

SAFE+EQUAL

Standing strong
against family
violence

Victorian State Budget **2027-28**

Submission

October 2026

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

2026 marks ten years since the landmark Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence (RCFV). We are at a pivotal juncture – we must continue our shared efforts to deliver an effective, coordinated, multi-sector approach to addressing and ultimately ending family and gender-based violence in Victoria. There is still progress to be made – and continued commitment and investment is essential.

Ten years on, the task is to build on what works, address what remains unfinished and invest in building the next phase of the system.

So far this year, there have been 13 deaths of women and children in Victoria due to family and gender-based violence.¹ In 2024-25 police recorded 106,340 family violence incidents, an eight per cent increase on the previous year. We know the devastation family and gender-based violence causes victim survivors (adults, children and young people), including ongoing trauma, families in crisis and lives lost. These are the preventable human costs on the community.

The most recent estimate for the cost of family violence in Victoria was \$5.3 billion in 2015-16,² equivalent to about \$8.9 billion today. This cost includes direct impacts on victim survivors such as health costs, property damage and lost workforce participation. It also includes the costs borne by friends and families, employers and other government services such as the justice, health and child protection systems. There are also additional long-term costs associated with children affected by family violence, including to their health, education and lifetime earnings.³

Core investment across preventing and responding to family violence needs to grow to \$554 million per year from 2026–27. Economic modelling⁴ shows this investment would return \$2.8 billion in benefits to victim survivors, communities and the Victorian economy – six times the cost of investment – while helping reduce the \$8.9 billion family violence costs Victoria each year. **This is prevention of a cost, not new spending; for every dollar invested, nearly six times that is saved.**

Prevention and early intervention can reduce future demand for crisis responses and specialist services. These efforts, combined with effective support and recovery can reduce pressure on healthcare, housing, child protection and justice systems. Increased safety also supports greater workforce participation and productivity, and avoided pain, suffering and premature mortality for both adult and child victim survivors.

¹ As at 12/09/2026: Moody, S (n.d) *Women & Children Lost to Violence: Database*, The RED HEART Movement. <https://australianfemicidewatch.org/database/>

² KPMG (2017), *The cost of family violence in Victoria*

³ Equity Economics (2025), *The costs and benefits of fully meeting demand for Specialist Family Violence Services in Victoria*, <https://safeandequal.org.au/wp-content/uploads/Final-report-Costs-and-benefits-of-fully-meeting-demand-updated.pdf>

⁴ Ibid.

The \$554 million investment includes increased funding for specialist family violence services to meet demand and adequately respond to children and young people, as well as across justice responses and investment in primary prevention and early intervention.

The Victorian government must commit to keeping progress and momentum going, across four priority areas:

- **Priority 1:** Support children and young people as victim survivors in their own right
- **Priority 2:** Sustainable investment in the sector including:
 - Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations
 - targeted and community-led services and organisations
 - across the continuum (primary prevention, early intervention, response and recovery)
 - key system enablers
- **Priority 3:** Safe, secure and affordable housing as critical for victim survivor safety and recovery
- **Priority 4:** Strengthening justice responses and access to legal support

Priority 1: Support children and young people as victim survivors in their own right

Children and young people have distinct experiences of family violence, with their own safety and support needs. Children and young people require responses that recognise their age, development, individual circumstances, culture and experiences of family violence.

Without appropriate intervention, negative impacts from children and young people's experiences of family violence can persist throughout life and result in substantial costs to individuals and families, and ultimately the government.⁵ Greater investment in support and early intervention for children and young people is therefore both an essential part of the family violence response and an opportunity to reduce longer-term harm and demand across other systems.

While many specialist family violence services are already working with children and young people, current funding is ad hoc and unsustainable. Adequate and sustainable investment for specialist family violence services to more effectively support children and young people is needed more than ever to successfully implement the forthcoming Child and Young Person's Family Violence Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management (CYP MARAM) guidance.

Recognising children and young people as victim survivors in their own right requires more than stronger practice guidance. It requires the specialist family violence system to have the capacity, capability and sustainable funding to provide dedicated support, as well as

⁵ 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.

investment in the broader services and pathways that children and young people need to be safe and recover.

Children and young people's experiences of family violence

There are no circumstances in which children and young people who have experienced family violence or are currently living with family violence are not negatively impacted.⁶ This includes being exposed to, and/or having witnessed family violence. Family violence places significant risk on children and young people's immediate and long-term health, development and wellbeing.⁷

Children and young people can experience family violence from a range of people using violence, including intimate partners, family members and people who they have a familial-like relationship with, including carers. In addition, people using violence will target children and young people as a tactic of their family violence against an adult victim survivor, including child sexual abuse,⁸ and using parental responsibility to block the child's access to necessary supports. This further complicates the ability of children and young people to obtain tailored safety and support and heightens the reliance on the specialist family violence service system to adequately identify and respond to children's needs.

The experiences of family violence are also shaped by structural and systemic factors. Aboriginal children, due to the ongoing effects of colonisation and discrimination, experience disproportionately higher rates of family violence,⁹ which is a leading factor in family separation and placement in out-of-home care. The disproportionate involvement of Child Protection in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families reflects the intersecting impacts of family violence, homelessness, poverty and systemic racism, as highlighted in the Yoorrook Justice Commission's reports.¹⁰ Efforts to improve responses for Aboriginal children and young people must include direct funding for Aboriginal communities to self-determine approaches and maintain children's connections to culture and kin.

Children and young people from systemically marginalised groups also have distinct experiences of family violence, shaped by compounding structural factors. People using violence will often choose to target a child or young person's individualised needs, including limiting access to cultural connections and/or necessary disability supports, and/or utilising

⁶ 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) [ANROWS: Children and Young People's Safety](#)

⁷ 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*, 22(3), 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. [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*, 22(4), pp. 928-943. doi: 10.1177/1524838019888885.

⁸ Richards, K & Hussey, E (2026) Why Do Adults Sexually Abuse Children? A Systematic Scoping Review of How Male Perpetrators Qualitatively Account for Their Actions, *Victims & Offenders*, 1-45. doi:10.1080/15564886.2026.2615842.

⁹ SNAICC – National Voice for our Children (2025) Family Matters Report 2025, SNAICC, [Family Matters Report](#)

¹⁰ 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, [Yoorrook for Justice: Report into Victoria's Child Protection and Criminal Justice Systems](#); Yoorrook Justice Commission (2025) Yoorrook for Transformation: Third Interim Report, Volume 1, Melbourne: Yoorrook Justice Commission, [Yoorrook for Transformation: Third Interim Report](#)

specifically discriminatory tactics of family violence including against LGBTIQ+ victim survivors.

Targeted specialist family violence services working with children and young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds report that family violence can compound the impacts of earlier experiences of displacement, conflict, time in refugee camps, torture and other trauma, unsafe journeys to Australia, or the loss of extended family and community networks.¹¹ These experiences can be compounded by settlement-related difficulties, and experiences of racism and discrimination. Service data highlights the scale of diversity of children affected. In 2022-23, inTouch provided direct family violence supports to 1,495 women and 1,551 children.¹² These clients came from 97 countries and spoke 91 different languages.¹³ For children and young people, the impacts of family violence occur alongside the challenges associated with migration and settlement and may be further compounded by cultural and linguistic barriers and social isolation.

Targeted services¹⁴ working with additional complexities and structural barriers require resources to support children and young people directly in a trauma-informed, culturally responsive and age-appropriate way.

Recommendations:

The 2027-28 State Budget must:

- Resource Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations to self-determine approaches to address family violence in their communities and maintain children and young people's connections to culture and kin
- Ensure funding allocations for targeted specialist family violence services include increased investment to support children and young people, recognising increased structural barriers and complex support needs

Funding to meet current demand in specialist family violence services

Specialist family violence services across Victoria are deeply committed to supporting children and young people experiencing family violence.¹⁵ Strengthening practice through CYP MARAM will not in itself address the underlying capacity of specialist family violence services to work directly with children and young people. Working directly with children and young people requires dedicated effort, time, and staff who can work in trauma-informed and age-appropriate ways. Current investment does not support specialist family violence services to provide this level of direct support.

Specialist family violence services report that most activities to provide dedicated support to children and young people are funded via uncoordinated, piecemeal resourcing that is

¹¹ Tassone, J (forthcoming) *Measuring Specialist Family Violence Service Demand and Capacity Report 2026*. Melbourne: Safe and Equal.

¹² inTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence (2023), Annual Report, [inTouch Annual Report](#)

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ 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.

¹⁵ inTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence (2023), Annual Report, [inTouch Annual Report](#)

short-term and insecure.¹⁶ This results in ad hoc and ultimately unsustainable service delivery.

The scale of existing demand demonstrates the need for a sustainable funding model. The 2026 Demand and Capacity report¹⁷ found that:

- Over 7,200 children were supported in a six-month period, in addition to the 10,566 adults supported in the same period. **This means children account for 40 per cent of specialist family violence case management service delivery**
- Around half of case management services and 69 per cent of refugees received dedicated funding for this support¹⁸

Safe and Equal has undertaken modelling to understand the resourcing required to meet current demand and best practice support to children and young people. A minimum of \$33 million annually is needed for specialist family violence services to appropriately support children and young people accessing their services and should become permanent core and indexed funding.

Recommendation:

The 2027-28 State Budget must:

- Provide a minimum of \$33 million in permanent and core annual funding for specialist family violence services to meet the needs of children and young people, adjusted as demand grows

Addressing system gaps for children and young people

Children and young people experiencing family violence continue to face significant gaps in accessing support that is tailored to their age, circumstances and needs. For example, young people aged 15-17 who present without a protective parent remain a significant and overlooked gap in the family violence system, with limited access to services that are appropriate to their age and circumstances. Many specialist family violence and mainstream counselling services do not provide services to children under the age of 18, and the child protection system focuses on children under the age of 15. As a result, these young people are often referred to youth services, which can provide important housing, case management and practical support but may not have the specialist family violence expertise required to respond to their needs.

Young people aged 15-17 face a number of systemic barriers to accessing support. This includes needing parental consent to access services such as Centrelink, which impacts

¹⁶ Tassone, J (forthcoming) *Measuring Specialist Family Violence Service Demand and Capacity Report 2026*. Melbourne: Safe and Equal.

¹⁷ Tassone, J (forthcoming) *Measuring Specialist Family Violence Service Demand and Capacity Report 2026*. Melbourne: Safe and Equal.

¹⁸ Most refugees funding via the Children in Refuge funding stream. Tassone, J (forthcoming) *Measuring Specialist Family Violence Service Demand and Capacity Report 2026*. Melbourne: Safe and Equal.

their ability to afford suitable housing.¹⁹ Consequently, young people who cannot live at home due to family violence are at increased risk of violence, homelessness and poverty.²⁰

Young people who cannot live with their families due to family violence require youth-focused services that provide tailored supports including specialist family violence case management, access to appropriate housing, and engagement with study or employment. There are examples of successful youth-focused programs and services, such as *Amplify*²¹ and *Aspire*.²² We note these programs remain geographically limited with limited capacity.

While specialist family violence services are well positioned to deliver this support, targeted funding is needed to build service models that bring together the specialist family violence response with other services children and young people need. The unique and specific needs of infants, toddlers, preschoolers, primary and secondary school aged children, as well as young people aged 18-24 need to be better understood and explicitly articulated, and service delivery models and approaches need to be specifically designed for these distinct cohorts in a way that recognises the uniqueness of their experiences and needs.²³

New service approaches should not be designed within the constraints and parameters of the adult service system and must ensure specific support for children and young people are delivered.²⁴ This should involve family violence practitioners and child wellbeing practitioners developing detailed, tailored case plans for each family member, with appropriate support services engaged and ensuring that the safety and wellbeing of children and young people are centred.²⁵

Innovative investment across the state in multidisciplinary family violence demonstration projects that deliver holistic, wraparound supports for children and young people who are victim survivors of family violence would build the evidence base on what works and how to improve a shared response between services that improves the support children and young people receive. These should be composed of a minimum of four workers – specialist family violence services and allied sectors such as housing, family services, mental health, AOD, youth, early childhood, community health, migrant and refuge settlement and LGBTIQ+ community support. This would enable for collaborative efforts and system capacity building across specialities, ensuring that risks are appropriately addressed and mitigated, and services are intervening early for children and young people.

We estimate establishing multidisciplinary projects would require a minimum investment of \$12 million annually.²⁶ These projects should be funded for a minimum of five-years each to allow service models to develop, mature and to maximise impact evaluation.

¹⁹ Azize M (2024) *Priced Out: An Index of Affordable Rentals for People on the Lowest Incomes*, 2nd edn, Everybody's Home, Melbourne.

²⁰ McHale R, Brennan N, Freeburn T, Rossetto A, Richardson E, Boon B, and Christie R (2023) *Youth Survey Report 2023*, Mission Australia, Sydney, NSW.

²¹ Melbourne City Mission (2025) *Amplify Program*, [Amplify evaluation confirms family violence program is changing lives](#)

²² Meli (2026) *Aspire Program*, [Meli Aspire program](#).

²³ Safe and Equal (2026), *Understanding support for children and young people within specialist family violence services in Victoria: a sector snapshot*, Safe and Equal.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

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.

Recommendation:

The 2027-28 State Budget must:

- Provide \$12 million annually for a minimum of five years to fund Multidisciplinary Children and Young People Family Violence Demonstration Projects across the state, designed without the constraints of the adult system and to build the evidence base on what works

MARAM as a critical system enabler

One of the most far-reaching systemic reforms that emerged from the Victorian RCFV is the introduction and legislation of the Family Violence Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework (MARAM). This is a crucial pillar of our family violence system, supporting specialist family violence services and a range of other intersecting workforces to work together when addressing family violence. The MARAM enables consistent family violence risk assessment and response across the system. Continued workforce development of government agencies, service providers, and workforces prescribed with MARAM responsibilities is needed.

This includes resourcing to support capacity, capability and alignment to the forthcoming release of the CYP MARAM guidance so that all prescribed workforces are able to implement and align to the legislation.

Dedicated implementation support for specialist family violence services is critical. The sector requires a statewide model that includes Child and Young Person Practice Leads embedded at specialist family violence services in each of the 17 Department of Families, Fairness and Housing regions, providing organisational development, alignment and capability uplift, including child-centred family violence practice advice. This model would be further supported by statewide coordination by Safe and Equal. These models have been proven effective, as evidenced through the existing Family Violence and Disability Practice Lead Initiative.²⁷ Services have consistently indicated that these roles are an impactful and not an overly resource intensive way to address critical skill gaps and lead cultural and organisational change across services.²⁸

Prescribed workforces must also be resourced to ensure they align to emerging best practice and evidence. A total of \$34.7 million of funding provided across education, justice, health and social services to meet obligations under the MARAM legislation and information sharing schemes is due to lapse at the end of the 2026-2027 financial year. With continued workforce development required, including for the CYP MARAM, a renewed commitment and associated funding from the Victorian Government is needed. Alongside this, investment in continued workforce training is needed.

²⁷ Safe and Equal (2026), *Family Violence and Disability Practice Leader Initiative*, Melbourne: Safe and Equal. [Safe and Equal Family Violence and Disability Practice Leader Initiative](#)

²⁸ Safe and Equal (2026), *Understanding support for children and young people within specialist family violence services in Victoria: a sector snapshot*, Melbourne: Safe and Equal. [Understanding support for children and young people within specialist family violence services in Victoria: a sector snapshot](#)

Recommendations:

The 2027-28 State Budget must:

- Invest to implement CYP MARAM including dedicated funding for:
 - \$3.43 million funding annually across three years for 17 Children and Young Person Practice Leads to be placed in specialist family violence services across the state and Safe and Equal to provide statewide coordination activities
 - training across all prescribed workforces
- Re-instate the \$34.7 million MARAM funding (across two years) ceasing at the end of this financial year
- Provide resourcing to support continued alignment to the MARAM legislation across government departments and broader workforces

Priority 2: Sustainable investment in the sector

Victoria's family violence system has been transformed over the past decade, however demand for specialist services continues to grow and significant gaps remain across the continuum. Specialist family violence services are experiencing higher levels of demand, increasing complexity and greater pressure on their workforces. Prevention, early intervention and recovery remain under-resourced and inconsistently funded.

Family and gender-based violence causes profound preventable harm to victim survivors, families and communities, while also placing significant and avoidable pressure on government systems. Sustaining and building on progress requires investment that provides certainty for the organisations delivering this work, builds the capability and workforce needed for the future, and enables effective services and programs to be sustained and scaled.

Sustainable and increased investment in specialist family violence services

Across the state, specialist family violence services are experiencing higher levels of demand than ever before. As well as greater demand, services are reporting that more victim survivors are presenting with higher levels of family violence risk and facing complex barriers to accessing support. Together, increasing demand and complexity –including co-occurrence issues such as mental health and homelessness – has put incredible pressure on specialist services.²⁹

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

²⁹ Tassone, J (forthcoming) *Measuring Specialist Family Violence Service Demand and Capacity Report 2026*, Melbourne: Safe and Equal.

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 this critical work, resourcing levels constrain capacity to respond adequately to all victim survivors needing support. **A report commissioned by Safe and Equal estimates that each year around 3,750 victim survivors seeking help from specialist family violence services are unable to receive support, with a further 5,000 victim survivors unable to be provided with services they need.**³⁰

In addition, around 85 per cent of clients who seek case management support must wait to be assigned to a case manager, waiting an average of 8.5 days.³¹ Specialist family violence services prioritise safety and will ensure victim survivors at the highest risk are assigned as quickly as possible, meaning clients assessed at lower levels of risk wait the longest.³² As family violence risk is dynamic, the longer these clients wait the more likely their risk will escalate.

We know that experiences of family violence rarely resolve through a single period of support. The 2026 Demand and Capacity report has found:³³

- A total of 1,770 adult victim survivors re-presented to a service at least three months following their previous support period
- Safety and risk were the highest identified driver of re-presentation, alongside housing needs and financial insecurity, as well as ongoing court processes, reflecting the need for flexible outcome-driven support
- Targeted services report culturally responsive and community-specific support requires significant time and is 'core to effective service delivery but are not always explicitly funded'

To manage escalation of risk, 69 per cent of services report practitioners work overtime to cope with workload, despite personal cost – 78 percent reported workload and/or demand had impacted retention and staff wellbeing in their organisations.³⁴

Funding levels, alongside funding certainty, impact the sustainability of the system. Last year, the specialist family violence sector had approximately \$96 million across family violence case management, refuge, and family violence crisis brokerage funding at risk. While funding was extended for a further two years in the last state budget, this short-term

³⁰ Equity Economics (2025), *The costs and benefits of fully meeting demand for Specialist Family Violence Services in Victoria*, [The costs and benefits of fully meeting demand for Specialist Family Violence Services in Victoria](#)

³¹ Ibid.

³² Tassone, J (forthcoming) *Measuring Specialist Family Violence Service Demand and Capacity Report 2026*, Melbourne: Safe and Equal.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

extension does not address the sustainability issue. Agencies need secure, ongoing funding to reliably provide services to victim survivors. Insecure funding creates uncertainty for organisations who are unable to confidently recruit and retain staff or invest in service model innovations. This results in ongoing staff turnover due to short-term contracts and a loss of capability to respond. Successful programs may be scaled back or ended, resuming only when funding is made available.

It is estimated that specialist family violence services received about \$286 million in government funding in 2025-26, increasing to approximately \$300 million in 2026-27 to keep pace with inflation and population growth. However, this funding is insufficient to meet current known unmet demand. An additional \$187 million in annual government investment is required to meet demand, increasing the total funding for specialist family violence services to \$487 million – a 62% increase on current core funding. This would ensure specialist family violence services can meet existing demand – to support 15 per cent more clients and, for existing clients, to deliver all supports they need when they are needed.³⁵

Rural and regional specialist family violence services also face additional barriers that increase the cost of delivering services which include geographic isolation, limited service availability, staff having to travel for in person training and the housing crisis.³⁶ Metropolitan service delivery costs cannot be automatically applied to rural and regional areas. As part of the proposed \$187 million increase in specialist family violence core funding, the Victorian Government should provide additional, ongoing and annually indexed funding to recognise the higher costs of delivering specialist family violence services in rural and regional communities. This should support the additional costs associated with travel and outreach, workforce attraction and retention, professional supervision and development, safe mobile service delivery, and maintaining service capacity across large geographic areas. Funding should also provide sufficient flexibility to respond to regional accommodation costs and periods of heightened demand, including during tourism peaks and after extreme weather events.

Investment should be prioritised on outcomes for victim survivors and their families, with targets and reporting co-designed with the sector, to reflect safety, risk and holistic needs across a range of issues and that meet flexibility that victim survivors need. A co-designed review and development of a targets and outcomes framework must be developed with specialist family violence services including ACCOs and targeted services and organisations.

A strong specialist family violence sector is critical. The sector holds deep knowledge and practice expertise developed through decades of feminist-led service delivery, and plays a central role in coordinating, leading and developing the capability of the broader service system. Sustained investment in the specialist sector is therefore essential not only to meet current victim survivor needs and demand, but to maintain the capability, expertise and system infrastructure needed to deliver the next phase of reform.

³⁵ Equity Economics (2025), *The costs and benefits of fully meeting demand for Specialist Family Violence Services in Victoria*, [The costs and benefits of fully meeting demand for Specialist Family Violence Services in Victoria](#)

³⁶ Tassone, J (2025) *Measuring Specialist Family Violence Service Demand and Capacity Report 2025*, Melbourne: Safe and Equal

Recommendations:

The 2027-28 State Budget must:

- Increase ongoing core funding for specialist family violence services by a minimum of \$187 million per year, bringing total core funding to approximately \$487 million per year, to adequately meet current unmet demand. Resourcing should take into account:
 - Funding for ACCOs undertaking specialist family violence work in line with the Yoorrook Justice Commission's report recommendations
 - The additional time and resources required by targeted specialist family violence services to address systemic harm and navigate structural barriers to services; and
 - The additional costs and service delivery considerations for rural and regional areas.
- Make current short-term, lapsing funding for specialist family violence services permanent and ongoing, including the \$99.8 million due to lapse in 2027-28, to prevent reductions in services for victim survivors in an already overwhelmed system
- Resource the co-design of a contemporary funding framework with the specialist family violence sector including targets, reporting and outcomes

Sustain and increase primary prevention to stop violence before it starts

Stopping family and gender-based violence before it starts means changing attitudes, cultures and structures across society.

Primary prevention is about the social and systemic change needed to stop family and gender-based violence before it starts. It works across the whole population, to address four gendered drivers of violence in places where people live, learn, work, socialise and play. These gendered drivers of violence intersect with violence that is driven by systems of oppression such as racism, the ongoing impacts of colonisation, myths about culture, homophobia, transphobia and ableism.

Victoria has built a strong foundation of primary prevention initiatives across education, local councils, workplaces and communities through the work of local government, sporting clubs, schools, women's health services and specialist family violence and sexual assault services. Community-led programs are an essential part of this work, ensuring prevention activity includes and works effectively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, migrant and refugee communities, women living with disabilities and LGBTIQA+ communities, with elder abuse prevention also an important focus.

Primary prevention requires sustained investment over the long term. Current short-term funding cycles undermine the impact of all primary prevention efforts, resulting in disrupted program delivery and effectiveness. It is critical to scale up work in key settings and strengthen whole-of-community efforts, while continuing to trial, test and build the evidence

base for emerging work.³⁷ Five-year minimum funding arrangements would support program continuity and contribute to workforce stability and retention. As primary prevention outcomes are realised over the long term, funding models need to reflect this reality.

There is \$10.52 million of funding annually across primary prevention due to cease at the end of the 2026-27 financial year. Lapsing funding includes funding for the Women's Health Services Network, and the *Free From Violence* local government program and support for local government prevention efforts through the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV). Programs like Respectful Relationships Education, women's health services primary prevention partnerships and the Free from Violence local government grants are crucial place-based work that need secure, ongoing funding in order to sustain progress in preventing violence in Victoria.

In addition to ceasing funding, a further \$20 million per year is needed to scale up community-led primary prevention. Community-led initiatives are a critical part of the prevention landscape, finding solutions and preventing violence in their communities.³⁸ It helps ensure groups are not homogenised and empowers in-community solutions. The Victorian Government should recognise the vital role of communities and community-led prevention as critical to delivering prevention activity at scale, and with impact.

Local communities and organisations are well placed to design and deliver place-based initiatives that can drive meaningful change. Several successful community-led programs and initiatives have been delivered, supported by departmental grant funding to enable on-the-ground change, including the *Supporting Multicultural and Faith Communities to Prevent Family Violence Program*, the *LGBTIQ+ Family Violence Prevention Project*, a consortium of LGBTQIA+ community organisations led by Rainbow Health Australia, and many local sporting club recipients within the *Preventing Violence through Sports* grants program.

There is a longstanding history of prevention work undertaken by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, much of which long predates Australia's contemporary history of primary prevention work. There is significant opportunity for the broader prevention sector to learn from Aboriginal-led prevention through stronger partnerships and collaboration with ACCOs, Aboriginal peak bodies, partnerships and the Aboriginal organisations leading this work. This requires sustained investment not only in the delivery of Aboriginal-led prevention activity, but also in the capacity of Aboriginal organisations to lead, evaluate and share learnings on their own terms.

Multicultural, ethno-specific and faith based communities also have a long history of designing and delivering a range of primary prevention activities for their communities across Victoria including using a range of techniques that are proven or show promise in preventing violence women at the grass-roots or community level including; direct participation programs; communication strategies and social marketing to challenge gendered and racialised stereotypes; and recruiting community champions to advocating

³⁷ Respect Victoria. 2025. *Maintain the momentum: Three yearly report to parliament on the progress of prevention 2022–2024*. Melbourne: Respect Victoria.

³⁸ Respect Victoria (2026) *Recognising and enabling community-led and specialist prevention work*, Melbourne: Respect Victoria. [Recognising and enabling community-led and specialist prevention work](#)

for transforming systems and structures to promote gender equality and prevent violence against women.³⁹

Victoria has an opportunity to move from a collection of valuable prevention initiatives towards a more sustainable, coordinated and adequately resourced prevention system. This means protecting existing investment, providing longer-term funding, scaling effective approaches and investing in community-led prevention so that prevention can reach more people and communities across Victoria.

Recommendations:

The 2027-28 State Budget must:

- Make permanent and ongoing \$10.52 million in annual funding for primary prevention, with annual indexation, as current funding is due to lapse at the end of 2026-27. This includes:
 - \$9.17 million annually to sustain Women's Health Services Network services,
 - \$1.32 million annually to reinstate the *Free From Violence* local government program, and for local government prevention efforts through the Municipal Association of Victoria
- Invest an additional \$20 million per year in primary prevention, required to scale-up community-led primary prevention efforts for a minimum of five-year funding cycles to support continuity, workforce stability and measurable impact
- Ensure primary prevention investment includes dedicated and sustainable funding for Aboriginal-led and other community-led prevention approaches, enabling communities to design, lead and evaluate prevention activity that responds to their own contexts and priorities

Investing in early intervention

Early intervention can reduce harm for victim survivors, create opportunities for earlier support and reduce future demand on crisis and specialist services. It is particularly important where family violence is emerging or escalating but has not yet resulted in the level of risk that would typically trigger intensive specialist intervention.

A 2025 Safe and Equal member survey showed early intervention initiatives are under-resourced, inconsistently funded, and often embedded within broader programs not specifically designed for early intervention.⁴⁰ This equates to program instability, practitioner burnout, and the inability to scale existing effective approaches. There is existing early intervention work being done in overlapping ways with primary prevention (for example, work in councils and schools, community-led prevention) and with specialist family violence services, services for people who use violence, legal services and services for children, young people and families.

³⁹ Safe and Equal & Multicultural Centre for Women's Health 2024, *Improving our approach to community-led prevention: Lessons from the Connecting Communities program*, Safe and Equal [Improving our approach to community-led prevention: Lessons from the Connecting Communities program](#)

⁴⁰ Hewitt, S & Carman, M (2025) Early intervention in family and gender-based violence: Scoping paper, Melbourne: Safe and Equal, [Early intervention in family and gender-based violence: Scoping paper](#)

There are ample opportunities for greater investment in tailored early intervention programs and services focused on children and young people. These programs must be trauma-informed, child-centred and strengths-based, as well as accessible, inclusive and culturally safe. For example, the Recognise, Respond and Refer (3Rs) community education program⁴¹ assists members of the community to recognise the signs of family violence, facilitate and respond to disclosures and refer victim survivors to appropriate supports. Tailored training sessions are available to various community members such as hairdressers, people working with children and young people, and workers in the animal care industry. The Rainbow 3R's training program is also designed for the rainbow community and allies.⁴²

However, this is just one successful example of early intervention initiatives occurring in Victoria. There are several early intervention programs already underway in the specialist family violence sector that are flexible, culturally safe and developmentally appropriate, occurring across multiple settings and utilising a variety of complementary modalities. These programs could easily be scaled up and built upon to increase their impact and reach for children and young people.

To achieve this, a targeted investment of \$20 million is required to build upon existing work, and to strengthen coordination needed to establish a system of effective early intervention. The investment would fund demonstration projects in specialist family violence services over five years, with Safe and Equal providing a key role in project coordination, support and delivery. Targeted investment would help strengthen Victoria's prevention system, reduce avoidable escalation of harm, and provide government with tested models for future investment.

Recommendation:

The 2027-28 State Budget must:

- Invest \$20 million in early intervention demonstration projects across a five-year funding cycle to strengthen, coordinate and scale effective approaches in Victoria

Dedicated funding for victim survivor recovery and healing⁴³

While early recovery work is often taken on by specialist family violence practitioners, sustained recovery work requires longer-term, holistic support to support victim survivors to rebuild their confidence, agency, wellbeing and lives as a whole. This includes therapeutic care, peer-to-peer support, and pathways back into education and employment.

Some specialist family violence services deliver dedicated recovery programs and activities, which combine therapeutic supports, alongside building social connections and financial independence. However, while these programs do exist, they are inconsistently available to victim survivors, amidst an already fragmented landscape of support. As

⁴¹ FVREE (2026) Family Violence disclosure training. [FVREE Training Packages](#)

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Recovery and healing also has a specific meaning for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and healing as a practice is deeply rooted in First Nations' approaches. Please see: Sinko, L, James, R. and Hughesdon, K (2022) Healing after gender-based violence: A qualitative meta synthesis using meta-ethnography, *Trauma, Violence & Abuse*, 23(4), 1184-1197. doi: 10.1177/1524838021991305.

recovery and healing are non-linear, the time limited nature of programs and services often do not align with ongoing support needs.

Recovery remains an under-resourced part of the system, receiving insufficient policy attention and targeted funding. Additional investment for specialist family violence services and broader programs and services would support models and pathways to recovery, such as peer-to-peer support and initiatives to improve victim survivors' access to education and employment.

Recommendation:

The 2027-28 State Budget must:

- Invest in targeted funding for recovery for victim survivors across therapeutic care, peer-to-peer support, and pathways back into education and employment

System governance, oversight and accountability

Continued system oversight and accountability is critical to ensure the family violence and broader systems are meeting the needs of all victim survivors – alongside systems data, learning, reflection, evaluation, connectivity, resourcing and a system that is being specialist informed.

As Victoria's leading peak body, Safe and Equal provides a critical system leadership and advocacy role in the family and gender-based violence sector. We provide an invaluable bridge between government policy and frontline practice, across the continuum, including primary prevention, early intervention, response and recovery.

We represent more than 134 organisations across the state, which provides crucial insight into the different experiences of family and gendered-based violence across different identities and communities.

Sustained and increased investment in Safe and Equal supports:

- Sector representation and specialist policy advice: bringing collective sector expertise and frontline intelligence into policy development and reform;
- Practice and workforce capability: providing specialist training, practice leadership and workforce development; and
- Sector leadership and coordination: supporting organisations to remain connected, informed and aligned through system change.

Lived experience of family violence should continue to play a central role in policy and service system design, with structures and processes that embed it developed and supported across the sector.

Recommendations:

The 2027-28 State Budget must:

- Sustain and increase investment in Safe and Equal to strengthen sector leadership, advocacy and workforce development and amplify the collective voice of the specialist family and gender-based violence sectors
- Provide continued investment in embedding lived experience in policy and system design

Priority 3: Safe, secure and affordable housing is critical for victim survivor safety and recovery

Family violence is the leading cause of homelessness for women and children.⁴⁴ Homelessness poses its own additional risks of violence, with women who are homeless experiencing higher rates of sexual assault than housed women.⁴⁵ Homelessness also often leads to a lifetime of disadvantage and poverty, and children who experience homelessness are more likely to become homeless as adults.⁴⁶

Safe, secure and affordable housing is therefore a critical part of family violence response. Without safe housing, victim survivors can be forced to make the impossible choice between remaining in violence and facing homelessness. For some victim survivors, lack of housing also creates barriers to leaving violence, maintaining primary care of children and rebuilding their lives.

The Federal Government's \$145 million investment in crisis and transitional housing in Victoria is a welcome step towards ensuring people escaping family violence have somewhere safe to go. The funding will deliver 234 additional homes across Victoria for women and children escaping family violence and young people experiencing or at risk of homelessness. Importantly, the investment includes housing in rural and regional Victoria – a critical part of making sure victim survivors can access safety and support close to their communities, families and networks.

However, crisis accommodation is only one part of the picture. Due to compounding discriminations and inadequate appropriate housing options, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victim survivors and victim survivors from marginalised groups face higher rates of homelessness and additional barriers to housing, compared to victim survivors who do not face these additional systemic barriers.⁴⁷

Aboriginal victim survivors are more likely to have experienced homelessness as a result of family violence than non-Aboriginal people,⁴⁸ who also face systemic racism and discrimination in the housing market. With family violence a major driver for Child Protection

⁴⁴ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) 2025, Specialist Homelessness Services Annual Report 2024–25, Australian Government, Canberra. [Specialist Homelessness Services Annual Report 2024–25](#)

⁴⁵ Goodman, L; Fels, K; Gelln, C; and Benitez, J. (2006) No Safe Place: Sexual Assault in the lives of homeless women. [No Safe Place: Sexual Assault in the lives of homeless women](#)

⁴⁶ Flatau et al. (2013). Lifetime and intergenerational experiences of homelessness in Australia. Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute. [Lifetime and intergenerational experiences of homelessness in Australia](#)

⁴⁷ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Family, domestic and sexual violence in Australia: continuing the national story (2019), pg. 106. [AIHW Family, domestic and sexual violence in Australia: continuing the national story](#)

⁴⁸ Ibid.

involvement and entry into out-of-home care for Aboriginal children,⁴⁹ the lack of culturally safe and affordable housing not only increases family violence risk, but it also increases the risk of Aboriginal children being removed from their family and culture.

Where victim survivors wish, the primary response should be for adult and child victim survivors to remain safely in their own homes, with the person using violence removed; and we welcome the Victorian Government's funding of the *Personal Safety Initiative*. However, this is not always a viable choice and alternative housing options across crisis accommodation and longer-term affordable housing are critical for safety and recovery of victim survivors.

The Commonwealth has put significant funding on the table. This provides an important opportunity to expand safe housing for victim survivors, alongside further investment from Victoria to fill the gap and ensure there are pathways from crisis accommodation into secure, long-term housing.

Specialist family violence refuge

Refuges provide secure crisis accommodation, risk assessment and a range of supports for victim survivors. The current Victorian family violence refuge system accommodates approximately 198 households per night.⁵⁰ Unfortunately, due to demand on the refuge system, victim survivors are often placed in unsafe and unsuitable motels. For example, the statewide service Safe Steps places 80 victim survivors in motels per night, 40 per cent of whom are children;⁵¹ with even more victim survivors being housed in motels by local specialist family violence services and The Orange Door.

In addition to being inappropriate, motels are costly. 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.⁵² Refuge capacity needs to be at least doubled to stop the reliance on motels, including across regional areas which face the greatest shortage of refuge options.

We also know that refuges act as an important site for the early stages of victim survivor recovery to occur. Recovery work is often taken on by specialist family violence practitioners in this setting, who use their skills in negotiating the broader service system to assist victim survivors in building long-term foundational supports across 'life domains' such as housing, education, employment, and health and wellbeing. Practitioners also use foundational trauma-informed and person-centred approaches to support victim survivors to feel intrinsically empowered, and to rebuild confidence and individual agency.

⁴⁹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) (National Indigenous Australians Agency) (2026) *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework: 2.12 Child protection*, AIHW. [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework: 2.12 Child protection](#); Yoorrook Justice Commission (2025) *Yoorrook for Transformation: Third Interim Report – Volume 3*, [Yoorrook for Transformation: Third Interim Report – Volume 3](#)

⁵⁰ Tassone, J (2025) *Measuring Specialist Family Violence Service Demand and Capacity Report 2025*, Melbourne: Safe and Equal.

⁵¹ Safe Steps (forthcoming) *2025-26 Annual Impact Report*, Melbourne: Safe Steps.

⁵² Collected via a survey of Safe and Equal members.

We encourage the Victorian Government to recognise refuges as sites of early recovery, with investment in refuges linked to bolstering recovery efforts and improving longer-term outcomes for victim survivors.

Social housing is essential to long-term safety

Family violence has significant economic and financial impacts, meaning victim survivors are more likely to experience poverty.⁵³ For example, over one-third (36-40%) of victim survivors of intimate partner violence receive government payments.⁵⁴ Combined with rising prices in the private rental market, social housing the only option for the majority of victim survivors – a system which is already overwhelmed with demand.

More than 65,000 people are waiting for social housing in Victoria,⁵⁵ with priority recipients (including family violence victim survivors) waiting an average of 17 months.⁵⁶ Modelling by the Victorian Housing Peaks Alliance⁵⁷ estimates that an additional 377,000 social homes are needed across Victoria by 2051 to meet total demand for social housing.⁵⁸ The modelling estimates a minimum of 83,000 social homes by 2051 are required to meet existing demand for victim survivors.⁵⁹ As there is no data set that measures unexpressed demand (i.e. victim survivors requiring assistance that do not present to services), the social housing figures are the *minimum* required, with the actual demand likely higher.

The demand for long-term housing compounds the experience of victim survivors and impacts existing demand on specialist family violence services. When victim survivor needs are not met due to unavailable housing, they remain at risk and are more likely to return for family violence support. For victim survivors who have been able to obtain a refuge space, the lack of exit pathways can mean they remain in refuge for extended periods. The intended average length of stay is four to six weeks. On average, victim survivors with permanent residency spent an average of six weeks in refuge. This rose to an average of eleven weeks for victim survivors with non-permanent residency, with one refuge provider recording an *average* of forty-four weeks (310 days) across their clients without permanent residency.⁶⁰ The lack of exit pathways, particularly for temporary visa holders, creates bottlenecks in refuge and perpetuates the use of inappropriate and unsafe motels as emergency accommodation. It also leads to victim survivors being faced again with the

⁵³ Particularly victim survivors with children. Please see: Summers, A (2022) *The Choice: Violence or Poverty*, University of Technology Sydney. doi: 10.26195/3s1r-4977

⁵⁴ Note: This statistic does not include family violence committed by family members and would likely be higher if the full definition of family violence was measured; The Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee (EIAC) (2025) *2025 Report to Government*, Australian Government. [EIC 2025 Report to Government](#)

⁵⁵ As of March 2026, when adding new applications to those on the transfer list. See reference: Homes Victoria, *Applications on the Victorian Housing Register*, [Homes Vic Applications on the Victorian Housing Register](#)

⁵⁶ State of Victoria, Australia (Department of Family, Fairness and Housing), (2025) *Department of Family, Fairness and Housing Annual Report 2024-25*, Victorian Government, Melbourne.

⁵⁷ The Victorian Housing Peaks Alliance comprises the eight leading peak bodies dealing with housing and homelessness matters in Victoria: Victorian Council of Social Services, Council to Homeless Persons, Community Housing Industry Association, Victorian Public Tenants Association, Aboriginal Housing Victoria, Tenants Victoria, Safe and Equal and Justice Connect.

⁵⁸ SGS Economics and Planning, (2025) *Growing Social Housing: Data, insights and targets*, [Growing Social Housing: Data, insights and targets](#)

⁵⁹ Ibid. This figure is based on the number of Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) clients receiving assistance with the primary reason being family violence, households awaiting assistance through the Victorian Housing Register, and households requesting a social housing transfer due to family violence as well as demand growth.

⁶⁰ Tassone, J (forthcoming) *Measuring Specialist Family Violence Service Demand and Capacity Report 2026*, Melbourne: Safe and Equal.

impossible decision to return to live with the person using violence or potentially face homelessness.

Expanding social housing is essential to prevent homelessness, and to ensure the broader family violence system can function effectively. A functioning pathway from crisis accommodation to stable long-term housing is critical to victim survivor safety, recovery and independence.

Housing in rural and regional areas⁶¹

Victim survivors and specialist family violence services in rural and regional Victoria face additional barriers due to geographic isolation, limited service availability and the housing crisis. Safe and Equal member agencies report that some areas have no crisis or emergency accommodation, including motels, meaning victim survivors may have to leave their local area to access safety, disrupting employment, children's schooling and connections to family and community. In some areas, homelessness services have reported having no option other than tents for victim survivors leaving family violence. Emergency accommodation is also subject to significant fluctuations in availability and cost, with tourism reducing access to motels and caravan parks and peak periods substantially increasing prices, limiting the accommodation that specialist family violence services can secure within existing budgets.

Safe and Equal member agencies report that the lack of suitable, available housing significantly impacts the ability to recruit and retain staff in rural and regional areas, which is a significant concern in the context of a state-wide workforce shortage. Lack of affordable student accommodation means students are also less likely to undertake a rural placement, which is often a key recruitment strategy. In addition, member agencies have reported successfully recruiting, only to have the offer declined because the potential staff member has not been able to secure affordable rental accommodation.

Recommendations:

The 2027-28 State Budget must:

- Double refuge capacity in Victoria from 198 to 396 households per night, including to reduce dependence on unsuitable emergency accommodation such as motels
- Commit to delivering at least 83,000 new social housing dwellings specifically for family violence victim survivors over the next 25 years, as part the broader expansion of social housing required in Victoria
- Rural and regional housing considerations across a range of issues, such as service delivery and workforce, should inform investment

⁶¹ Safe and Equal (2025) *Inquiry into the Supply of Homes in Regional Victoria*, Melbourne: Safe and Equal. [Inquiry into the Supply of Homes in Regional Victoria](#)

Priority 4: Strengthening justice responses and access to legal support

The justice system is a critical part of the family violence response, but it must operate in ways that prioritise victim survivor safety, minimise re-traumatisation and recognise the ways people using violence can weaponise systems to continue their abuse. This requires accessible legal support, safeguards across justice responses, and adequate resourcing for the services that support victim survivors to navigate the justice system.

Access to legal support for victim survivors

Access to affordable, trauma-informed legal support across multiple areas of law is vital to ensure victim survivors receive just outcomes. However, victim survivors often can't afford private lawyers due to the economic impact of experiencing family violence, and don't qualify for publicly funded legal support. This makes victim survivors reliant on community-funded legal advice, which is already experiencing significant unmet demand.

Nationally, we are facing a period of increasing demand for legal assistance and ongoing pressure on legal aid resources. Both Victoria Legal Aid and community legal services continuously report that demand for services continues to outpace capacity and funding.⁶²

The scale of the gap is significant. Nationally around 52,000 women per year are unable to access legal support from Women's Legal Services.⁶³ Over 400 victim survivors of family violence are turned away from community legal centres per day.⁶⁴ There are approximately 14 per cent of the population living below the poverty line,⁶⁵ but only 8 per cent of the population qualify for legal aid.⁶⁶

While the Commonwealth Government has an important role in addressing broader gaps in legal assistance funding, the Victorian Government also has a critical role in ensuring victim survivors can access legal support within the Victorian family violence response.

In addition to funding legal services directly, increased collaboration between specialist family violence services and legal services would increase the accessibility of legal support for victim survivors and reduce the burden that victim survivors currently face in obtaining legal support. Existing examples of successful models – such as embedded legal support models within specialist family violence refuges – have had positive outcomes for victim survivors. Dedicated duty lawyers visit a refuge to provide advice and support and represent the victim survivor as a client. One program model has found that:⁶⁷

⁶² Victoria Legal Aid (2025) *Community Legal Services Program: 2024-25 Report* [Community Legal Services Program: 2024-25 Report](#)

⁶³ Women's Legal Services Australia (2025) *Federal Pre-Budget Submission 2025-26*, Women's Legal Services Australia. [WLSA Federal Pre-Budget Submission 2025-26](#)

⁶⁴ Community Legal Centres Australia (2025) *2026-27 Pre-Budget Submission*, Community Legal Centres Australia. [SLS 2026-27 Pre-Budget Submission](#)

⁶⁵ Davidson, P & Bradbury, B (2025) *Poverty in Australia 2025: Overview*, Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) and UNSW Sydney [ACOSS Poverty in Australia 2025: Overview](#)

⁶⁶ Balmer, NJ & McDonald HM (2025) *Access to just this? Eligibility for legal aid in Australia and its implications*, Victoria Law Foundation. [Access to just this? Eligibility for legal aid in Australia and its implications](#)

⁶⁷ Emerge Women and Children's Support Network (2026), *Legal Health at Refuge*, [Emerge Legal Health at Refuge](#)

- 95 per cent of clients in the refuge participated, presenting with an average of 4.2 concurrent legal matters
- The model lessens the burden on victim survivors and the need for specialist family violence practitioners to undertake legal support matters as part of their work – for example, attendance at court which are often lengthy days
- The model has been cost effective⁶⁸

Safeguards for coercive control legislation

With coercive control legislation passed, careful implementation, strong safeguards and public and community-led awareness of the legislation will be essential to protect victim survivors from unintended consequences, including misidentification and increased criminalisation of people from overpoliced communities.

We welcome Respect Victoria's new campaign '*See the Signs*', designed to support members of the public to recognise coercive control as family violence, spot harmful patterns earlier and seek support before violence escalates.⁶⁹ Alongside broad public awareness, targeted community engagement will be important to ensure information about coercive control and the legislation is understood, relevant and accessible across different communities, and that implementation does not contribute to unintended harms for communities already experiencing structural disadvantage and over-policing.

The Victorian Government should invest \$15 million over five years in community-led coercive control awareness and engagement initiatives, including tailored approaches for a range of communities, to support safe and effective implementation of the legislation. This should include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, rural and regional communities, multicultural, faith-based and ethno-specific communities, people with a disability and LGBTIQ+ communities.

To ensure effective oversight of the legislation, we recommend the establishment of an independent Coercive Control Implementation and Evaluation Taskforce (the Taskforce) that includes sector representation and centres lived experience, to facilitate genuine consultation with the specialist family violence sector, community legal centres and other stakeholders on coercive control legislation implementation. This must include consultation with marginalised and overpoliced communities and victim survivors. The Taskforce must also lead the evaluation process, and consult with impacted groups in an evaluation process, with a primary focus on victim survivor safety and perpetrator accountability. Quantitative data must be combined with qualitative research to understand the experiences of victim survivors reporting coercive control through the justice system, with findings published publicly.

Coercive control and misidentification are complex issues that can only be addressed through a whole-of-system response that draws upon legislative reform, data and coordinated service responses between police, the courts, the specialist family

⁶⁸ Based on existing modelling, these programs can be established with an investment of \$100K annually per organisation, with smaller organisations requiring minimums of approximately \$70K. This allocation is reliant on pre-existing structures and funds an allocation of time with community legal service providers and specialist family violence practitioners, alongside coordination.

⁶⁹ Respect Victoria (2026), *See the Signs*. [Respect Vic See the Signs](#)

violence sector and government. In addition, a clear system-wide process to correct misidentification across systems when it occurs and increasing funding for community legal centres so all victim survivors can access legal support is needed, as well as funding for specialist family violence services to adequately respond to a likely increase in demand.

Recommendations:

The 2027-28 State Budget must:

- Increase Victorian Government funding for legal assistance to ensure at a minimum all victim survivors who sit below the poverty line can access timely, affordable and trauma-informed legal support
- Invest in co-located legal support models that connect community legal services with specialist family violence services
- Invest \$15 million over five years in community-led coercive control awareness and engagement initiatives including tailored approaches, to support safe and effective implementation of the legislation
- Provide additional funding to community legal services and specialist family violence services to respond to the increased demand associated with the implementation of coercive control legislation and awareness raising activities

Conclusion

Victoria has spent the past decade building a stronger system to address family and gender-based violence. This progress has changed lives and strengthened our collective capacity to prevent violence and support victim survivors – but the work is not finished. Behind every statistic is a person; every death is a life lost, a family devastated and a failure to prevent violence that should never have happened.

We know what sustained investment can achieve. When services and programs are properly funded, victim survivors can access support when they need it, children can be protected from the impacts of violence, people can begin to heal, recover and rebuild their lives, and we can create a future Victoria free from violence. An under-resourced system means people wait longer for support; workers are stretched beyond sustainable limits and victim survivors face greater barriers to safety and recovery. The costs then flow through every part of our community — to health, housing, justice and policing systems, as well as workplaces, families and future generations.

The 2027-28 Budget can build on a decade of progress; Safe and Equal calls on the Victorian Government to make a clear commitment to family violence victim survivors (adults, children and young people). **Investing in family and gender-based violence isn't new spending – it is saving lives, supporting the frontline and preventing costs already borne by government.**

Summary of Recommendations

Support children and young people as victim survivors in their own right

- Resource Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations to self-determine approaches to address family violence in their communities and maintain children and young people's connections to culture and kin
- Ensure funding allocations for targeted specialist family violence services include increased investment to support children and young people, recognising increased structural barriers and complex support needs
- Provide a minimum of \$33 million in permanent and core annual funding for specialist family violence services to meet the needs of children and young people, adjusted as demand grows
- Provide \$12 million annually for a minimum of five years to fund Multidisciplinary Children and Young People Family Violence Demonstration Projects across the state, designed without the constraints of the adult system and to build the evidence base on what works
- Invest to implement CYP MARAM including dedicated funding for:
 - \$3.43 million funding annually across three years for 17 Children and Young Person Practice Leads to be placed in specialist family violence services across the state and Safe and Equal to provide statewide coordination activities
 - training across all prescribed workforces
- Re-instate the \$34.7million MARAM funding (across two years) ceasing at the end of this financial year
- Provide resourcing to support continued alignment to the MARAM legislation across government departments and broader workforces

Sustainable investment in the sector

- Increase ongoing core funding for specialist family violence services by a minimum of \$187 million per year, bringing total core funding to approximately \$487 million per year, to adequately meet current unmet demand. Resourcing should take into account:
 - funding for ACCOs undertaking specialist family violence work in line with the Yoorrook Justice Commission's report recommendations
 - the additional time and resources required by targeted specialist family violence services to address systemic harm and navigate structural barriers to services; and
 - the additional costs and service delivery considerations for rural and regional areas.
- Make current short-term, lapsing funding for specialist family violence services permanent and ongoing, including the \$99.8 million due to lapse in 2027-28, to prevent reductions in services for victim survivors in an already overwhelmed system
- Resource the co-design of a contemporary funding framework with the specialist family violence sector including targets, reporting and outcomes

- Make permanent and ongoing \$10.52 million in annual funding for primary prevention, with annual indexation, as current funding is due to lapse at the end of 2026-27. This includes:
 - \$9.17 million annually to sustain Women's Health Services Network services,
 - \$1.32 million annually to reinstate the *Free From Violence* local government program, and for local government prevention efforts through the Municipal Association of Victoria
- Invest an additional \$20 million per year in primary prevention, required to scale-up community-led primary prevention efforts for a minimum of five-year funding cycles to support continuity, workforce stability and measurable impact
- Ensure primary prevention investment includes dedicated and sustainable funding for Aboriginal-led and other community-led prevention approaches, enabling communities to design, lead and evaluate prevention activity that responds to their own contexts and priorities
- Invest \$20 million in early intervention demonstration projects across a five-year funding cycle to strengthen, coordinate and scale effective approaches in Victoria
- Invest in targeted funding for recovery for victim survivors across therapeutic care, peer-to-peer support, and pathways back into education and employment
- Sustain and increase investment in Safe and Equal to strengthen sector leadership, advocacy and workforce development and amplify the collective voice of the specialist family and gender-based violence sectors
- Provide continued investment in embedding lived experience in policy and system design

Safe, secure and affordable housing is critical for victim survivor safety and recovery

- Double refuge capacity in Victoria from 198 to 396 households per night, including to reduce dependence on unsuitable emergency accommodation such as motels
- Commit to delivering at least 83,000 new social housing dwellings specifically for family violence victim survivors over the next 25 years, as part the broader expansion of social housing required in Victoria
- Rural and regional housing considerations across a range of issues, such as service delivery and workforce, should inform investment

Strengthening justice responses and access to legal support

- Increase Victorian Government funding for legal assistance to ensure at a minimum all victim survivors who sit below the poverty line can access timely, affordable and trauma-informed legal support
- Invest in co-located legal support models that connect community legal services with specialist family violence services
- Invest \$15 million over five years in community-led coercive control awareness and engagement initiatives including tailored approaches, to support safe and effective implementation of the legislation

- Provide additional funding to community legal services and specialist family violence services to respond to the increased demand associated with the implementation of coercive control legislation and awareness raising activities