainable mode of service delivery. Increased capacity in the family violence sector is essential to ensure effective support for children and young people.

Safe and Equal has undertaken modelling to determine the resourcing required for the specialist family violence sector to work more effectively with children and young people currently accessing their services. Modelling is informed by the data available from the 2025 Demand and Capacity Survey regarding the number of children and young people currently

²² Tarpey-Brown, G; Kirwan, J; Wise, S; Alisic, E; Vaughan, C & Block, K (2024) *Domestic and family violence affecting children and young people from culturally and rationally marginalized migrant backgrounds in Australia: A scoping review of child experiences and service responses*. University of Melbourne.

²³ Tassone, J (forthcoming) *Measuring Specialist Family Violence Service Demand and Capacity Report 2025*. Melbourne: Safe and Equal.

being supported by case management services. The analysis considered varying demand scenarios, anticipated support intensities based on risk profiles, and service hours per the DFFH guidelines as a guide.²⁴

Findings indicate a minimum investment of \$32.6 million per annum is needed if children's support needs align with those of adults. Best practice in the youth and out-of-home care sectors emphasises that trauma-informed support for children and young people requires time and consistent, trusting relationships with support workers. In light of this knowledge, should children and young people require more intensive support than adults, this figure increases to \$43.2 million per annum. Annual investment should be recalibrated as service demand and data on required support evolves. This funding must be embedded as a core and ongoing part of specialist family violence service provision.

System gaps for children and young people

The introduction of the CYP MARAM guidance is an important step; however, a significant system gap persists - there are not enough services focused on children and young people.

Dedicated programs that work directly with and for children and young people must be funded. Promising programs such as *Amplify* by Melbourne City Mission and youth foyers have demonstrated positive outcomes. A 2024 evaluation of *Amplify* found that 80 per cent of participants left violent households or relationships, and 97 per cent have not returned to or entered new violent environments. Further, 25 per cent remained in school and another 25 per cent re-engaged with education.²⁵ These programs have limited capacity and often time-limited funding. *Amplify* and similar youth-focused family violence programs must be developed, expanded and supported with ongoing and sustainable funding, in consultation with youth services, specialist family violence services and young people.

While these programs facilitate recovery and cater mainly to older adolescents (i.e., those aged 16+), there is a significant service gap for younger children. For many children, having access to family violence and other support earlier is likely to prevent them from needing to access support later in life. Greater investment in early intervention and recovery for children and young people across all ages and stages could disrupt intergenerational cycles of violence and improve long-term outcomes.

To achieve this, Safe and Equal recommends investment in ten statewide demonstration projects focused on family violence multidisciplinary practice for children and young people. The projects would be composed of a minimum of four workers – specialist family violence services alongside allied sectors such as family services, mental health, AOD, youth, early childhood, community health, migrant and refugee settlement, LGBTIQ+ and/or homelessness.

²⁴ Data from Safe and Equal's Measuring Specialist Family Violence Service Demand and Capacity Survey 2025 indicates that, for survey respondents, across a six-month data collection period, 7,071 children and young people were supported by specialist family violence services. Data collection on children and young people remains under recorded – as a result the need is likely to be much higher than reported. Modelling is also based on assumptions regarding risk levels and the proportion of children and young people who will need a brief, intermediate or intensive level of support according to DFFH funding definitions and the estimated amount of time it will take practitioners to conduct a risk assessment with a child or young person. Some of these assumptions are based on the sectors experience of working with adults because we do not yet have this data regarding family violence practice with children and young people.

²⁵ RMIT Centre for Innovative Justice (2024) “...the first people that had listened...” *Evaluation of Melbourne City Mission's Amplify Program: Preliminary Findings Report* (unpublished). Melbourne: RMIT Centre for Innovative Justice.

The mix of services involved could be determined based on community need in consultation with local services, young people and the community to best respond to the needs of children and young people in the region and help them recover from violence in a holistic way. We estimate investment in ten demonstration projects would cost approximately \$12 million per year.²⁶ These projects should be funded for a minimum of four years each to allow service models to develop, mature and to maximise impact evaluation.

Recommendations

The 2026-27 State Budget must:

- Provide permanent funding to support continued MARAM alignment across government departments and broader workforces, including alignment to the CYP MARAM guidance
- Provide funding for specialist family violence services to provide direct support and meet the needs of children and young people currently accessing their services, with an estimated minimum ongoing cost of \$32.6 million per year from 2026–27, adjusted for demand
- Maintain and expand specific adolescent-focused programs like *Amplify* and others to increase access across the state
- Resource the co-design, development and delivery of child and youth-focused family violence programs for at-risk young people across all ages and stages
- Provide \$12 million annually for a minimum of four years to fund ten Multidisciplinary Children and Young People Family Violence Demonstration Projects across the state

Priority 3: Increase access to safe, secure and affordable housing to facilitate recovery from family violence

Family violence is the primary cause of homelessness among women, children, and young people in Victoria. Nearly 40 per cent of those seeking support from homelessness services list family violence as their main reason for presenting,²⁷ and women over 55 (many who have experienced family violence) are the fastest growing group of people seeking assistance for homelessness.²⁸ Due to compounding discrimination, exclusion, and inadequate appropriate housing options, victim survivors from systemically marginalised groups, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, LGBTIQ+ people, people

²⁶ Modelling is based on salaries of four practitioners at SCHADS level 7, including on-cost, infrastructure, project and evaluation expenses across ten demonstration projects total.

²⁷ Council to Homeless Persons (2025) *Bridging the Gap between Homelessness and Family Violence Services*. Melbourne: Council to Homeless Persons, <https://chp.org.au/publication/bridging-the-gap-between-homelessness-and-family-violence-services/>

²⁸ Council for Homeless Persons (2021) *International Women's Day: Ending homelessness for older women in Victoria*, <https://chp.org.au/article/international-womens-day-ending-homelessness-for-older-women-in-victoria/#:~:text=The%20theme%20for%20this%20year's,a%20lower%20income%20in%20retirement.>

with disabilities, people on temporary visas, and young people face higher rates of homelessness than victim survivors who do not face these additional systemic barriers.²⁹

Housing, family violence and child protection involvement are strongly linked, as stable housing is also often required to maintain primary care for children. This forces some victim survivors with children to not just choose between living with family violence and homelessness, but to choose between living with family violence and potentially having their children removed from their care. This is particularly true for Aboriginal families who, due to colonisation and ongoing systemic discrimination, are more at risk of child protection involvement.³⁰

The housing affordability crisis, increased cost of living, and chronic underfunding of social housing have increased the likelihood of victim survivors becoming homeless and financially insecure upon leaving violence. In 2022–23, 23,415 women and 13,294 children experiencing family violence were assisted by homelessness services in Victoria.³¹ Housing and homelessness and financial insecurity were listed as the predominate issues for victim survivors by 95.8 per cent of respondents in the 2025 Demand and Capacity Survey, illustrating that almost all victim survivors accessing the system are at risk of homelessness and poverty.³² A structural lack of housing and income support is placing extreme pressure on both the family violence and homelessness sectors, as services try to find support for victim survivors that simply is not available.

Supporting victim survivors to remain safely in their homes through safe at home responses is preferable, when possible, to moving victim survivors into new housing. However, rising housing costs and the incremental reduction of safe at home supports is making this increasingly impossible. The Personal Safety Initiative (PSI) is one such safe at home response that is at risk of being incrementally rolled back. The PSI funds essential security upgrades such as locks and security systems that can make a victim survivor's existing home safe to continue to live in. However, a two-year funding package of \$1.2 million for PSI coordination is at risk of ending at the end of 2025-26. PSI coordinators liaise with local, vetted security providers to make sure security upgrades are fit to an individual household's needs. If this funding ceases, some regions will lose their PSI coordinator role, risking geographic inequity and delays in support for victim survivors.

The lack of long-term housing options both in the private and social housing systems prevents victim survivors from leaving crisis accommodation and forces services to rely on motels for emergency accommodation, which is an unsuitable, unsafe and costly solution. Between September 2023 and August 2024, family violence services spent an average of \$2,850 per client on motel stays. In one region, costs averaged \$7,425 per client.³³ As part

²⁹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) (2019) *Family, domestic and sexual violence in Australia: continuing the national story*, AIHW, <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/b0037b2d-a651-4abf-9f7b-00a85e3de528/aihw-fdv3-FDSV-in-Australia2019.pdf.aspx?inline=true>

³⁰ Yoorrook Justice Commission (2023) *Yoorrook for Justice: Report into Victoria's Child Protection and Criminal Justice Systems*. Melbourne: Yoorrook Justice Commission, <https://www.yoorrook.org.au/reports-and-recommendations/reports/yoorrook-for-justice-report>

³¹ Homelessness Australia (2024) *Homelessness and domestic and family violence: State of response report 2024*, p.5. Available at: <https://homelessnessaustralia.org.au/urgent-need-to-address-a-surge-in-family-violence-fuelled-homelessness/>

³² Tassone, J (forthcoming) *Measuring Specialist Family Violence Service Demand and Capacity Report 2025*. Melbourne: Safe and Equal.

³³ Ratcliffe, L & McGregor, E (2025) *Crisis Response Model Implementation Monitoring Project: Key Findings*, (unpublished), Melbourne: Safe and Equal.

of the \$96 million due to drop out of the system at the end of this financial year, a two-year funding package of \$12.8 million for family violence crisis brokerage (FVCB) is due to end. Our members report that the loss of funding for FVCB last financial year is having detrimental impacts on victim survivors' ability to access housing options. With Flexible Support Package (FSP) brokerage also being reduced last financial year when the COVID crisis response funding ended, services are being forced to utilise FSPs to try to make up for the shortfall in crisis brokerage to fund victim survivors' emergency accommodation. Crisis brokerage funds, initially intended for recovery needs, are now increasingly allocated to motel accommodation. In the absence of access to emergency accommodation, victim survivors may resort to sleeping in cars, staying with acquaintances, or returning to perpetrators.

The lack of housing is also having an impact on family violence refuges' ability to operate, as they are unable to exit clients into safe, affordable housing once their immediate family violence risk is mitigated. The average stay for victim survivors with residency or citizenship is 84 days (nearly three months), with some remaining up to nine months. For those on temporary visas, the average is 130 days (over four months), with reports of stays lasting a year.³⁴ Family violence refuges are operating at capacity. The inability to move victim survivors into permanent housing once their family violence risk is mitigated limits refuges' availability to take in incoming victim survivors, which results in more motel placements.

The current family violence refuge system accommodates approximately 198 households per night and increased capacity is urgently needed.³⁵ Of the funding due to expire, \$26.2 million (\$13.1 per annum) is allocated to refuge operational costs. If lost, this could result in up to 82 job cuts, compromising 24/7 support and reducing service quality. Approximately 243 victim survivors could lose access to refuge annually if refuges are forced to close units to maintain appropriate staff to resident ratios. Sustaining current resourcing and doubling refuge capacity remains a critical need.

As of April 2025, more than 65,000 people were waiting for social housing in Victoria,³⁶ with priority recipients waiting an average of 20 months.³⁷ The critical shortage of crisis and long-term housing options has severe consequences for victim survivors, particularly those facing systemic discrimination. Social housing must be significantly increased to meet demand in Victoria. Modelling done in conjunction with the Victorian Housing Peaks Alliance estimates that an additional 377,000 social homes are needed by 2051 to meet demand for social housing. A minimum of 87,000 social homes by 2051 (approximately 3,500 per year) are required for victim survivors alone to end homelessness as a result of family violence.³⁸

³⁴ Tassone, J (forthcoming) *Measuring Specialist Family Violence Service Demand and Capacity Report 2025*, Melbourne: Safe and Equal.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Council to Homeless Persons (2024) *Social housing waitlist increases again, now topping 65,000*, Council to Homeless Persons, <https://chp.org.au/article/social-housing-waitlist-increases-again-now-topping-6500>

³⁷ Council to Homeless Persons (2025) *Bridging the Gap between Homelessness and Family Violence Services*. Melbourne: Council to Homeless Persons, <https://chp.org.au/publication/bridging-the-gap-between-homelessness-and-family-violence-services/>

³⁸ Victorian Housing Peaks Alliance (2025) *Growing Social Housing: Data, insights and targets*, Melbourne: Victorian Housing Peaks Alliance, <https://apo.org.au/node/330589>

Recommendations

The 2026-27 State Budget must:

- Maintain current investment in Safe at Home responses, through continued and indexed funding for the five at-risk PSI coordinator positions and statewide PSI coordination
- Sustain the \$26.2 million funding package (\$13.1 million per annum) for refuge operational funding due to expire at the end of this financial year
- Double refuge capacity in Victoria from 198 to 396 households per night to reduce dependence on unsuitable emergency accommodation such as motels
- Commit to expanding social housing in Victoria by an additional 377,000 homes by 2051, with at least 87,000 (about 3,500 per year) allocated specifically for family violence victim survivors

Conclusion

Family violence remains widespread, with devastating human and economic consequences. Every instance of violence represents preventable harm and in the most tragic cases, loss of life. Sustained and strategic investment from the Victorian Government is essential to effectively address family and gender-based violence. Without adequate funding, critical prevention and response services are at risk with nearly \$118 million dollars of system funding on the line.

Every dollar invested in the family violence continuum stops violence before it starts, saves lives, prevents long-term trauma and reduces the enormous costs carried by our health, housing, justice and policing systems. Our members see the human cost of underinvestment in our work every day. We are devastated by every death, by every statistic that represents a life at risk, a family in crisis, and a preventable tragedy within our community.

We also see the incredible impact of properly funded services and programs: victim survivors living safely, healing and rebuilding their lives, free from violence. The question is not whether Victoria can afford to invest in the family violence sector – it is whether we can afford not to.

The 2026-27 budget is an opportunity for the Victorian Government to continue to stand with adult, child and young victim survivors of family violence by sustaining and increasing the long-term funding needed to prevent, respond and increase work across the continuum.

Summary of Recommendations

Sustainable and increased investment in specialist family violence services

- Ensure sustained core funding for family violence response services and brokerage. This includes continuation of the \$96 million resourcing that is due to cease at the end of 2025-26, with a minimum annual allocation of \$48 million. Funding should be indexed and made permanent to maintain current service access for victim survivors
- Continue workforce initiatives for the family violence sector that support attraction, retention and workforce wellbeing
- Increase ongoing core funding for specialist family violence services (mainstream and targeted) by 20 per cent, in recognition of increasing demand across the system. Funding allocation should also take into account the additional time and resources required by targeted services to address systemic harm and navigate structural barriers to services
- Increase funding for ACCOs undertaking specialist family violence work in line with the Yoorrook Justice Commission's report recommendations

Strengthen primary prevention initiatives to stop violence before it starts

- Provide sustainable and ongoing funding for key organisations with funding due to end, including the Women's Health Services Network, to ensure ongoing delivery of primary prevention activities across the state, support for local government prevention efforts through the Municipal Association of Victoria, and Safe and Equal's statewide primary prevention workforce development program
- Sustain and increase investment in community-led prevention for LGBTIQ+ communities, migrant and refugee communities and women with disabilities
- Increase investment and work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led services and organisations to implement violence prevention recommendations from the Yoorrook Justice Commission
- Continue to prioritise and support a comprehensive approach to primary prevention workforce development across the state, through implementation of the Prevention Capability Framework and recommendations outlined in the *Foundations for Action* report

Coordinate and increase investment across the continuum

- Increase investment in family and gender-based violence early intervention and recovery, and support coordination and cross-sector collaboration to strategically advance this work
- Target early intervention and recovery initiatives for children and young people experiencing family and gender-based violence to disrupt intergenerational trauma and violence
- Commit to sustainable, long-term funding for ACCOs and targeted services that work with priority communities to expand and develop culturally safe, community-led family and gender-based violence early intervention and recovery initiatives

System gaps for children and young people

- Provide permanent funding to support continued MARAM alignment across government departments and broader workforces, including alignment to the CYP MARAM guidance
- Provide funding for specialist family violence services to provide direct support and meet the needs of children and young people currently accessing their services, with an estimated minimum ongoing cost of \$32.6 million per year from 2026–27, adjusted for demand
- Maintain and expand specific adolescent-focused programs like *Amplify* and others to increase access across the state
- Resource the co-design, development and delivery of child and youth-focused family violence programs for at-risk young people across all ages and stages
- Provide \$12 million annually for a minimum of four years to fund ten Multidisciplinary Children and Young People Family Violence Demonstration Projects across the state

Increase access to safe, secure and affordable housing

- Maintain current investment in Safe at Home responses, through continued and indexed funding for the five at-risk PSI coordinator positions and statewide PSI coordination
- Sustain the \$26.2 million funding package (\$13.1 million per annum) for refuge operational funding due to expire at the end of this financial year
- Double refuge capacity in Victoria from 198 to 396 households per night to reduce dependence on unsuitable emergency accommodation such as motels
- Commit to expanding social housing in Victoria by an additional 377,000 homes by 2051, with at least 87,000 (about 3,500 per year) allocated specifically for family violence victim survivors