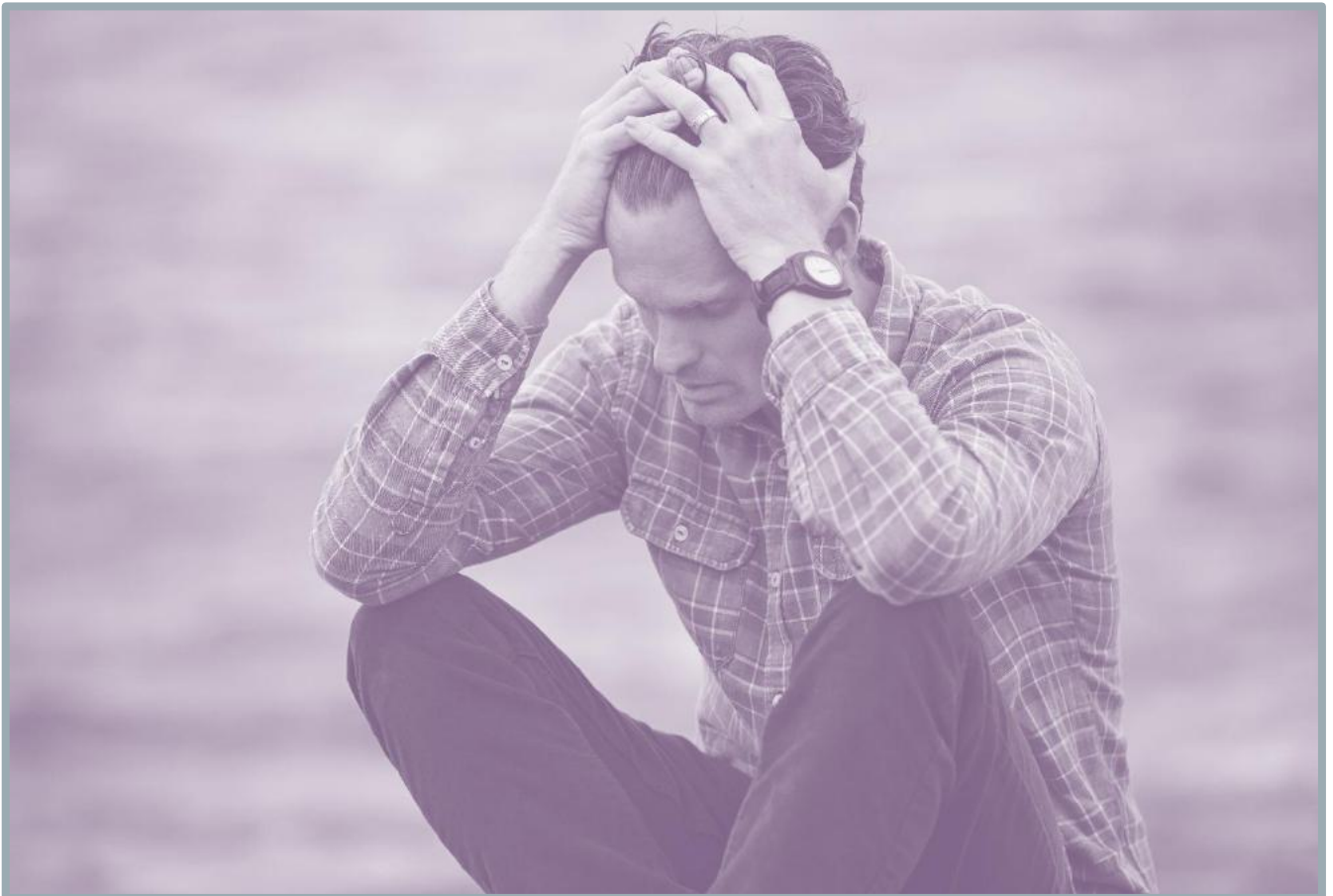


No to Violence

*2023-24 Victorian Pre-Budget Submission:
Funding perpetrator accountability*



Acknowledgment of Country

No to Violence acknowledges First Nations Peoples across these lands; the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waters. We pay respect to all Elders, past, present, and emerging. We acknowledge a deep connection with country which has existed over 60,000 years. We acknowledge that sovereignty was never ceded, and this was and always will be First Nation's land.



About No to Violence

No to Violence (NTV) is Australia's largest national peak body representing organisations and individuals working with men to end family violence. We are guided by the values of accountability, gender equity, leadership, and change.

NTV provides support and advocacy for the work of specialist men's family violence interventions carried out by organisations and individuals. The work undertaken by specialist men's family violence services is diverse and includes but is not limited to Men's Behaviour Change Programs (MBCP), case management, individual counselling, policy development and advocacy, research and evaluation, training, workforce development and capability building.

NTV also provides a range of training for the specialist men's family violence workforce including a Graduate Certificate in partnership with Swinburne University, as well as professional development for all workforces who come into contact, directly and indirectly, with men using family violence. NTV is a leading national voice and plays a central role in the development of evidence, policy, and advocacy to support the work of specialist men's family violence nationally.

About Our Members

NTV represents 186 members Australia-wide. Our membership structure is inclusive of individuals and organisations ranging from specialist services to individuals and others who have an interest in preventing and responding to men's family violence.

Executive summary

No to Violence welcomes the opportunity to provide a pre-budget submission to the Victorian Government.

In the lead up to the 2022 Victorian state election, No to Violence partnered with Safe and Equal and Sexual Assault Services Victoria on the 'Vote Against Violence in 2022' Election Tour. We travelled around the state, meeting with our members, sector, and local candidates to understand the most pressing issues facing the family violence sector.

We heard that workforce shortages; the on-going housing crisis; increasing demand; and the need for criminal justice reform are the priority areas for the family violence sector. The entire family violence sector, including the perpetrator intervention specialist sector, requires ongoing and sustainable investment.

Our sector continues to face challenges with recruitment and retention of our specialist workforce. While we acknowledge the investment made in the sector following the Royal Commission, in many ways that filled historical under investment. With new infrastructure still in development and implementation, now is not the time to wind back or cease investment. The 2023-24 Victorian State Budget must invest in a sustainable, evidence-based family violence sector, one funded to hold perpetrators accountable and uphold victim-survivor safety.

With increased resourcing, No to Violence knows that our sector would be able to support more men to change their behaviour. Through previous budgets, the Victorian Government has demonstrated a commitment to ending men's use of family violence with the Family Violence Independent Monitor verifying the value of this commitment. It ought not stop just as the individual and community benefits are being realised.

The launch of the new National Plan will require continued investment from state governments in localised, evidence-based solutions and to help realise the collective and shared ambition of all governments to end family violence in a generation. No to Violence has thirty years of experience working with men who use violence. We have the expertise and experience required to support long-term behaviour change.

Investing in the perpetrator intervention sector must be a budget priority.

We look forward to continuing to work with you to end men's family violence.

Summary of recommendations

No to Violence recommends the Victorian Government fund the following to keep more women and children safe and realise our vision of a world free from male violence:

1. Evaluation of family safety contact as a specialist and integral part of all perpetrator intervention services
2. Investment in evidence-based practice through data collection, research, evaluation, and translation of evidence into action (\$2.2 million over five years)
3. Increased resourcing for NTV's Men's Accommodation and Counselling Service (MACS) to expand the scope and footprint of the program (\$10 million over five years)
4. Expand and support the development of a highly skilled and sustainable perpetrator intervention workforce (\$12.5 million over five years)
5. Provide, at a minimum, five-year contracts for all perpetrator intervention service providers

Initiative 1: Family Safety Contact throughout all perpetrator interventions

Ask: Evaluation of family safety contact as a specialist and integral part of all perpetrator intervention services

Research makes clear that working with men in isolation is potentially dangerous because it can raise the risk of harm to affected family members. Men's family violence interventions aim to keep perpetrators engaged and hold them accountable in their choice to use violence with the end goal of keeping families safer.

Family Safety Contact workers, also referred to as Family Safety Advocates, support family members of men engaged in programs under the provisions of the Victorian Minimum Standards for Men's Behaviour Change Programs. Family Safety Contact workers also provide support for family members of men engaged in the Men's Accommodation and Counselling Service (MACS) program. It is intended to ensure that the partners and former partners, and children affected by the man's use of family violence are safer, and that safety and risk are fundamental responses to imminent and ongoing harm.

Family Safety Contact work supports affected family members through the Multi Agency Risk Assessment and Management (MARAM) aligned risk assessment, safety planning and information sharing arrangements. Referrals to case management and other support services may be required to enhance the safety of all affected family members, including children. Family Safety Contact provides affected family members with information about the content explored in men's behaviour change programs and other interventions such as MACS. Family Safety Contact workers can be engaging with multiple partners and former partners of one male client at a time.

Additional resources are required to support family safety contact work to meet increased demand and improve overall service delivery. Ideally, engagement with affected family members should commence when a perpetrator completes initial intake and assessment and would continue until the completion of the behaviour change program. An evaluation of the current delivery of Family Safety Contact Work across all funded services would reveal the extent to which funding covers all the Family Safety Worker's activities that underpin their face-to-face client engagement, including attendance at team and risk review meetings, clinical supervision, professional development and engagement with local services. Services need to be adequately supported to meet these attendant requirements for appropriately managed family safety contact work.

No to Violence is asking for evaluation of family safety contact as a specialist and integral part of all perpetrator intervention services.

Initiative 2: Invest in evidence-based practice through data collection, research, evaluation, and translation of evidence into action: \$2.2 million over five years

The Victorian Government has made significant investments in family violence research since the Royal Commission. The sector has welcomed these investments as they have contributed to the building of the evidence base. However, our sector needs additional resources to ensure we can continue to embed the lessons from new and existing data collection, research and evaluation of frontline services and other specialist interventions.

No to Violence has 30 years' experience delivering programs to men who use violence. We know that one-size-fits-all programs in response to perpetrators of family violence are less effective than interventions that target specific needs and risks of perpetrators. Men who choose to use violence have different trauma, different backgrounds, different upbringings, and different cultural heritage – and they pose different levels of risk. We need evidence-based programs that address the individual variables that lead men to choose to use abuse and violence. This includes specialised programs for First Nations people, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, people with mental illness, adolescents and people of diverse sexuality and gender identities and expressions. We must understand when, how and for whom these programs work. To support men's decisions to stop using violence and start their healing journey, we need a strong evidence base.

In addition, we need to understand service providers' ability to meet the minimum standards for MBCPs. We are unable to track or report compliance, and while we have proven ourselves to be flexible and adaptive in our context of significant change and reform, and especially during COVID-19, we need to better understand how these reforms are impacting our sector's work. Tracking and evaluating compliance with the minimum standards is an important investment for the Victorian Government.

Family Safety Victoria recently awarded \$2.2 million to fund high-quality research to develop and build the evidence base to support family violence reform in Victoria, a portion of which has been allocated to perpetrator-focused research.

No to Violence is asking for an additional \$2.2 million over five years to:

- Fund ongoing monitoring and evaluation of existing programs and new initiatives as well as funding the implementation of key evaluation findings. This means funding independent evaluations to collect, collate, analyse, and report on data, and support service providers and policy makers with the view to embed evaluation recommendations into existing and new programming.
- Support perpetrator intervention providers to monitor and report compliance with Recommendation 91 of the Royal Commission regarding the Minimum Standards for MBCPs.

Initiative 3: Increase resourcing for NTV’s Men’s Accommodation and Counselling Service (MACS) to expand the scope and footprint of the program: \$10 million over five years

The Men’s Accommodation and Counselling Service (MACS) is an innovative short-term program for men who have been excluded from the home as a result of their use of violence. An independent evaluation in 2021 found that MACS, operated by No to Violence in partnership with the Statewide Salvation Army Crisis Service, fills an important gap in the service system and is responding to a key area of need.

MACS was originally designed to provide fourteen days of accommodation and counselling to men who had been excluded from the home via a Safety Order or Interim Violence Order (IVO). The Victorian Government recently provided short-term funding to expand this program to enable more men to take part and access services, and to expand the program from fourteen to thirty days.

MACS has proven to be an important component of the support families need. The MACS program has been expanded to better support the safety of women and children and engage men for a longer period of time, which is beneficial to longer term outcomes. Extending MACS’ footprint so that more families who require support can receive it and making the 30-day timeframe permanent will improve the overall safety of Victorian families.

No to Violence is asking for \$10 million over five years to expand MACS, including:

- Permanently extend MACS from fourteen to thirty days.
- Double the workforce of MACS to permanently expand the service.
- Permanently expand the eligibility criteria beyond men who have been excluded from the home via legal mechanisms to enable men who are referred by corrections, justice, or child protection services to participate in MACS.

Initiative 4: Expand and support development of a highly skilled and sustainable perpetrator intervention workforce: \$12.5 million over five years

Working with family violence perpetrators is a highly specialist skill set that requires deep knowledge and practice experience. The experience and quality of practitioners involved in perpetrator interventions is linked to better outcomes for participants. In order to substantially expand the availability of the suite of perpetrator interventions including the complex specialist work in Men's Behaviour Change Programs (MBCPs), Family Safety programs and men's case management programs to meet current and increasing demand, the availability of accredited and non-accredited training should be expanded.

A qualification and training pipeline across the career lifespan of the men's specialist violence workforce and training workforce is needed to upskill workers across their careers; for example, at career entry, 3- 7 years, and 7-15 years, and to address current workforce capacity and capability constraints. This includes:

- Expansion of specialist accredited training and professional development to support Graduate Certificate qualifications, and expanding capacity for Certificate IV in Training and Assessment (TAE40116)
- Support of the Family Violence Graduate Program & Family Violence and Sexual Assault Traineeships Program, including induction processes, professional development opportunities and professional clinical supervision.

No to Violence is asking for \$12.5 million over five years to:

- Expand the current Swinburne NTV Graduate Certificate in Client Assessment and Case Management (RTO Code 3059) through the addition of 60 places which will add 120 specialist professionals into the men's case management and behaviour change workforce per year.
- Develop an accredited Advanced Skillset program specifically targeting forensic skills for practitioners to support secondary consultations, ongoing support of practice in the frontline and skills in the provision of clinical supervision. This will support health and wellbeing frameworks and initiatives and act as a retention strategy for practitioner's keen to stay in this complex work and share practice skill as a career specialist.
- Develop a men's family violence workforce expansion strategy, including the training, development, and support of specialist trainers, to align with the 10 Year Industry Plan.
- Develop and run recruitment campaigns focused on working with men who use family violence to attract new people to the workforce.

Initiative 5: Provide, at a minimum, five-year contracts for all perpetrator intervention service providers

The uncertainty of funding and short-term contracts for Victorian perpetrator intervention service providers is a sector-wide challenge. Short-term funding cycles contributes to high staff turn-over and the casualisation of the workforce, as well as preventing service providers from fully evaluating programs and implementing the findings from evaluations. Participants and their families need certainty in the availability of programs and services that support their safety and security. Longer-term funding would enable better program planning, availability, and opportunities to embed emerging best practice (short term contracts are often for 'pilot' program that heighten participant and service provider expectations, and which are often not evaluated to support extension or permanency. This compounds the disservice to families and their desire to live free from violence.

Short term funding and contract cycles makes the recruitment and retention of qualified staff challenging. This is more so the case for providers in rural and regional areas, where qualified staff are disincentivised from relocating because of 6 or 12-month contracts.

Funding for services should reflect the quality of practitioners: as requirements for qualifications increase, contract terms and conditions should too. These conditions are essential in building a sustainable end to end family violence sector. Recruitment and attraction campaigns can only go so far without good employment standards and workforce conditions.

Longer term program planning is impacted with short term contracts – No to Violence members have repeatedly reported that short-term funding makes it impossible to appropriately evaluate, learn from, and embed learnings into future program cycles.

No to Violence is asking for the Victorian Government to provide multi-year funding contracts (minimum 5 years) to all perpetrator intervention service providers.