



MONASH  
University

MONASH GENDER  
AND FAMILY VIOLENCE  
PREVENTION CENTRE

FACULTY  
OF  
ARTS

# Family, domestic and sexual violence

Submission to the  
Standing Committee on  
Social Policy and Legal  
Affairs, July 2020

Prepared by the Monash Gender and Family Violence  
Prevention Centre.

## **The Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs**

### **Submission: Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs inquiry into family, domestic and sexual violence.

This submission has been prepared by members of the Monash Gender and Family Violence Prevention Centre (MGFVPC).

Our submission provides a response to each of the Inquiry's Terms of Reference. We note the Standing Committee has been asked to inquire into and report on these Terms of Reference to inform the next National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children. The focus of our response and recommendations are forward facing and directed largely towards what action can be undertaken, coordinated and achieved by the Australian Government and through the next National Plan.

The submission also provides summary details of relevant research completed by MGFVPC researchers as well as current research that we are leading examining family violence and the COVID-19 global health pandemic.

Please find our submission attached to this letter.

We would welcome the opportunity to provide further detail to inform the work of the Standing Committee's reference to examine family, domestic and sexual violence with the view of informing the next National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children.

Kind regards,

Kate Fitz-Gibbon  
Jude McCulloch  
JaneMaree Maher  
Sandra Walklate  
Marie Segrave  
Silke Meyer  
Naomi Pfitzner  
Jasmine McGowan

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We have structured this submission according to the Terms of Reference. We note that the Standing Committee has been asked to inquire into and report on these Terms to inform the next National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children. The focus of our response and recommendations are forward facing and directed largely towards what action can be undertaken, coordinated and achieved by the Australian Government and through the next National Plan.

**a) Immediate and long-term measures to prevent violence against women and their children, and improve gender equality.**

Workplaces have been identified as key settings in the community in which to challenge gender inequalities, and the overt and covert practices, attitudes and power imbalances that lead to family and domestic violence (Holmes and Flood, 2013; Powell, Sandy and Findling, 2015; Women's Health Victoria, 2012). With approximately 65% of Australians aged 15 years and over employed or actively seeking employment, workplace initiatives have the potential to reach large populations and to help build a culture of respect and non-violence among the broader community (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2018). Work-based family violence initiatives can offer victim survivors safety and respite from abuse and a way forward through support, information and referral to services. The economic costs of family violence to workplaces are well documented in terms of absenteeism, staff turnover, and reduced job satisfaction and productivity (KPMG, 2016; Mighty, 1997; Reeves and O'Leary-Kelly, 1997). Family violence can affect employees' work attendance, performance and safety as well as impacting on relationships with co-workers. It is estimated that lost productivity related to domestic and family violence will cost the Australian economy \$609 million dollars in 2020/2021 with \$235 million borne by employers (The National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children, 2009). In addition to the economic benefits to employers of investing in family violence prevention, creating workplace cultures that are free from gender-based discrimination and harassment may lead to indirect benefits, such as increased staff morale, reduced staff turnover and being identified as an 'employer of choice' (Powell, Sandy and Findling, 2015).

Although there is growing interest in work-based family violence initiatives, many activities undertaken to address domestic and family violence in Australian workplaces are undocumented and/or not rigorously evaluated. To date, most workplace strategies focus on response rather than prevention. While workplaces offer promising entry points for domestic and family violence primary prevention strategies, research exploring key priority issues of capacity building and institutionalisation is required. More rigorous evaluation of workplace approaches in different settings and with different population groups is needed to develop empirical and theoretical evidence in this field.

[We recommend the Australian Government commission a review of national and international evidence for the effective design, implementation and monitoring of workplace primary prevention strategies with attention to the scalability and sustainability of workplace initiatives.](#)

Gender inequality is recognised as the underlying cause of family and domestic violence. Challenging rigid gender roles and stereotypes is required to more effectively prevent family and domestic violence. The transition to parenthood marks a critical point in the production of gender inequality and increased risk of family and domestic violence. There is a vital opportunity to better prevent all forms of domestic and family violence by promoting more gender equitable divisions of child care, house work and paid work. International practices show that breaking down rigid gender stereotypes and engaging fathers in caregiving can effectively promote gender equality. Most existing Australian programs target fathers who already use violence. However, there is emerging evidence in Australia as to how fatherhood can be used to promote gender equality and prevent domestic and family violence (Pfitzner, Humphreys and Hegarty, 2020, 2018, 2017). Greater investment in domestic and family violence primary prevention strategies is needed to increase safety and wellbeing for Australian families, specifically women and children.

[We recommend the Australian Government commission a review of promising and innovative practices to engage men as fathers in the primary prevention of domestic and family violence.](#)



## THE NEED TO BUILD THE NATIONAL EVIDENCE BASE TO INFORM PRIMARY PREVENTION

The challenges of evaluation research in the primary prevention field are well documented including what and how outcomes are measured, timelines for measuring sustainable change and the complexity of evaluating programs that operate simultaneously across multiple levels (Meade, 2010; Wall, 2013). Evaluation research in this field tends to be reliant on self-reporting measures, the validity of which are open to claims of social desirability bias (Cox et al., 2016). Larger scale, more methodologically rigorous primary prevention research is needed to overcome these evaluative weaknesses and produce a solid evidence base for social change. These shortcomings in the primary prevention evidence base reflect wider knowledge gaps in violence against women research. Methodological weaknesses in researching domestic, family and sexual violence, such as lack of standardised definitions, identification tools and reporting systems, have been widely acknowledged (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), 2018; Our Watch, 2017; Phillips, Muller and Lorimer, 2015; Phillips and Vandenbroek, 2014). Consistent and coordinated approaches to defining, identifying and recording partner and sexual violence would improve the quality of data collected and provide a more comprehensive picture of the prevalence of partner and sexual violence in Australia. The collection of accurate information would in turn better inform primary prevention efforts in Australia. The next National Plan presents an opportunity to do this.

We recommend that the next National Plan include a commitment to build the evidence base for quality indicators to measure attitude and behaviour change and greater national coordination and dissemination of primary prevention knowledge.

### **b) Best practice and lessons learnt from international experience, ranging from prevention to early intervention and response, that could be considered in an Australian context.**

Taking on board lessons from international experience is fraught with difficulties. It is the case that policies and practices do travel from one jurisdiction to another on occasion with little regard for their evidenced efficacy (for example, on Clare's Law see Walklate and Fitz-Gibbon, 2018) or for their appropriateness within different settings (Goodmark, 2015). However, considered with caution there is one intervention and one theme worthy of further consideration for the Federal Government. The potential success or otherwise of either of these initiatives rests upon the wider embrace of the principles of integration, holism and intersectionality featured elsewhere in this submission.

#### **1. WALES SAFEGUARDING REPOSITORY**

This newly established repository houses Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHRs), Mental Health Homicide Reviews (MHHRs) and Adult Practice Reviews (APRs). Following research from Robinson et al. 2018; see also Rowlands, 2020) which identified commonalities in the learning generated by these different review practices, the purpose of the repository is to ensure better integration of data and impact from death reviews in order to improve the future development of safeguarding practice across and between professionals working in these different fields.

We recommend the Australian Government consider the efficacy of a similar cross state and cross-professional repository for Australia charged with the responsibility for identifying the good practice lessons to be learned from death review practices in and between the different states of Australia.

#### **2. INFORMATION SHARING FOR EFFECTIVE PREVENTION**

There are different points at which effective prevention of domestic, family and sexual violence might occur. Such interventions may focus on whole system change and/or single issue or agency change. Central to any effective prevention of such violence is a focus on the perpetrator. The Victorian Royal

Commission on family Violence (2016) made a wide range of recommendations on the completion of its work and one key theme coming out of this work was the importance of information sharing within and between the different stakeholders about perpetrators. International research demonstrates that perpetrators of family and sexual violence are often perpetrators of violence(s) in other settings and are also often repeat and/or serial violence perpetrators within the domestic setting (see inter alia McCulloch et al. 2019). The sharing of information between the different stakeholders who may come into contact with such perpetrators is essential to effective prevention of their current and/or future use of violence. The requirement for such information sharing reaches beyond the criminal justice process and includes medical, counselling and educational settings. The Priority Perpetrator Identification Tool developed by Robinson and Clancy (2017) is a good intervention example of this kind.

We recommend the Australian Government commission a review of good practice both national and international designed to facilitate appropriate perpetrator focused information sharing protocols for use across and to be shared between all the Australian jurisdictions.

**c) The level and impact of coordination, accountability for, and access to services and policy responses across the Commonwealth, state and territory governments, local governments, non-government and community organisations, and business.**

**THE NEED TO IMPROVE UNDERSTANDINGS OF AND ACCESS TO THE FAMILY LAW SYSTEM**

The Australian Government should develop a national education and awareness campaign to enhance community understanding of the family law system. A national education and awareness campaign should be developed in co-design with cultural and linguistically diverse (CALD), LGBTIQ and disability organisations, the state and territory governments as well as any other relevant organisations and bodies. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across Australia should be provided with the resources to develop and deliver educational and awareness campaigns consistent with self-determination principles.

There is a need to ensure that all information on the family law system is easy to access, clear and culturally safe, and that these resources must be available in a range of languages and formats. Our research suggests that particular attention should be drawn to the need to develop resources for CALD communities and women with disability. Access to information cannot be limited to written information.

Access to accurate and timely legal information is important for all those who have experienced family violence. It is likely to be particularly important for women from CALD communities who might believe or be told that they have no legal rights in relation to family violence. Women who migrate to Australia and experience family violence face specific insecurities and barriers in accessing assistance (Segrave 2017). These barriers are often heightened for women who are on a temporary visa (Segrave 2017). Women often fear that disclosure will impact on their pathway to permanent residency and citizenship and/or that it may result in separation from Australian-born children. Women are often unable to access information about legal and migration rights (or may be provided with misinformation by their abusive partner). When initial disclosures to police or other services do not result in an effective response, women may be concerned that they have no legal rights in Australia over their children, their own safety or their residency. We recommend that readily available and accessible resources be developed to ensure the provision of accessible information about the family law system to women from CALD communities. These resources should be developed and disseminated in consultation with members of the CALD community. As recommended by Segrave (2017:4) there is a need for a diverse and direct communication strategy that is provided pre-departure and on arrival, and then via a comprehensive multi-platform approach in order to reach women who may be quite isolated. It must include ensuring appropriate resourcing of specialised, expert support who can scaffold connection to the system and informed decision making for victim survivors: via legal aid, court support networks (such as Court Network).

We recommend the Australian Government develop a national education and awareness campaign to enhance community understanding of the family law system.

## THE NEED FOR AN AUSTRALIAN INTEGRATED FAMILY VIOLENCE COURT MODEL

There is a need to reconsider the traditional boundaries between the Federal family court system and state-based criminal justice and civil systems. All of these hold responsibilities for responding to cases occurring in the context of family violence. This results in a situation where a person experiencing family violence may be required to move between a number of courts to have their matters heard, including a state magistrate's court, a district (County) court, a state supreme court, state children's court and/or federal family court (ALRC/NSWLRC 2010: 132). As noted in Fitz-Gibbon's (2016: 27) Churchill Fellowship report 'for most persons the court environment is a foreign and confusing setting, complexities which are further exacerbated when a person is required to navigate multiple jurisdictions and courtrooms'. Similarly, the Victorian Royal Commission (2016: Summary – 26) found 'procedural and jurisdictional features of the courts have the potential to produce adverse consequences in family violence proceedings'. Similar conclusions were reached in the Luke Batty Inquest (Gray 2015: 105).

In recognition of the need to minimise complexities and fragmentation in legal processes, internationally specialist court approaches have been developed which bring together multiple areas of law within the one court setting. For example, in the United States, the integrated domestic violence court model allows for criminal, civil and family law matters to be dealt with in the one courtroom (for further details on this model, see Fitz-Gibbon 2016). The 'one court' model was considered by the ALRC/NSWLRC (2010: 145) which concluded that it would be plausible in the Australian context albeit that implementation would give rise to 'significant' challenges in terms of the constitutional division of power between the Commonwealth and the states, and the cost of establishing a national specialist family violence court framework. This was also a key recommendation in the Coroner's report into the death of Luke Batty (Gray 2015: 105).

In the meantime, there remains a need, in line with previous inquiries and reform activities, to upskill actors in the Family Law system (including judicial officers, legal practitioners and court report writers) to deliver domestic and family violence-informed responses in Family Law proceedings. Ensuring domestic and family violence-informed Family Law responses are critical in minimising the well-established risk of post separation abuse (Bagshaw et al, 2011; Holt, 2017). This requires upskilling around the screening for and identification of domestic and family violence along with risk management and monitoring that is consistent with recent Australian policy and practice reforms guiding the delivery of integrated service responses to domestic and family violence along with relevant information sharing.

We recommend that a review be undertaken at the Commonwealth level to develop an Australian integrated family violence court model. The developed model should:

- consider what legislative amendments are required to facilitate the inclusion and resolution of family law matters at the state level for cases involving family violence,
- propose a way forward in accommodating the constitutional division of powers between Commonwealth and State laws with the aim of minimising the fragmented and complex web of court processes that persons experiencing family violence are presently expected to navigate.

An integrated family violence court model would facilitate specialisation among all legal practitioners involved in a family violence matter. It is essential to ensure that all members of the judiciary, legal practitioners and court professionals who engage with persons involved in high-risk family violence matters have the relevant expertise and skills to identify and understand risk, assess and case manage dynamic risk in the context of family law system decisions and orders, engaging in triaging and case management.

As part of the review process the Australian Government should ensure that all family court premises and other state and territory courts used for family laws matters are safe for attendees, including ensuring the availability and suitability of safe waiting areas, rooms for co-located service providers, safe entrances and



exit options, child-friendly spaces, and multi-lingual and multi-format signage, ensuring safe architectural design should be undertaken in consultation with specialist family violence and women's services as well as representatives from ATSI and CALD communities.

**d) The way that health, housing, access to services, including legal services, and women's economic independence impact on the ability of women to escape domestic violence.**

There has been increasing recognition of the significance of economic independence in achieving freedom from family violence. Economic abuse is now clearly recognised as a form of intimate partner and family violence that occurs within the broader system of coercive control. This type of abuse is now recognised specifically in legislation addressing family violence in most States. While this form of abuse affects all women experiencing domestic and family violence, there is a need to focus targeted resources on women who may face additional exposure to this form of abuse. The use of economic abuse by perpetrators is considered to be a primary tactic of subordination and control (Stark 2007).

The Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence (2016, Chapter 21, 31) drew attention to the way economic vulnerability is compounded by factors such as disability, race and age and how economically abusive behaviours threaten victims' potential for self-sufficiency. In recent research and engagement with women with disability (Maher et al 2018), issues of economic abuse were consistently raised, including the misappropriation of disability and/or carer support payments. In response to this, supported by the Victorian Women's Trust, we developed The [Identifying Economic Abuse toolkit](#) (McGowan et al. 2019a), intended to function as a support for women with disability to identify economic abuse where it is present in their relationships. Tailored resources such as this toolkit aim to assist women and support workers in both specialist and mainstream contexts, to identify harm where it exists and seek appropriate responses to it. The development of such resources works to lessen the impact of siloed knowledges across the family violence, disability and health sectors (McGowan et al. 2019b). In their review of the Common Risk Assessment Framework McCulloch et al. stress the importance of 'building shared understandings of family violence' (2016, 15). They contend that a shared 'language of risk can...provide an effective means of communication between service providers and victim/survivors and be affirming and educative for victims of family violence' (2016, 15; Backhouse and Toivonen, 2018, 8-9).

It is hoped that the toolkit will contribute to the broader aims of risk assessment, namely, a shared understanding of economically abusive behaviours and risk amongst women with disability and service providers as well as targeted and effective referrals for women (Backhouse and Toivonen, 2018, 8). Greater commitment to the economic independence and security of women with disability is critical in supporting them to live safe and secure lives, free from violence.

[We recommend the Australian Government invest in a national education campaign focused on the economic security of women with disability as a measure to address and ameliorate the prevalence and impacts of domestic violence on women with disability.](#)

**e) All forms of violence against women, including, but not limited to, coercive control and technology-facilitated abuse.**

Australia has yet to grapple in a coordinated and meaningful way with the pervasiveness and severity of coercive control in the lives of abused Australian women. The evidence base on coercive control is well established in Australia and internationally, but it is yet to be translated into comprehensive training of frontline practitioners outside the specialist family violence sector. There is limited understanding of how frontline practitioner identify, assess and manage coercive control.

[We recommend the next National Plan include a commitment to build the evidence base on how frontline practitioner can effectively identify, assessment and manage risk associated with coercive control.](#)

## THE NEED TO EXERCISE CAUTION AHEAD OF IMPLEMENTING AN OFFENCE OF COERCIVE CONTROL

Over the last 10 years, new offences have been introduced to varying degrees across the United Kingdom, Europe and Australia (Douglas 2015) and debated in the US (Tuerkheimer 2007). While these offences have taken varied forms—in terms of the label applied to the abusive behaviour they are designed to address and in terms of their inclusivity (e.g., some are gender-specific and/or apply only to those in intimate partner relationships)—at the core of each has been an argument that a new category of criminal offence is necessary to capture a pattern of abusive behaviours the law is otherwise incapable of responding to.

In Australia, coercive and controlling behaviours are recognised as abuse in the definition of family violence in the majority of Australian states and territories. Tasmania is the only jurisdiction that has introduced a specific criminal offence to cover this form of family violence. (*Family Violence Act 2004 (Tas)*). Neither the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence (2016) nor the Queensland Special Taskforce (2015) recommended an offence of coercive control.

Despite a significant law reform activity internationally and debate within Australia, there is as yet limited evidence to suggest that *more law* in this area will improve justice responses for victims and/or enhance perpetrator accountability.

The successful operation of an offence of coercive control would rely upon victims being willing and able to involve police. This is problematic. Research has consistently documented the many reasons why women victims of intimate partner violence are hesitant to engage police. They fear gender bias, discrimination, not being believed, that the abuse will escalate following police intervention, or that they will be blamed for the abuse committed against them. For women within a coercively controlled relationship, these barriers to seeking help are particularly insurmountable. Women who have been coercively controlled are more likely to experience isolation and to lack social support networks and independent decision-making skills (Stark, 2009). The introduction of a new offence alone is unlikely to reduce the reluctance of women victims to engage the police.

Victims who do contact the police are likely to come up against additional barriers to justice. For example, the implementation of this offence relies on a police officer's ability to identify the potential presence of coercive and controlling behaviour, elicit information from the victim and correctly assess that pattern of behaviour. This requires that officers move away from assessing a particular "incident" and instead interpret a series of interrelated events and the harm that flows from these. Effectively educating frontline police on the gender dynamics at play in coercive control situations and enhancing their ability to identify such behaviour will require a long-term commitment to specialist training. This has yet to happen across Australia.

For cases that proceed beyond the policing stage and into the criminal courtroom, a key issue is how to prove coercion. The difficulties women victims face in documenting their abuse should not be overlooked. The offence of coercive control focuses on a pattern of abusive behaviour. This may involve unremarkable acts that, when viewed in isolation, are not criminal. Rather, it is about analysing behaviour that forms a pattern of abuse. As such, the very same barriers that have traditionally hindered women's access to justice are likely to persist, despite the existence of a new offence.

Recourse to the law remains one of the central planks of policy responses to intimate partner violence. Our research demonstrates why more law of this kind is not the answer to improving those responses (Walklate, Fitz-Gibbon and McCulloch, 2018). The creation of any new offence in this field places women squarely within the domain of criminal justice. Yet, the difficulties faced by women in dealing with criminal justice systems are both well-known and profound (on this, see further Walklate and Fitz-Gibbon, 2019: 101). The creation of a new offence does not deal with any of the well-documented concerns women have for not engaging with the criminal justice process and, as Douglas (2018) has observed, may also create new opportunities for

what she has termed 'legal systems abuse': perpetrators using the legal system to further assert control over their partners.

We urge Australian jurisdictions to be cautious. There may be a place for coercive control in law. But we believe a more effective role for this concept may lie in better-informed expert testimony presented to the court in the case of very serious offences. Law reforms should be evidence-based and informed by an understanding of the problems the reform seeks to address. Policymakers must also look beyond the criminal law as a "quick fix" to a long-standing social problem and instead strengthen civil remedies, service access and delivery.

Through the findings of this Inquiry, we recommend the Australian Government cautions the States and Territory Governments' against the introduction of a stand-alone offence of coercive and controlling behaviour.

**f) The adequacy of the qualitative and quantitative evidence base around the prevalence of domestic and family violence and how to overcome limitations in the collection of nationally consistent and timely qualitative and quantitative data including, but not limited to, court, police, hospitalisation and housing.**

#### **THE NEED TO BUILD THE NATIONAL EVIDENCE BASE NEEDED TO INFORM PREVENTION**

There is a critical opportunity to build the national evidence base needed to inform the prevention of, and improved responses to domestic and family violence. The Australian Government must invest in building and coordinating the data necessary to monitor, measure and evaluate the impact of national and state level reforms in practice. The next national plan provides an opportunity to this. It is commendable that a program of research has accompanied National Plan activities to date and we stress the importance of research as a central feature of the forthcoming National Plan.

The data generated from this program of research, generated through independent research projects and sector evaluations, is largely siloed, archived on a project by project basis, and has not been coordinated or collated in any centralised way.

There is an ongoing risk is that this research data, needed to realise the impact of the significant government investment in reform, will not be accessible moving forward. Further, inefficiencies in research and evaluation arise where:

- research is not sequenced or clustered in the optimum way
- there is duplication of effort
- research datasets are not shared among or accessible for future researchers
- research data sets are/ cannot be linked across government departments.

There is a need to develop a systematic and coordinated approach to family violence reform data collection, collation, and dissemination, that would have real benefits for facilitating future research, avoiding duplication of research effort and ensuring that the impacts of the government's commitment in this space can be accurately measured.

We recommend the Australian Government invest in a national domestic and family violence research data archive. This data archive should be set up to facilitate data storing, linkage and sharing with the aim of building the long-term evidence base required to measure the prevalence of, and prevention of family and domestic violence.

## THE NEED TO CONSIDER THE INTRODUCTION OF A NATIONAL INTIMATE PARTNER HOMICIDE INDEX

Intimate partner violence is the biggest preventative threat to the health, wellbeing and safety of Australian women. In Australia, approximately one woman is killed every week by a male intimate partner, and the total cost of violence against women and their children in Australia was estimated at \$22 billion (at a minimum) in 2015-16 by KPMG. Eliminating family homicide requires national leadership, coordination and investment to build the evidence base needed to identify definitive points of intervention to prevent violence and change perpetrator behaviour.

Australia currently has no national toll recording violence against women and children and has no national organisation dedicated to the detailed reporting of femicide, family violence and the killing of children. Increasingly there has been global attention on the prevalence of women's deaths resulting from intimate partner violence. Campaigns such as 'Counting Dead Women' in Australia, the 'Femicide Census' in England, the Canadian Femicide Observatory, and the emergence of family violence death review teams globally, build on the work of agencies such as the United Nations and the World Health Organisation, highlighting the fatal consequences of intimate partner violence for women around the world. Our research has documented the benefits and limits of 'counting' intimate partner homicide (Walklate et al. 2020).

Tolls can be effective tool for prevention and awareness if developed from a meaningful framework. State-based and national road tolls have driven public awareness surrounding road deaths and generated new safety principles for their prevention. A national intimate partner homicide index will provide national recognition of the lives lost and a commitment to building the evidence base required to prevent future deaths.

Establishing a national index for intimate partner homicide responds directly to calls at the state and national level to better understand and respond to family violence risks. The findings will have direct policy and service relevance in each Australian state and territory. The Index will produce guidance targeted at improving family violence risk identification, assessment and management processes for women and children, and enhanced perpetrator interventions.

The Index could bring together data held by different organisations and research bodies at the state and national level. The lack of systematic overview and coordination of data relating to family homicides in Australia presently results in inefficiencies and lost opportunities to build the most comprehensive evidence base needed to prevent these killings. The Index could draw data from a range of sources including state-based death review committees, Coronial court inquiries and findings, state and territory criminal justice system agencies, and the Australian Death Review Network.

We recommend that the Australian Government considers introducing a national intimate partner homicide index.

### **g) The efficacy of perpetrator intervention programs and support services for men to help them change their behaviour.**

## THE NEED TO BUILD A NATIONAL EVIDENCE BASE ON EFFECTIVE PERPETRATOR INTERVENTIONS

The Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence (2016) highlighted the importance of keeping perpetrators 'in view' and of developing a suite of intervention options to more effectively engage with and hold perpetrators of family violence to account. In the intervening years across Australia there has been a welcomed breakdown in the siloed barriers between those who work with men and those who work with women and children, alongside a wider appreciation and recognition of the need to trial and introduce new men's behaviour change programs (MBCPs) for working with men who use family violence.

To date, there have been a significant number of MBCPs trialled, piloted and/or funded by the government, however, with the exception of work funded by ANROWS under the perpetrator research stream, there

remains a critical lack of evidence as to what works in engaging men in behaviour change. While our recently completed ANROWS project (Fitz-Gibbon et al 2020) found that timely and consistent consequences, early referral, and availability of perpetrator interventions were key elements of a best practice approach to the sentencing of family violence perpetrators, there is limited understanding (beyond the UK Project Mirabal findings, which was focused on men not necessarily engaged with the criminal justice system) as to what impact and effect MBCPs have on a man's use of violence and level of risk. Building this evidence base is critical to inform future reform activity and funding decisions at the state and national levels.

A key challenge here remains the utilisation of many MBCPs as a one-size fits all approach, combining men from diverse backgrounds (including cultural and linguistic diversity, different perpetrator profiles, men with physical and/or cognitive disabilities) in mainstream programs. Evaluation of such programs often cannot account for the diversity of program participants in the breakdown of findings due to small participant numbers, rendering many evaluation findings inconclusive or non-significant. Further, the majority of existing program evaluations are funded to examine short-term outcomes, often limited to observable behaviour change at program exit and potentially short-term follow up, leaving questions around the longevity of any behaviour change and its long-term impact on family safety and wellbeing. Further, while research evidence highlights the importance of a dedicated victim advocacy/ family safety worker component in each MBCP (Chung et al, 2020, Meyer et al, 2020), this component continues to vary across programs. Gaps in the current evidence base should be addressed through the next National Plan.

Through the work of the next National Plan, we recommend the Australian Government should fund further trials of new perpetrator intervention models, along with long term evaluations (of at least 24 months). Such trials and evaluations should include programs specifically catering for the needs of:

- culturally and linguistically diverse men (this must consider shared language skills and the capacity of each group participant to engage with and process program content delivered in English or an alternative language that meets the needs of all program participants), and
- men with cognitive disabilities (including traumatic and acquired brain injuries) to ensure all group participants share a similar capacity to engage with and process delivered program content).

## **THE NEED FOR IMPROVED PERPETRATOR ACCOUNTABILITY IN COURT PROCESSES**

Our recently completed ANROWS project examining the views of Australian judicial officers on domestic and family violence perpetrator interventions (Fitz-Gibbon et al 2020) found that:

- There is still limited knowledge about how judicial officers view or understand perpetrator interventions, and how they use them in their practice.
- There is limited knowledge about what judicial officers believe the appropriate role for courts in relation to using, facilitating access to, and monitoring compliance with these interventions is.

Our research found that judicial officers at all levels (Magistrates, County and Supreme Court) have limited access to information about histories of perpetrator interventions in domestic and family violence cases. While judges recognise that prior histories of perpetrator interventions can be used as an indicator of risk and can be a valuable guide as to what sentencing intervention might work best in the current circumstance, judicial officers noted that this information is rarely presented to the court (Fitz-Gibbon et al 2020). This was attributed to time pressures and inadequate provision of information.

We recommend the Australian Government should facilitate the development of judicial guidance on seeking and making use of perpetrator intervention histories in all domestic and family violence matters, including in sentencing, to assist in judicial decision making.

We recommend the Australian Government should coordinate the development and maintenance of a centralised online register of perpetrator intervention programs, to be coordinated through the relevant



government departments, to ensure that information is readily available to support judicial decision-making and referral in domestic and family violence matters. This should be undertaken in partnership with relevant state and territory departments.

There is presently no nationally consistent framework for the approach taken by judicial officers to monitoring or supervising family violence perpetrators post sentence. Our ANROWS research found that there is considerable variation in how judicial officers understood the scope and extent of their role in facilitating perpetrator accountability (Fitz-Gibbon et al 2020). While some judicial officers believe it would be undesirable for active monitoring of high-risk perpetrators to become part of the judicial role, other judicial officers recognised the importance of the active judicial role in enhancing the effectiveness of, and compliance with a perpetrator intervention (Fitz-Gibbon et al 2020).

There is an opportunity for Australia to continue their leadership in the space of perpetrator interventions by developing clear judicial guidance on the supervision of family violence perpetrators post sentence.

We recommend that consideration be given by courts and judicial educational bodies to a broader discussion about the role of judicial officers in creating system accountability, to develop consistent outcomes across jurisdictions and national knowledge and practice about perpetrator intervention programs and outcomes.

#### **h) The experiences of all women, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, rural women, culturally and linguistically diverse women, LGBTQI women, women with a disability, and women on temporary visas.**

#### **WOMEN WITH A DISABILITY: THE NEED TO ENHANCE INTEGRATION OF THE FAMILY VIOLENCE AND DISABILITY SERVICE SECTORS**

Our ANROWS research in 2018 (Maher et al 2018) found that women with disability experience ongoing issues in navigating across and between family violence and disability services. Knowledge of available supports, such as the additional financial support available for women with disability leaving a situation of family violence, was uneven across sectors and organisations. Our research found that integrated approaches to training and responses for family violence and disability workforces with opportunities for shared skill building and enhancement of service approaches were required and should form part of an active and on-going workforce plan for both sectors. This is particularly critical as research consistently shows women with disability experience significant rates of intimate partner abuse and patterns of abuse which are distinctive and may not be well understood in mainstream family services.

We recommend that through the next National Plan the Australian Government support the development of integrated service responses for women with disability and consider enhanced opportunities for cross sector training and workforce deployment.

#### **ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER WOMEN: THE NEED TO INVEST IN CULTURALLY SAFE, COMMUNITY-LED SUPPORT MECHANISMS AND SERVICE RESPONSES**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are 32 times more likely to be hospitalised (Department of the Prime Minister & Cabinet 2017) and six times more likely to be the victims of homicide, with 70 to 90 percent of these homicides occurring in the context of domestic and family violence (Bricknell 2019). Yet, Australia's research evidence as it relates to community-led, culturally safe responses to family violence that address the support needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals, families and wider communities remains limited. Our research has shown that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women experiencing domestic and family violence face disproportionate challenges to help-seeking, housing stability, economic independence and safety (Meyer, forthcoming). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, men and children continue to suffer the persistent effects of colonisation and intergenerational trauma. Our research further shows that government departments continue to deliver mainstream service responses in Aboriginal

and Torres Strait islander communities that fail to address community needs for culturally safe service responses guided by self-determination (Meyer, forthcoming; Meyer & Hine, 2018).

We recommend the Australian Government allocates dedicated funding to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations for the delivery of culturally safe service responses to individuals and communities affected by domestic and family violence. This should include:

- Culturally safe victim support services,
- Culturally safe perpetrator interventions,
- Culturally safe, trauma informed recovery support,
- Culturally safe responses to address the wider impact of individual and community level marginalisation disproportionately affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

### **CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE WOMEN AND WOMEN ON TEMPORARY VISAS: THE IMPACT OF MIGRATION LAW AND REGULATION, FORCED MARRIAGE AND OTHER TRAFFICKING AND SLAVERY-LIKE OFFENCES**

The Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence (2016) recognised that migrant and refugee women are more likely to face barriers to obtaining help for family violence, and that there is a severe and specific impact of family violence for those who hold temporary visas. The consistent challenge for all Australian states and territories is that the operation of Immigration law and regulation is the jurisdiction of the Commonwealth, and yet it is migration issues and the structure of the system that has been shown to specifically create leverage for perpetrators of violence to act with impunity (Segrave 2017, Segrave 2019). Nationally there is recognition that temporary migrants, and their children, who experience family violence have specific limitations regarding eligibility for services and government support. These limitations include access to financial support, health care and housing which compromises access to safety and protection (Segrave 2017, National Advocacy Group 2019; RCFV 2016).

Associate Professor Segrave is a member of the National Advocacy Group on Women on Temporary Visas Experiencing Violence [National Advocacy Group]. This is a national collective of researchers, social service providers, lawyers and advocates who have identified the specific challenges experienced by women on temporary visas in their respective work. In 2019 this group developed a *Blueprint for Reform: Removing Barriers to Safety for Victims/Survivors of Domestic and Family Violence who are on Temporary Visas* (NAG 2019). In this submission, we endorse the priorities identified by the National Action Group and reiterate the recommendations, as well as endorsing the detailed recommendations in the Blueprint (NAG 2019).

We also draw attention to the ways in which temporary migration, in particular, appears to enable the conditions and circumstances within which trafficking and slavery-like offences (under the Commonwealth Criminal Code s170 & s171) offences may occur (Segrave 2017, Segrave et al 2018). While there is now recognition within the National Plan of Action that these cases may be deemed ‘complex forms of violence’ there is a need to cautious review of how offences are categorised and, more urgently, how women’s safety is prioritised. We note, in particular, that as the National Action Plan to Combat Modern Slavery 2020-24 is close to finalisation, the importance of focusing on the conditions that give rise to abuse and exploitation, and to ensuring that women’s safety is the primary focus. We urge against a commitment to simply ‘training’ service providers on these offences: but creating knowledge around pathways for potential victims and the implications of these pathways. We note in particular that the current response to trafficking and slavery offences includes a support program that is not designed to support women and their children who have experienced family violence.

We note that following the Royal Commission into Family Violence (2016) recommending that forced marriage be recognised as a “statutory example of family violence within the Family Violence Protection Act (2008) (Vic)”, this change was legislated in 2018. The Royal Commission recommendation made no reference to the existing Commonwealth legislation and the criminal justice and welfare infrastructure established at

the federal level to respond to forced marriage. In 2010, S. 270 of the Commonwealth Criminal Code Act (1995) (Cth) defines forced marriage within the trafficking and slavery-like practices offences. The response to these offences is overseen by the Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Branch within the Department of Home Affairs. There are clear differences between the state level and Commonwealth responses which require review in relation to implementation, with a specific view to consider the implications for victims, as well as for policing personnel and the broader family violence sector.

There is a need for evidence-based reform in the sector, as we have argued in relation to changes to sponsorship provisions (Segrave et al 2016). There is currently no national data on women from migrant and refugee communities experiencing family violence including no specific data regarding women who hold temporary visas and are experiencing abuse.

We recommend the Australian Government:

- Improve the migration system so that all women on temporary visas who experience domestic, family and sexual violence and their dependants can access protections, services and justice. (NAG 2019)
- Ensure eligibility and access to services and government support are based on women's needs for safety and recovery, regardless of their migration status. (NAG 2019)
- Ensure that women on temporary visas who have experienced domestic, family and sexual violence and their dependants have immediate and full access to safety, protection, justice and fully funded specialist support with demonstrated gender expertise and cultural competency. (NAG 2019)
- Implement an effective, community-specialist led program of developing better tools for communicating information to migrant and refugee women, that including an array of mediums, media and messaging. These efforts should be informed by and developed women from target communities and populations.
- Review the complex overlap of family violence as a state and territory offence and trafficking and slavery-like offences under the Criminal Code. This requires significant investment in evidence, including independent review of the existing Commonwealth response to trafficking and slavery-like practices that specifically considers the design and implantation of the investigative and victim support processes and programs.
- Ensure a commitment towards nationally consistent and publicly available data regarding the specific experiences of migrant and refugee women of family violence and abuse.

**i) The impact of natural disasters and other significant events such as COVID-19, including health requirements such as staying at home, on the prevalence of domestic violence and provision of support services.**

The coronavirus pandemic is causing uncertain and stressful times for all members of the community. This is likely to be significantly heightened for families experiencing family violence. National and international research evidences the gendered impacts of natural disasters, including the higher prevalence of family violence in the aftermath of such events (see, for example, Parkinson and Zara 2013). Here, financial stress arising from a change in employment and income has been recognised as a precursor to family violence, femicide and filicide. This is particularly critical in the rapidly changing context of the coronavirus pandemic, which will see many Australian families affected by a reduction or loss of income. While this will affect households across the board, low income families and those with insecure employment arrangements will be disproportionately affected by financial stress.

Periods of restrictions and lockdown pose significant health and safety risks for Australian women and children experiencing family violence. In a country which already experiences one woman a week being killed by a man, usually an intimate partner or ex-partner, and where one child a fortnight is killed by a parent, we cannot underestimate the combined risks that physical isolation, financial stress and family violence have already had, and will continue to have throughout the pandemic.

## IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE NATURE, FREQUENCY AND SEVERITY OF VIOLENCE

Our research in Victoria and Queensland demonstrates an increase in the prevalence, severity and complexity of violence against women (VAW) reported to practitioners since the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis (Pfitzner, Fitz-Gibbon and True, 2020; Pfitzner, Fitz-Gibbon, Meyer and True, 2020).

Our Victorian research demonstrates an increase in the prevalence, severity and complexity of violence against women (VAW) reported to practitioners since the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis (Pfitzner, Fitz-Gibbon, Meyer and True, 2020). Following the COVID-19 restrictions in Victoria, services working with perpetrators of family violence reported an increase in service use. Findings from the first survey of 166 Victorian frontline practitioners supported to women experiencing violence during the COVID-19 shutdowns revealed the following:

- An increase in the frequency and severity of VAW
- 59% of Victorian practitioners surveyed reported that COVID-19 has increased the frequency of VAW
- 50% of Victorian practitioners surveyed reported it has increased the severity of VAW
- An increase in the complexity of women's needs noted by 86% of respondents
- An increase in first-time family violence reporting by women noted by 42% of respondents

The Queensland survey data further supported this perceived increase and escalation in violence by domestic and family violence practitioners during the period of COVID-19 restrictions. Just over one third of Survey One respondents (36%, n=20) said that COVID-19 has led to an escalation of violence for their clients. Concerningly, while Queensland eased COVID-19 lockdown restrictions in May (Queensland Government, n.d.), this perceived escalation in violence experienced by women continued with almost double the numbers of practitioners in Survey Two (70%, n=82) identifying this as the key issue for their clients.

Describing the escalation of violence observed from client presentations during the pandemic, Survey Two practitioners reported the following forms of abuse as being perpetrated:

- 81% reported an escalation of controlling behaviour and manipulation (n=94)
- 49% reported an escalation of perpetrators using COVID-19 as a reason for any form of abuse (n=57)
- 36% reported an escalation from non-physical to physical forms of abuse (n=42)
- 33% reported an escalation of perpetrators' threats to kill the client (n=38)
- 28% reported an escalation of clients' suicidal ideations (n=33)
- 21% reported an escalation of perpetrators' threats to children (n=24)
- 9% reported perpetrators' abuse towards children that had not been experienced before the pandemic (n=11)

Survey Two data also highlighted that three months into the period of restrictions clients increasingly presented with additional concerns. 76% of Survey Two practitioners (n=89) said that clients were experiencing an increase in mental health issues and 53% (n=62) reported an increase in drug and alcohol use. Likewise, the economic impact of COVID-19 on women experiencing violence became apparent at this point with 75% of Survey Two practitioners (n=88) reporting employment and 69% (n=81) housing as key concerns for their clients during the pandemic. This practitioner view supports mounting evidence of the ways in which COVID-19 is exacerbating existing gender inequalities. The specific implications this will have on women in terms of housing, job and income insecurity, health and wellbeing are beginning to emerge (Milford & Anderson, 2020; OECD, 2020).

Victorian and Queensland practitioners both reported new forms of violence that perpetrators are using during the COVID-19 restrictions (Pfitzner, Fitz-Gibbon and True, 2020; Pfitzner, Fitz-Gibbon, Meyer and True, 2020). Victorian survey respondents described the ways in which perpetrators were using the restrictions and threat of COVID-19 infection, purposeful or otherwise, to restrict women's movement, to gain access to women's residences and to coerce women into residing with them if they usually reside separately (Pfitzner, Fitz-Gibbon and True, 2020).

In their responses to Survey Two, Queensland practitioners were asked to nominate forms of COVID-19-related abuse from a list of seven items and/or to describe the form of violence in an open-text response. Practitioners reported the following forms of violence against women experienced by clients during this period:

- 83% reported an increase in perpetrator anger/violence allegedly due to reduced income or loss of job due to COVID-19 (n=95)
- 68% reported perpetrators having more time to drink or take drugs due to a reduction in work (n=77)
- 68% reported perpetrators using COVID-19 as a reason to not allow her to leave the home (n=61)
- 10% reported perpetrators threatening to infect their partners and/or their children with coronavirus (n=11)
- 9% reported perpetrators threatening to bring infected people to the house (n=10)
- 6% reported perpetrators not letting their partner use a hand sanitiser or stopping her from protecting herself and/or her children (n=7)

These findings demonstrate how perpetrators of intimate partner violence and other forms of violence against women have adapted their abusive behaviours, finding new opportunities to control and isolate their victims during the COVID-19 restrictions.

[We recommend the Australian Government promptly distribute the existing funding support packages for the family violence sector to allow them to meet increased demand during COVID-19 and provide effective and timely responses to women and children experiencing family violence.](#)

## **IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON SHARED CARE ARRANGEMENTS AND THE WEAPONISING OF CHILDREN**

Research has repeatedly highlighted perpetrators' strategic use of children and child contact arrangements to exercise ongoing abuse and control over the non-abusive parent post-separation. The control measures implemented by Australian state and federal governments to manage the spread of COVID-19, including physical distancing and stay-at-home restrictions, have offered a welcome tool for perpetrators of family violence to further manipulate, control and terrorise women and children who are subject to shared care arrangements (see also United Nations, 2020).

Our Queensland study presents emerging evidence on the heightened risks and experiences of violence for children during this period (Pfitzner, Fitz-Gibbon, Meyer and True, 2020). In Survey Two, 21% of practitioners surveyed reported an escalation of perpetrators' threats to children (n=24) and 9% reported perpetrators' abuse towards children that had not been experienced before the pandemic (n=11). In terms of detailing what form the abuse against children took, 10% of Queensland practitioner respondents reported perpetrators threatening to infect their partners and/or children with coronavirus (n=11) and 6% reported perpetrators not letting their partner use a hand sanitiser or stopping her from protecting herself and/or her children against the coronavirus (n=7).

While perpetrators commonly use children to coerce and control their victims, including undermining the mothers' relationship with their children, violating shared care arrangements, withholding children and threatening to harm children (Bagshaw et al., 2011; Campo, 2015; Holt, 2017), our Queensland study revealed that the COVID-19 pandemic has increased such opportunities for perpetrators to do so. These findings indicate the ways in which the COVID-19 restrictions have facilitated an increase in coercive and



controlling forms of domestic and family violence post-separation and substantially affected women and children's lives throughout the pandemic to date.

The Australian Government should immediately increase funding to community legal services to meet the demand of shared care related enquiries during the COVID-19 pandemic. This will ensure legal support can be provided and minimise risks to children.

## **IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE SAFE HOUSING SHORTAGE AND WOMEN'S RISK OF HOMELESSNESS**

Findings from our Victorian survey of practitioners responding to women experiencing violence during the initial stage 3 restrictions revealed a perceived lack of safe accommodation options for women who are unable to remain at home during the restrictions (Pfitzner, Fitz-Gibbon and True, 2020). Practitioners believed there is a need for the government to urgently address the significant safe-housing shortage that pre-existed in Victoria but has been heightened to critical levels during the COVID-19 pandemic. Numerous Victorian practitioners noted that securing safe-housing options and availability during the COVID-19 restriction period posed a significant challenge.

Similar findings emerged from the Queensland data (Pfitzner, Fitz-Gibbon, Meyer and True, 2020). During the early stages of the lockdown in Queensland, practitioners observed that attaining safe housing was a priority for their clients, with 24% (n=13) of practitioners reporting access to ongoing accommodation and 18% (n=10) reporting access to temporary accommodation as key services gaps. In the second Queensland survey, some practitioners recognised that there had been a government contribution to securing more safe-housing options for women experiencing violence during the period of the pandemic (Department of Housing and Public Works, 2020; Queensland Government, 2020). However, the temporary nature of the accommodation offered was highlighted as problematic and the need for further funding was emphasised.

Relatedly, a major challenge is gaps in support including accommodation options for non-citizens without permanent residency. People experiencing family violence who hold temporary visas are often without a reliable or ongoing income, cannot access ongoing social security benefits and are therefore often unable to access longer-term subsidised accommodation options. This group of temporary migrants has been identified during this time as at significant risk of destitution and homelessness (Rushton, 2020).

These practitioner views support mounting evidence of the ways in which COVID-19 is exacerbating existing gender inequalities. The specific implications this will have on women in terms of housing, job and income insecurity, health and wellbeing are beginning to emerge.

There has been long-held recognition across Australia that there is a shortage of safe-housing options for women and children (see, for example, Flanagan, Blunden, Valentine and Henriette, 2019; RCFV, 2016; Special Taskforce on Domestic and Family Violence, 2015). Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, family violence was recognised as a key contributor to women and children's homelessness in Australia (Special Taskforce on Domestic and Family Violence, 2015; Tually et al., 2018) and our research has repeatedly shown that a lack of safe and sustainable housing solutions frequently forces women and children back into unsafe family and living arrangements (Meyer, 2014, 2015).

We recommend the Australian Government provide immediate support to women and children experiencing family violence by devoting additional funding for securing housing options.

## **IMPACT ON PERPETRATOR ACCOUNTABILITY AND HOLDING PERPETRATORS 'IN VIEW'**

Since the outset of the COVID-19 crisis and related restrictions there has been minimal attention paid to how this will impact responses to family violence perpetrators – in terms of the justice system's ability to hold perpetrators to account during the COVID-19 crisis and the wider family violence system's need to keep

perpetrators 'in view'. Both are critical to manage and monitor the identified heightened risk and dangerousness during this period of uncertainty.

Achieving perpetrator accountability and supporting perpetrators to change their actions was listed as one of six priority action areas by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Advisory Panel on reducing violence against women in their 2016 Final Report. Since then, all Australian state and territories have implemented family violence reforms to varying degrees to ensure that numerous 'check points' are embedded in the wider family violence system to keep perpetrators 'in view' at all times.

In 2016 the findings of the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence equally highlighted the need to break down silos in the family violence and wider service system to increase perpetrator visibility. This notion of increased perpetrator visibility relies on service system coordination, risk assessment and information sharing. While these principles remain valid, the extent to which they can be achieved is significantly hampered by the COVID-19 restrictions, which limit victims' ability to seek help and contribute to family and perpetrator invisibility. This raises the very real risk that new perpetrators will manage to remain invisible for longer. Patterns of escalation among known perpetrators may on the other hand go 'unchecked' for prolonged periods unless proactively monitored during this period of heightened risk.

One of the key ways in which known family violence perpetrators are held to account and kept in view is through their attendance at and participation in men's behaviour change programs (MBCPs). These programs are usually run in a weekly, group-based format and require men to physically attend group sessions as well as engage in short or long-term case management. Since the beginning of the Victorian restrictions, services delivering programs with perpetrators of family violence and practitioners offering face-to-face supports have had to reorient to deliver their services remotely. For instance, some men's intervention programs are adapting their strategies to reach known perpetrators who otherwise would be unsupported (Fitz-Gibbon, Burley and Meyer, 2020).

In our Queensland study, practitioners responding to Survey Two commented that restrictions around face-to-face service delivery have affected their area of practice while also creating new opportunities for service engagement (Pfitzner, Fitz-Gibbon, Meyer and True, 2020). Queensland examples provided included the remote delivery of men's behaviour change programs (MBCP) and (ex)partner contact to manage the safety of women and children linked to men in such programs. Practitioners reflected that when delivered remotely, these points of contact were not restricted by geographic and time challenges associated with face-to-face client meetings.

We believe these service innovations may lead to improvements in the future delivery of men's service and behaviour change interventions post COVID-19 restrictions, especially for clients in remote geographic areas. Given the heightened invisibility of perpetrators during the period of restrictions, it will be important to rigorously evaluate the benefits of any innovations operating during this period to maintain contact with perpetrators and ensure ongoing engagement (see also Fitz-Gibbon, Burley and Meyer, 2020).

[The Australian Government should continue to commit to a higher funding level for the Men's Referral Service \(MRS\), the MensLine and to men's behaviour change programs \(MBCPs\) to ensure that these services can adequately cater for increased demand.](#)

It is essential that the momentum of the work advanced nationally to keep perpetrators in view is not lost during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. There is no roadmap as to how this should be achieved but at a time when women and children face heightened risk and invisibility in their homes it is clear that we must prioritise and resource the monitoring, assessment and management of family violence perpetrator risk.

## **IMPACT ON WOMEN ON TEMPORARY VISAS**

Temporary migrants in Australia regardless of visa status, and before the pandemic, have long been disadvantaged by the system because they have no access to Centrelink, Medicare or housing. In the context

of COVID-19, a significant financial burden has been carried by temporary workers who were refused access to the federal support packages (JobKeeper and JobSeeker) for those out of work, or those who could not work due to the lockdown. Financial stress and increased alcohol consumption, combined with the lockdown and myriad compounding stress factors in the context of COVID-19, have resulted in escalating reports of violence and severity of family violence for temporary migrants. Service providers in Victoria reported a 20% increase in temporary visa holders coming forward needing assistance in the context of family violence, while Domestic Violence NSW reported that 60% of women on temporary visas they were supporting had less access to income, food and essentials (Rushton, 2020). The conditions for this group of women are significant, not least because there are no safe options: leaving a violent partner is inherently risky because of the absence of any guarantees of ongoing support, yet remaining with a violent partner is also significantly risky in terms of the immediate and long-term safety of women and their children. These conditions have escalated during the pandemic.

The Australian Government should consider extending financial support to all temporary migrants to relieve income and rent stress.

The Australian Government should review the specific provision of emergency relief funding to Red Cross, to ensure it is accessible and to identify whether women experiencing family violence are accessing this fund, and to consider whether and how this fund can continue to operate as per the extension of other financial support packages.

Eligibility and access to services and government support must be funded to ensure it is available to all those experiencing family violence, particularly housing and financial support;

The Australian Government should fund legal and specialist support with demonstrated gender and cultural competency to target efforts to reach women who are harder to reach for mainstream services, and to provide the complex care and support as women navigate federal and state legal systems and processes.

#### **j) The views and experiences of frontline services, advocacy groups and others throughout this unprecedented time.**

### **IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON SERVICE DELIVERY AND RESPONSES TO WOMEN EXPERIENCING VIOLENCE**

Like many other service areas, family violence specialist services in Victoria have had to act quickly during the initial stages of the COVID-19 restrictions to support continued client engagement and safety. Since the third week of March 2020 in Victoria, social restrictions have largely prevented face-to-face service delivery with victim support and perpetrator intervention services reoriented to deliver many of their services via online and telephone counselling.

In our study (Pfitzner, Fitz-Gibbon and True, 2020), practitioners indicated that many services that have traditionally provided in-person responses to women experiencing violence were transitioning to phone, video and messaging-based services during the COVID-19 pandemic. Given the timing of the survey, falling over a four-week period during the initial stage 3 restrictions in Victoria, practitioners were at different phases of their transition to remote-service delivery. Some of the remote-service practices that were reported in the survey had been developed specifically in response to the pandemic, while other organisations had utilised and expanded existing remote-service models.

Many Victorian practitioners reported that their organisations have sought to integrate family violence response into the essential services that have remained open during the shutdown, such as doctors' clinics, Centrelink and childcare services. Practitioners recognised that these service touchpoints offered potentially useful ways to access women and children who have experienced violence but who may otherwise be unable to seek help (see further Pfitzner, Fitz-Gibbon and True, 2020). Victorian practitioners also reported that their

organisations had created new alert systems for women to signal when they need support. These alerts include the use of code words in telephone and text communication as well as physical signals.

Similar findings emerged from our Queensland study (Pfitzner, Fitz-Gibbon, Meyer and True, 2020). In May 2020, at the time of the Survey Two data collection, Queensland practitioners reflected on a range of innovative service approaches that they had implemented or observed within the sector, including:

- A shift to online counselling
- Online men's behaviour change programs
- Increased cross-sector collaboration with Child Safety
- An increased outreach service to install safety features on clients' homes

Survey participants noted that some of these innovative approaches greatly benefited clients and may therefore be useful to retain after the COVID-19 restrictions as a way of continuing to offer clients more flexible and accessible services.

The Australian Government should invest in building the evidence base on the efficacy of family and domestic violence remote service provision. While it would need to be established whether technology facilitated service provision can ensure effective client engagement, support and perpetrator accountability, learnings from service provision under COVID-19 restrictions may be able to inform technology facilitated service provision trials in regional, rural and remote communities. These trials could include remote access to:

- Specialist family violence/ victim support services;
- Culturally specific family violence specialist services;
- Community legal services for victims and perpetrators;
- Men's Behaviour Change Programs/ casework, and
- Timely access to court mention dates that may be available sooner in larger courts which have more frequent sitting days, facilitated through videoconferencing via local police stations.

Service innovation during COVID-19 suggests that more services could potentially be delivered remotely to ensure wider service accessibility and client visibility. Because none of the current innovated service models have been evaluated while being implemented during COVID-19, it is important to consider their effectiveness in improving regional, rural and remote service accessibility in the form of service trials, accompanied by evaluation research to establish the evidence base necessary to inform future utilisation of technology facilitated service delivery.

## **IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE WELLBEING OF PRACTITIONERS RESPONDING TO WOMEN EXPERIENCING VIOLENCE**

Our research has revealed the risk of losing the essential workers on the frontlines of our family violence response, as a result of overwhelming workloads and potential burn out. The change in service delivery to largely remote formats, has required frontline workers providing crisis counselling and conducting risk assessment and planning with women experiencing violence to do so from home.

Several survey respondents to our Victorian survey reported that changes to the mode of service delivery as a result of COVID-19 restrictions have increased clinician stress and raised new challenges associated with setting practitioners up to work from home (Pfitzner, Fitz-Gibbon and True, 2020). Acknowledging that these services have typically not been delivered solely remotely, nor have workers typically been based from home (either completely or partially), the move required at the start of the COVID-19 restriction period represented a significant adjustment and cost for many services and individual practitioners. In addition to the breakdown of barriers between work and home, practitioners identified the additional toll on their time during this period. One practitioner, for example, described the additional time now required to support a woman at

court when taking out an intervention order (IVO), commenting that ‘There are more hours involved in achieving safety’.

As Australia navigates its response to the COVID-19 pandemic, there is a need to devote the funding and resources required to ensure the sector can meet the demands of the increasing number of women seeking help from violence while also ensuring the necessary health and wellbeing supports are available for family violence practitioners (Pfitzner, True, Fitz-Gibbon and Meyer, 2020). The specific of what support packages are required should be determined in close consultation with the family violence sector.

[We recommend the Australian Government invest in developing worker wellbeing packages to ensure that the wellbeing of family and domestic violence practitioners is ensured working from home.](#)

## **OPPORTUNITIES TO EVALUATE INNOVATIVE SERVICE MODELS**

The introduction of innovative service models during COVID-19 restrictions around face-to-face service access and delivery has demonstrated that a range of services addressing domestic and family violence perpetration and victimisation can be delivered remotely if absolutely necessary. While it would need to be established whether or not technology-facilitated service provision can ensure effective client engagement, support and perpetrator accountability, learnings from services provided under COVID-19 restrictions may be able to inform technology-facilitated service provision trials in regional, rural and remote communities.

These trials could include remote access to:

- Specialist family violence/victim support services
- Culturally specific family violence specialist services
- Community legal services for victims and perpetrators
- Men’s Behaviour Change Programs/casework
- Timely access to court mention dates that may be available sooner in larger courts which have more frequent sitting days, facilitated through videoconferencing via local police stations

Service innovation during COVID-19 suggests that more services could potentially be delivered remotely to ensure wider service accessibility and client visibility. Because none of the current innovated service models have been evaluated while being implemented during COVID-19, it is important to consider their effectiveness in improving regional, rural and remote service accessibility in the form of service trials, accompanied by evaluation research to establish the evidence base necessary to inform future utilisation of technology-facilitated service delivery. Work done prior to the pandemic by Robinson (2017) suggests that telephone contacting (instead of face-to-face visits) in one police force area, and domestic abuse complainants, results in improved satisfaction levels in service delivery for the latter.

### **k) An audit of previous parliamentary reviews focussed on domestic and family violence.**

Researchers from the Monash Gender and Family Violence Prevention Centre have previously made submissions to a range of state and Federal Inquiries and reviews relevant to the Terms of Reference of this Inquiry. These include:

- Fitz-Gibbon, K., McCulloch, J., Maher, JM., Meyer, S., Segrave, M., Pfitzner, N., Walklate, S. & McGowan, J. (2020). The Victorian Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor Submission: Monitoring the Family Violence Reforms. Submitted 20 July 2020.
- Fitz-Gibbon, K., Meyer, S., Segrave, M., Pfitzner, N., & True, J. *Select Committee on COVID-19 to inquire into the Australian Government’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic*. Submitted 28 May 2020.



- Maher, J M., McCulloch, J. & McGowan, J. (November 2019). *Submission to the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability*. Monash Gender and Family Violence Prevention Centre, Monash University.
- Walklate, S & Fitz-Gibbon, K. (2019) Written evidence submitted to the Joint Committee on Human Rights in respect of the Domestic Abuse Bill, 2019. United Kingdom.
- McCulloch, J., Fitz-Gibbon, K., Maher, JMM. & Walklate, S. (2018) Submission provided in response to: Call for femicide related data and information. United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, Geneva, Switzerland.
- Fitz-Gibbon, K., Maher, JMM., McCulloch, J., Segrave, M. and Walklate, S. (2017) *Submission in response to the Parliamentary Inquiry into a better family law system to support and protect those affected by family violence*. Australian Government, Canberra.
- Fitz-Gibbon, K., Walklate, S., McCulloch, J. and Maher, JM. (2017) *Submission in response to the Tasmanian Government Department of Justice – Family Violence: Strengthening our Legal Responses Consultation Paper*. Department of Justice, Tasmania.
- Fitz-Gibbon, K and Walklate, S (2017) *Submission to the Queensland Law Reform Commission: Review about whether a domestic violence disclosure scheme should be introduced in Queensland*. Department of Justice, Queensland.
- Fitz-Gibbon K, Walklate S, McCulloch J and Maher JMM (2016) *Submission to the Government of South Australia in response to the Domestic Violence Discussion Paper*. Government of South Australia, Adelaide

Researchers from the Monash Gender and Family Violence Prevention Centre have also made submissions to relevant international Inquires. These include:

- Fitz-Gibbon, K., Pfitzner, N., True, J., Walklate, S., Meyer, S., Segrave, M., Godfrey, B. & Richardson, J. (2020). Submission to the United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner to inform the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences in the upcoming report to the General Assembly. 'COVID-19 and the increase of domestic violence against women'. Submitted 30 June 2020.
- Fitz-Gibbon, K., Maher, JMM., McCulloch, J., Segrave, M. & Reeves, E. (2018) Review of the Family Law System: submission in response to the proposal, questions and analysis in the Discussion Paper. Australian Law Reform Commission, Canberra, Australia.
- Segrave, M., Maher, JMM., Fitz-Gibbon, K., Forbes Mewett, H., McCulloch, J., Pickering, S. & Wickes, R. (2018) Submission on the practice of dowry and the incidence of dowry-related abuse in Australia. Senate Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs, Australia.

Copies of any of these submissions can be made available upon request and are accessible via our Centre website: <https://www.monash.edu/arts/gender-and-family-violence/research-outputs>

## **I) Any other related matters.**

### **THE NEED FOR INDEPENDENT MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF ANY REFORMS**

Any reforms implemented as a result of this Parliamentary Inquiry into Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence must be accompanied by a rigorous program of monitoring and evaluation. At the state level there is as yet limited evidence as to what the impact of numerous reforms have been on service system and user experiences. This limits the degree to which learnings can be shared across state and territory jurisdictions. Building the evidence based on the impact, effectiveness and challenges of any reforms introduced should be an essential component of the next National Plan and/or of any package of reforms introduced.

**We recommend that the next National Plan and/or of any package of reforms introduced as a result of this Inquiry be accompanied by a rigorous program of monitoring and evaluation.**

## WORKFORCE PLANNING AND QUALIFICATIONS

In the TAFE and higher education sector across Australia there have been a range of initiatives that have seen the development of courses and units. These have included the redevelopment of existing offerings such as the Swinburne Graduate Certificate in Client and Case Assessment (Male Family Violence) and the emergence of new offerings (including in Victoria the Monash Graduate Certificate/Diploma in Family Violence Prevention, RMIT Graduate Certificate in Domestic and Family Violence, Chisolm Certificate in Family Violence and the Graduate Certificate in Family Violence at QUT). These offerings are focused beyond training for specific aspects of the reforms and work towards educating a wide range of professionals to understand and respond to family violence in line with their professional standards and/or obligations.

However, there has been no systematic work to bring TAFE and higher education providers and stakeholders together to map the development and provision of these qualifications. There has also been no plan for the development of graduate pathways to support and enhance the provision and delivery of family violence knowledge to workforces, such as teachers.

We recommend the Australian Government establish a family and domestic violence workforce taskforce that provides expert advice on training and education needs, pathways and funding models to support workforce development. This national taskforce should address state and federal pathways and funding for training and education. Specific consideration must be given to training and education for First Nations peoples, with requisite funding support, to support family violence prevention within Aboriginal communities.

## THE NEED TO ADDRESS ADOLESCENT FAMILY VIOLENCE

To date activity under the National Plan has not included a specific focus on adolescent family violence. We recommend that this form of family violence is included as a specific focus in the next National Plan.

Adolescent family violence describes violence perpetrated by young people against family members, including parents, siblings, carers and other members of the family. Adolescents who use violence in the home engage in a range of different strategies to control, coerce and threaten family members that create harm (RCFV, 2016). It is also known as adolescent violence in the home, adolescent-to-parent abuse (Holt 2016b), 'child-to-parent violence, child-to-mother violence, adolescent violence to parents or parent abuse' (McKenna et al. 2010, 1). This distinct form of family violence (FV) has a detrimental effect on the health and wellbeing of families. AFV encompasses young people engaging in behaviours 'designed to dominate, threaten or coerce parents, other family members or pets' (McKenna et al. 2010, 1). To date, there is limited research examining AFV in Australia and elsewhere, and few tailored responses and programs either for those who use or those who are affected by this unique form of family violence (RCFV 2016; McCulloch et al. 2016).

The complex needs of adolescents who use violence in the home and those caring for them require specialist service responses outside of the criminal justice system. Our research found that the dearth of targeted resources and specialist responses for adolescent family violence means that many parents are left on their own to manage and maintain their families' safety and security (Fitz-Gibbon, Elliott and Maher, 2018). There are no clear avenues for accessing effective support or responses, particularly in cases where the child using violence is under 12 years of age. Our research also noted the critical role that schools and other education institutions can play in operating as an interface between families and services, and providing support for families experiencing adolescent family violence.

There is a significant opportunity in this space for the next National Plan to commit to funding the development of service responses and housing models to enhance responses to adolescent family violence in each Australian state and territory.

We recommend that building the evidence base on understanding, preventing and responding to adolescent family violence is included as a specific focus in the next National Plan. As part of this we recommend that the Australian Government:

- support the development of integrated service response models for vulnerable children and young people, including building a coordinated response model for adolescent family violence engaging various sites, programs and services, including schools.
- develop interim and short-term respite models for families experiencing adolescent family violence, including care options for adolescents who use family violence beyond child protection or residential care.

#### **THE NEED TO INVEST IN CHILD-CENTRED, LONG-TERM RECOVERY SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN GROWING UP WITH DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE**

While service responses to families affected by domestic and family violence have increasingly begun to recognise the adverse effects of children's exposure to domestic and family violence (Campo 2015; Carlson et al. 2019), our research shows that most interventions remain parent- rather than child-centred (Meyer et al. 2019; 2020). Existing responses focus on removing the abusive parent from the home (e.g. through arrest, incarceration or exclusion orders), placing mothers and children into crisis accommodation or removing children from both parents where fathers are seen as creating risk to children's wellbeing and mothers are viewed as failing to adequately protect their children from such harm. All these current responses aim to stop children's exposure to DV due to its known adverse, and often lasting, effects on children's safety, development and long-term wellbeing. However, these interventions are parent-focused, rather than child-centred. Few of these responses recognise the importance of ongoing, child-centred recovery needs. Little remains known about the role of early interventions post domestic and family violence exposure along with long-term recovery to mitigate the otherwise devastating and often lifelong effects of this form of childhood trauma (Gregory et al. 2020). Specialist domestic and family violence service responses that do recognise children as primary victims and their arising support needs are often not resourced to provide child-centred interventions that work with and incorporate the voices of children affected by domestic and family violence.

We recommend investment in child-centred, trauma-informed short- and long-term recovery support for children affected by domestic and family violence to ensure children have access to counselling and other interventions that assist recovery, minimise long-term and intergenerational effects of childhood exposure to domestic and family violence and recognise children as victims with support needs in their own right.

We recommend the Australian Government:

- allocates dedicated funding to service responses that address the short- and long-term recovery needs of children, including in metropolitan, urban, regional and remote settings,
- allocates dedicated funding to the development and implementation of culturally sensitive, community-led service responses to support the needs for healing and recovery of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families, and
- allocates funding to evaluate such service responses to build the evidence base around how to better assist children in their recovery, improve short- and long-term child outcomes and minimise the risk of intergenerational transmission of domestic and family violence.

## Summary of Recommendations

immediate and sustained national action and leadership is essential to ensure the safety and women and children experiencing domestic and family violence during and beyond this crisis. There is a need to ensure that service provisions are aligned, accessible and equal regardless of location, to ensure that definitions of domestic and family violence are aligned nationally and across states and territories, and to recognise the importance of national investment targeted towards supporting mothers and children via, for example, schools and maternal health services.

### **This submission has made the following recommendations:**

1. We recommend the Australian Government commission a review of national and international evidence for the effective design, implementation and monitoring of workplace primary prevention strategies with attention to the scalability and sustainability of workplace initiatives.
2. We recommend the Australian Government commission a review of promising and innovative practices to engage men as fathers in the primary prevention of domestic and family violence.
3. We recommend that the next National Plan include a commitment to build the evidence base for quality indicators to measure attitude and behaviour change and greater national coordination and dissemination of primary prevention knowledge.
4. We recommend the Australian Government consider the efficacy of a similar cross state and cross-professional repository for Australia charged with the responsibility for identifying the good practice lessons to be learned from death review practices in and between the different states of Australia.
5. We recommend the Australian Government commission a review of good practice both national and international designed to facilitate appropriate perpetrator focused information sharing protocols for use across and to be shared between all the Australian jurisdictions.
6. We recommend the Australian Government develop a national education and awareness campaign to enhance community understanding of the family law system.
7. We recommend that a review be undertaken at the Commonwealth level to develop an Australian integrated family violence court model. The developed model should:
  - consider what legislative amendments are required to facilitate the inclusion and resolution of family law matters at the state level for cases involving family violence,
  - propose a way forward in accommodating the constitutional division of powers between Commonwealth and State laws with the aim of minimising the fragmented and complex web of court processes that persons experiencing family violence are presently expected to navigate.
8. We recommend the Australian Government invest in a national education campaign focused on the economic security of women with disability as a measure to address and ameliorate the prevalence and impacts of domestic violence on women with disability.
9. We recommend the next National Plan include a commitment to build the evidence base on how frontline practitioner can effectively identify, assessment and manage risk associated with coercive control.
10. Through the findings of this Inquiry, we recommend the Australian Government cautions the States and Territory Governments' against the introduction of a stand-alone offence of coercive and controlling behaviour.

11. We recommend the Australian Government invest in a national domestic and family violence research data archive. This data archive should be set up to facilitate data storing, linkage and sharing with the aim of building the long-term evidence base required to measure the prevalence of, and prevention of family and domestic violence.
12. We recommend that the Australian Government considers introducing a national intimate partner homicide index.
13. Through the work of the next National Plan, we recommend the Australian Government should fund further trials of new perpetrator intervention models, along with long term evaluations (of at least 24 months). Such trials and evaluations should include programs specifically catering for the needs of:
  - culturally and linguistically diverse men (this must consider shared language skills and the capacity of each group participant to engage with and process program content delivered in English or an alternative language that meets the needs of all program participants), and
  - men with cognitive disabilities (including traumatic and acquired brain injuries) to ensure all group participants share a similar capacity to engage with and process delivered program content).
14. We recommend the Australian Government should facilitate the development of judicial guidance on seeking and making use of perpetrator intervention histories in all domestic and family violence matters, including in sentencing, to assist in judicial decision making.
15. We recommend the Australian Government should coordinate the development and maintenance of a centralised online register of perpetrator intervention programs, to be coordinated through the relevant government departments, to ensure that information is readily available to support judicial decision-making and referral in domestic and family violence matters. This should be undertaken in partnership with relevant state and territory departments.
16. We recommend that consideration be given by courts and judicial educational bodies to a broader discussion about the role of judicial officers in creating system accountability, to develop consistent outcomes across jurisdictions and national knowledge and practice about perpetrator intervention programs and outcomes.
17. We recommend that through the next National Plan the Australian Government support the development of integrated service responses for women with disability and consider enhanced opportunities for cross sector training and workforce deployment.
18. We recommend the Australian Government allocates dedicated funding to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations for the delivery of culturally safe service responses to individuals and communities affected by domestic and family violence. This should include:
  - Culturally safe victim support services,
  - Culturally safe perpetrator interventions,
  - Culturally safe, trauma informed recovery support,
  - Culturally safe responses to address the wider impact of individual and community level marginalisation disproportionately affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
19. We recommend the Australian Government:
  - Improve the migration system so that all women on temporary visas who experience domestic, family and sexual violence and their dependants can access protections, services and justice. (NAG 2019)



- Ensure eligibility and access to services and government support are based on women's needs for safety and recovery, regardless of their migration status. (NAG 2019)
  - Ensure that women on temporary visas who have experienced domestic, family and sexual violence and their dependants have immediate and full access to safety, protection, justice and fully funded specialist support with demonstrated gender expertise and cultural competency. (NAG 2019)
  - Implement an effective, community-specialist led program of developing better tools for communicating information to migrant and refugee women, that including an array of mediums, media and messaging. These efforts should be informed by and developed women from target communities and populations.
  - Review the complex overlap of family violence as a state and territory offence and trafficking and slavery-like offences under the Criminal Code. This requires significant investment in evidence, including independent review of the existing Commonwealth response to trafficking and slavery-like practices that specifically considers the design and implantation of the investigative and victim support processes and programs.
  - Ensure a commitment towards nationally consistent and publicly available data regarding the specific experiences of migrant and refugee women of family violence and abuse.
20. We recommend the Australian Government promptly distribute the existing funding support packages for the family violence sector to allow them to meet increased demand during COVID-19 and provide effective and timely responses to women and children experiencing family violence.
  21. The Australian Government should immediately increase funding to community legal services to meet the demand of shared care related enquiries during the COVID-19 pandemic. This will ensure legal support can be provided and minimise risks to children.
  22. We recommend the Australian Government provide immediate support to women and children experiencing family violence by devoting additional funding for securing housing options.
  23. The Australian Government should continue to commit to a higher funding level for the Men's Referral Service (MRS), the MensLine and to men's behaviour change programs (MBCPs) to ensure that these services can adequately cater for increased demand.
  24. The Australian Government should consider extending financial support to all temporary migrants to relieve income and rent stress.
  25. The Australian Government should review the specific provision of emergency relief funding to Red Cross, to ensure it is accessible and to identify whether women experiencing family violence are accessing this fund, and to consider whether and how this fund can continue to operate as per the extension of other financial support packages.
  26. Eligibility and access to services and government support must be funded to ensure it is available to all those experiencing family violence, particularly housing and financial support;
  27. The Australian Government should fund legal and specialist support with demonstrated gender and cultural competency to target efforts to reach women who are harder to reach for mainstream services, and to provide the complex care and support as women navigate federal and state legal systems and processes.

28. The Australian Government should invest in building the evidence base on the efficacy of family and domestic violence remote service provision. While it would need to be established whether technology facilitated service provision can ensure effective client engagement, support and perpetrator accountability, learnings from service provision under COVID-19 restrictions may be able to inform technology facilitated service provision trials in regional, rural and remote communities. These trials could include remote access to:
- Specialist family violence/ victim support services;
  - Culturally specific family violence specialist services;
  - Community legal services for victims and perpetrators;
  - Men's Behaviour Change Programs/ casework, and
  - Timely access to court mention dates that may be available sooner in larger courts which have more frequent sitting days, facilitated through videoconferencing via local police stations.
29. We recommend the Australian Government invest in developing worker wellbeing packages to ensure that the wellbeing of family and domestic violence practitioners is ensured working from home.
30. We recommend that the next National Plan and/or of any package of reforms introduced as a result of this Inquiry be accompanied by a rigorous program of monitoring and evaluation.
31. We recommend the Australian Government establish a family and domestic violence workforce taskforce that provides expert advice on training and education needs, pathways and funding models to support workforce development. This national taskforce should address state and federal pathways and funding for training and education. Specific consideration must be given to training and education for First Nations peoples, with requisite funding support, to support family violence prevention within Aboriginal communities.
32. We recommend that building the evidence base on understanding, preventing and responding to adolescent family violence is included as a specific focus in the next National Plan. As part of this we recommend that the Australian Government:
- support the development of integrated service response models for vulnerable children and young people, including building a coordinated response model for adolescent family violence engaging various sites, programs and services, including schools.
  - develop interim and short-term respite models for families experiencing adolescent family violence, including care options for adolescents who use family violence beyond child protection or residential care.
33. We recommend the Australian Government:
- allocates dedicated funding to service responses that address the short- and long-term recovery needs of children, including in metropolitan, urban, regional and remote settings,
  - allocates dedicated funding to the development and implementation of culturally sensitive, community-led service responses to support the needs for healing and recovery of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families, and
  - allocates funding to evaluate such service responses to build the evidence base around how to better assist children in their recovery, improve short- and long-term child outcomes and minimise the risk of intergenerational transmission of domestic and family violence.

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## Appendix A: Monash Gender and Family Violence Prevention Centre

The Monash Gender and Family Violence Prevention Centre (MGFVPC) is at the forefront of research and education aimed at preventing family violence. The Centre is contributing to transformative social change by providing an evidence base for policy change that better supports and protects those experiencing family violence and addresses the cultural and economic drivers that underpin it. The Centre's track record includes ground-breaking research, engagement with government and civil society stakeholders, and innovative educational offerings.

The Centre's work has had a significant impact on the transformation of policy and practice and has a record of bringing together Monash and international researchers to collaborate with partners in government, social services, legal services, policing and health. Centre members have significant experience working with family violence and criminal justice stakeholders across the public sector and has advanced knowledge of the various processes involved in reviews and evaluations. The team has engaged or worked with a broad range of departments, and non-government organisations and statutory bodies.

The MGFVPC has extensive expertise and a strong track record in researching sensitive topics and engaging with hard-to-access or marginalised groups. Recently completed research projects have included Indigenous women, women from culturally and linguistically diverse communities, women with disabilities who have experienced family violence in all its forms, perpetrators of family violence, and key stakeholders from the family violence and criminal justice system service sectors. The Centre's distinctive approach engages with the full continuum of prevention, including primary prevention (preventing violence before it occurs), secondary prevention (early intervention to stop violence reoccurring), and tertiary intervention and response (to prevent long-term harm from violence). Our research is grounded in qualitative and quantitative methods, combined with a well-developed understanding of the contemporary policy landscape.

Members of the Monash Gender and Family Violence Prevention Centre are engaged in:

- **Australian Research Council funded research** – competitively awarded programs of research that provide independent, high-quality research to advance the national interest, with MGFVPC researchers undertaking major projects on intimate partner homicide and international students and sexual and intimate partner violence
- **Contract research and consultancy** – including on all aspects of family violence, family violence prevention and responses to family violence
- **Policy development** – including on perpetration interventions, risk assessment and risk management, mapping and developing linkages, and collaborations between sectors and between multiple intersecting reforms and reform agendas
- **Evaluations of programs and reforms** – including large-scale multi-sector reforms
- **Workforce capability building** – on family violence prevention for practitioners and policy makers from a wide range of sectors
- **Expert lectures, seminars, industry briefings and opinions on gender and family violence**

For further details about current and recently completed research projects, please visit the [Centre Research webpage](#).

## Appendix B: Current research on family violence and the COVID-19 pandemic

Members of the Monash Gender and Family Violence Prevention Centre are currently leading a range of research projects seeking to understand how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted on experiences of and responses to family violence.

These projects are summarised here.

### Gender-based violence and help-seeking behaviours during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Project leads: Naomi Pfitzner, Kate Fitz-Gibbon and Jacqui True

This project seeks to understand women's experiences of male violence as well as their help-seeking behaviours during the COVID-19 pandemic. The project aims to generate knowledge on service adaptations and innovations in response to the pandemic and identify service and resource gaps to ensure that women experiencing violence get the support they need. In order to achieve these aims, the project is framed by two key research questions:

1. What are the impacts of COVID-19 on gender-based violence in families and beyond?
2. What are the responses to gender-based violence during the health crisis and were women's help-seeking behaviours effectively responded to?

This project will generate new knowledge on effective crisis response and support for gender-based violence during the COVID-19 pandemic and provide an evidence base for service providers to reimagine service delivery during times of crisis.

The first phase of this project involved an online anonymous survey used to capture the voices and experiences of practitioners responding to women experiencing violence during the COVID-19 shutdown in Victoria, Australia. The survey ran for a four-week period from 23 April to 24 May 2020. The survey was administered through the survey development software Qualtrics. Survey responses were received from 166 Victorian practitioners. Univariate analyses were conducted to explore overall trends in the nature and frequency of violence against women during the COVID-19 shutdown, and the qualitative survey data was thematically analysed. The findings of this survey were presented in Pfitzner, Fitz-Gibbon and True (2020).

The research team has also published a second report presenting the findings from two surveys conducted by the Queensland Domestic Violence Services Network over a ten-day period in April 2020 (15 – 24 April) and a two-week period in May 2020 (8 – 22 May). The surveys sought to capture the professional views and experiences of practitioners responding to women experiencing violence during the period of COVID-19 restrictions in Queensland, Australia. Data collection for the second survey occurred during the Stage 1 easing of restrictions which began on 15 May 2020. Survey One provided a snapshot of DFV client and service needs in Queensland during the shutdown period and Survey Two explored emerging issues from the first survey. The findings of the Queensland surveys were presented in Pfitzner, Fitz-Gibbon, Meyer and True (2020).

This project is part of [The Melbourne Experiment](#), a Monash University research initiative. Further details about the project are available on the [project website](#).

### Family violence, help seeking and temporary migration during COVID-19

Project leads: Marie Segrave and Naomi Pfitzner

The project seeks to map the specific challenges of the pandemic and its flow-on effects to women who hold temporary visas, and their children, experiencing family violence in Victoria, Australia. This project will review

100 cases of women on temporary visas who became clients of inTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence during the predominant lockdown (from 22 March to 21 June) and will draw a cross-sectional sample of 100 clients across key visa types – including bridging, student and sponsored partner visas – as a basis for analysis. The research will seek to understand the specific impacts of lockdown for women on temporary visas experiencing family violence, including the financial stressors placed on temporary migrants who were excluded from the Commonwealth Government's COVID-19 financial support packages. It will build on previous work by Segrave (2017) that has mapped the specificity of temporary migration as contributing to women's insecurity in the context of experiencing, and seeking support or safety from, family violence. The research will utilise a mixed methods approach and provide a quantitative descriptive analysis of case files over this period. Utilising these files, and via consultation with inTouch case managers and their leadership team, specific case studies will be drawn out in more detail to offer more substantive accounts of women's efforts to find security and safety during this period.

## **Family violence, legal needs and access to justice during COVID-19**

**Project leads: Naomi Pfitzner, Kate Fitz-Gibbon and Silke Meyer**

In partnership with Women's Legal Services Victoria this project will investigate the impact of COVID-19 on access to justice and the legal needs of family violence victim/survivors with a particular focus on child protection and women's access to justice during periods of restrictions. The project will draw on the experiences and views of legal practitioners and clients during the pandemic as well as administrative service data.