

# Submission to the Victorian Government: Inquiry into capturing data on family violence perpetrators in Victoria



## Acknowledgement 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.

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## About No to Violence

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

No to Violence provides support and advocacy for the work of specialist men's family violence services. 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.

As a pro-feminist organisation, the safety of victim-survivors is at the centre of everything we do. It is by ending men's violence that families can have happier, safer, and more fulfilled lives.

Our members come from a diverse range of professional and community backgrounds and work in a number of settings, including within the community sector and private practice.

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## Contact

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# Terminology

No to Violence and our members support action-based descriptors, such as ‘adult or person/s using family violence’ that recognise a person’s ability to be accountable for their actions and change their behaviours. However, given the strong gender-based nature of family violence, it is important to ensure an ongoing emphasis on the disproportionate perpetration by men. As result, in this submission we use the terms ‘people using family violence’ and ‘men using family violence’.

# Sector contribution

This submission is heavily informed by the experiences and insights of NTV members, including organisations and individuals delivering frontline services, and those of the broader family violence sector. These insights emphasise the depth of specialist knowledge that is held across the sector, which must be centred in decisions about how to improve responses to people using family violence. Many NTV members and family violence sector advocates are referenced and quoted throughout this submission, including inTouch, Djirra, Safe and Equal, Relationship Matters, Thorne Harbour Health, Gateway Health and Family Life. No to Violence endorses the submissions of these organisations to this Inquiry.

# Executive Summary

No to Violence welcomes the Legislative Assembly Legal and Social Issues Committee examination of the collection of data on people using family violence in Victoria. Developing a deeper understanding of family violence perpetration is crucial if we are to ensure effective, appropriate responses are available to, ultimately, reduce and end family violence.

There is no simple solution. The difficulty of understanding the scale and dynamics of family violence perpetration in Victoria mirrors the complexity of the problem itself.

The recommendations we put forward in this submission shine light on the nuance needed to build a deeper understanding of this complexity without doing additional harm to victim-survivors and already marginalised communities. All work to capture data on family violence perpetration in Victoria must centre the experiences and perspectives of victim-survivors, including children, especially those from marginalised communities, and specialist family violence practitioner knowledge.

No to Violence wishes to bring particular attention to the need to **ensure data collection practices across all agencies and services responding to family violence address racial profiling and biases against marginalised people**. Not doing so risks reinforcing a skewed understanding of family violence perpetration as a problem of men who most often engage with the service system.

It is also critical that **information sharing processes are improved to support more informed service responses to people using family violence**. Enabling all specialist family violence services to directly access Central Information Point (CIP) reports would enable this, though this initiative must be supported by an effective and fast mechanism to rectify misidentification of the predominant aggressor across relevant data systems.

Actions to collect additional data on people, predominantly men, using family violence need to happen alongside the **development of a deeper understanding of family violence perpetration by exploring pathways into, and out of, using family violence**. Investment is needed to analyse behaviour patterns of people using family violence across service engagement, and build knowledge of men using family violence who never come into contact with the service system.

Furthermore, **prioritising outcome measurements of intervention services – as opposed to output measurements - will provide deeper insights into the impact of service provision and build understanding of what works to stop men using family violence**. Finally, the utility of the knowledge developed through this Inquiry and subsequent actions will be determined by how is integrated into practice. **There must also be increased ongoing investment in a broad suite of interventions to address the diverse and complex motivating factors, life experiences and support needs of men using family violence**.

# Summary of recommendations

## Data collection on family violence perpetration

1. Increase funding for specialist family violence services to support more thorough data collection and ensure data can be effectively stored and used
2. Review the current Victorian Family Violence Data Collection Framework to ensure it is up-to-date and addresses racial profiling, bias in data collection, misidentification of the predominant aggressor and privacy and security concerns
3. Ensure all agencies and services responding to people using family violence apply consistent data standards relating to cultural, language, gender and sexual diversity
4. Increase training for police on types of mental ill health and disability, and how these factors can intersect with family violence
5. Expand L17 risk assessment to assess for technology-facilitated abuse and provide training for police to understand and identify technology-facilitated abuse

## Use of data on people using family violence

6. Expand access to the Central Information Point (CIP) to enable all specialist family violence services to directly access CIP reports to support more informed responses to people using violence
7. Develop statewide processes for seeking and communicating the consent of affected family members for intervention services for people using family violence to contact
8. Develop an accessible, effective, and responsive mechanism to rectify misidentification of the predominant aggressor across relevant data systems
9. Transparently outline and conduct a review into how perpetration data feeds into unit costings for intervention service funding

## Developing a deeper understanding of pathways into and out of family violence perpetration

### Pathways into using violence

10. Invest in analysis of behaviour patterns of people using violence across service engagement to develop effective, appropriate interventions
11. Fund and support research on men using family violence who don't come into contact with the service system

### Pathways out of using violence

12. Develop an Outcome Measurement Framework for perpetration interventions to improve service provision impact
13. Integrate emerging research findings to develop a broad suite of targeted, effective, and timely interventions to end family violence

# Data collection on family violence perpetration

It is important to highlight that most men using family violence do not come into contact with government agencies and non-government service systems. Thus, one of the difficult challenges facing this Inquiry is how measure the scale and intensity of family violence that is not officially reported. For those people using violence who are engaged with the service system, the collection of data usually begins via reporting to Victoria Police, but can also be flagged through a broad range of agencies. These include Child Protection, the Magistrates Court of Victoria and The Orange Door. The primary mechanism for capturing data in Victoria Police is through Family Violence Reports (known as L17s). In addition to L17s, data is also captured through intervention order applications and the intake processes of other agencies. Both demographic data and data on family violence behaviour is captured through these mechanisms. Demographic data is mostly quantitative and simpler to capture and report on than data on family violence behaviour.

Data collected on people using family violence includes:

- Name
- Date of birth (Enables age analysis)
- Address (Enables geographic analysis, e.g. metro, regional or remote)
- Contact information
- Gender
- Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander status
- LGBTIQ+ identity
- Country of origin
- Ethnic appearance
- Preferred language
- Disability and/or accessibility needs

Data collected on family violence behaviour includes:

- Types of family violence (e.g. physical, emotional, sexual, spiritual)
- Narratives of victim-survivors, people using violence and responders (such as Police)
- Contextual information about relationship(s)
- Presence of risk factors

Data captured is stored on the private databases of the agencies that a person using violence interacts with, such as police or child protection.

## Recommendation 1: Increase funding for specialist family violence services to support more thorough data collection and ensure data can be effectively stored and used

Specialist family violence services typically begin their engagement with a person using family violence following a referral from the first point of contact agency. There are some occasions where people using family violence make first contact directly with a specialist family violence service, but this is rare. Referrals are mostly limited to high-level demographic data, meaning specialist family violence services often need to source additional information about the most recent family violence incident(s), family violence history, and details of intervention orders via information sharing requests and client intake processes.

Responses to information requests from government agencies usually take weeks, which means specialist family violence services often begin intake processes without key information. This makes intake processes particularly burdensome and risk sensitive as services attempt to build understanding of family violence dynamics. **Collecting this information in this way is resource-intensive and requires time and highly-trained staff.** Much of the information collected is qualitative in the form of case notes and is subsequently not only resource-intensive to capture, but also to extract and analyse.

There is an opportunity to improve the capturing of data on people using family violence that engage with service systems by ensuring that specialist family violence services are adequately resourced. **With increased resourcing, services would be able to dedicate more time and effort to capture more thorough data about people using family violence to guide more effective responses.** This would include more detailed information about life experiences and co-occurring issues, such as alcohol and other drug misuse, problem gambling, and previous experiences of family violence – particularly whether the person using violence had been a victim of family violence as a child. As this information is complex and sensitive to ascertain, services must be adequately resourced to do this work.

## Recommendation 2: Review the current Victorian Family Violence Data Collection Framework to ensure it is up-to-date and addresses racial profiling, bias in data collection, misidentification of the predominant aggressor and privacy and security concerns

**No to Violence is concerned that current data collection and reporting processes for people using family violence are biased in ways that emphasise perpetration by marginalised men, including for example, men with a disability, poor men and First Nations and refugee men.** If building an understanding of the scope and scale of family violence perpetration in Victoria centres government services data alone, the related data will skew understanding of the problem towards those who most often engaged with the service system.

There are a range of ways in which this happens. For example:

- L17s capture data on whether a respondent is employed or unemployed, but they do not capture data on employment type or salary range. This risks obfuscating the way family

violence happens in all socio-economic groups. In doing so, it hides family violence prevalence among wealthy men. This then has flow-on effects for developing an effective suite of interventions to change men's behaviour.

- The Family Violence Database (FVDB) reports the Indigenous status of people using violence but does not disaggregate the ethnicity of men who perpetrate family violence against Indigenous women. As Djirra highlight in their submission to this Inquiry, this fails to challenge the false assumption that most family violence perpetrated against Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander women is perpetrated by Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander men, whereas practice evidence suggests that a significant proportion of this violence is perpetrated by non-Indigenous men.<sup>1</sup>

**While the Victorian Family Violence Data Collection Framework (VFVDCF) was developed to address biases such as these, many still remain.** It is critical that these biases are identified and addressed to eliminate risk of discrimination against marginalised people, and to help build a more accurate understanding of the profile of men using family violence and the dynamics of their perpetration. To address this, we support inTouch's recommendation to review the VFVDCF.

### Recommendation 3: Ensure all agencies and services responding to people using family violence apply consistent data standards relating to cultural, language, gender and sexual diversity

Consistent with issues identified in the VFVDCF, NTV's members emphasise the challenges they face due to inconsistent data definitions and collection processes. These inconsistencies result in inaccurate representations of people using violence that come into contact with service systems. Inconsistent data standards also reduce the efficiency and effectiveness of referrals, with some people using violence not referred to appropriate services, while service providers may need to recapture data that has been inconsistently collected, such as that based on assumptions about men using family violence.

Urgent action is needed to improve the consistency of data collection standards. Since the VFVDCF was released, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) has released the Standard for Sex, Gender, Variations of Sex Characteristics and Sexual Orientation Variables (202) and the Standards for Statistics on Cultural and Language Diversity (SSCLD) (2021). It is critical that data collection processes are consistent across all agencies and services that respond to people using family violence to eliminate biases and risk of racial, cultural, religious and sexual discrimination.

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<sup>1</sup> Our Watch (2018) Changing the picture, Background paper: Understanding violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. <https://assets.ourwatch.org.au/assets/Key-frameworks/Changing-the-picture-AA.pdf>



## Member insight – Thorne Harbour Health

“Thorne Harbour Health’s LGBTIQ+ family violence specialist service frequently has to ‘correct’ data that we receive in referrals from police, courts, The Orange Door or other mainstream services. This includes data regarding people’s gender and sexuality and most commonly the assessment of the predominant aggressor in an LGBTIQ+ relationship.

This has huge consequences for our community. LGBTIQ+ people are often directed down inappropriate service pathways, including people using violence being referred to victim survivor supports, leaving LGBTIQ+ victim survivors without appropriate referrals to support safety.

**The failure to accurately capture data at first point of contact within the service system means it often takes far too long for LGBTIQ+ people using violence to finally be referred to a culturally safe service like Thorne Harbour Health, where they are invited to reflect on their behaviours and actions and move towards safety, honesty and accountability. As a result of poor data collection and lack of literacy about LGBTIQ+ family violence, we don’t receive nearly the number of referrals we should, and so many of our community members continue to fall through the cracks.”**

## Recommendation 4: Increase training for police on types of mental ill health and disability, and how these factors can intersect with family violence

As Victoria Police are often the first point of contact for people using family violence, they can play a crucial role in improving the detail of data collected on people using family violence. While the L17 has a section to assess whether people using family violence have mental health issues, police rarely capture the type of mental health issue(s) they believe to be present or has been disclosed to them. Likewise, the L17 has a section to assess accessibility needs but it does not require specification of type(s) of disability. During consultations, specialist family violence practitioners highlighted that this missing information could increase the difficulty of assessing support needs and intervention suitability. Improving these elements of data collection will also enable more accurate representation of the heterogeneity of family violence perpetration and guide the development of more targeted intervention services.

## Recommendation 5: Expand L17 risk assessment to assess for technology-facilitated abuse and provide training for police to understand and identify technology-facilitated abuse

Technology-facilitated abuse is currently not listed as a type of family violence on the L17 form. This is despite technology-facilitated abuse being common, with one in four Australian adults self-reporting having engaged in technology-facilitated perpetration at some point in their life.<sup>2</sup> This change to the L17 needs to be supported by additional training for police to better understand and identify technology-facilitated abuse.

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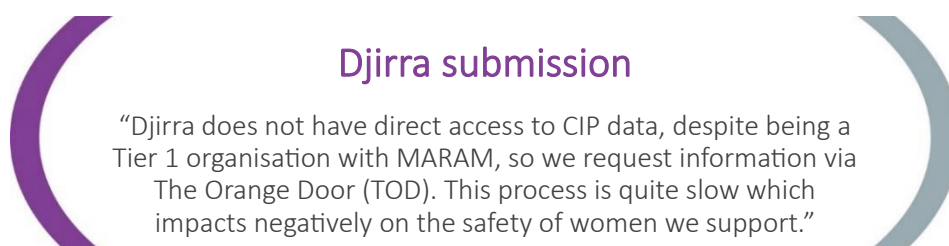
<sup>2</sup> Powell et al. (2022). Technology-facilitated abuse: National survey of Australian adults' experiences. <https://www.anrows.org.au/publication/technology-facilitated-abuse-national-survey-of-australian-adults-experiences/>

# Use of data on people using family violence

## Recommendation 6: Expand access to the Central Information Point (CIP) to enable all specialist family violence services to directly access CIP reports to support more informed responses to people using violence

The statewide Central Information Point (CIP) consolidates information about a person using family violence into a single report to inform the assessment and management of risk. CIP reports bring together information from four agencies: Court Services Victoria, Victoria Police, Corrections Victoria and the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing. However, only the Orange Door, NTV's Men's Referral Service and Safe Steps have access to CIP reports. This means that specialist family violence service providers that are not embedded within the Orange Door (with those two exceptions) must make information requests through either The Orange Door or individual agencies and services to get information about a person's history of family violence.

Although specialist family violence service providers can make information requests to The Orange Door to access information captured in CIP reports, this process is often problematic. **Service providers are often advised by The Orange Door that a client's family violence situation does not meet the threshold of risk to share requested information.** As such, there is often a disconnect in understandings of what is risk relevant information. Our members have also advised us that there are inconsistent information sharing practices across the different Orange Doors, as risk threshold assessments are ultimately subjective processes. When requests are fulfilled, information is often redacted. This limits the capacity of specialist family violence services to deliver risk-informed services. This is particularly an issue for family safety advocacy when contact details of affected family members are not shared because it is assessed that risk is not high enough to do so. We expand further on this in our next recommendation. The information request process is also slow, as outlined by Djirra in their submission to this Inquiry:



Due to issues with accessing information through the Orange Door, specialist family violence service providers must often make information requests to agencies to get information on a person using family violence's police interaction, criminal conviction, and intervention order history. **The process of making separate information sharing requests to individual agencies is slow and burdensome for specialist family violence services.** It normally takes weeks until responses are received. By the time information is provided, risk assessments have already been completed and decisions made about service suitability. This is if responses are received at all, with a member estimating they receive only

one response from Child Protection for every four requests they make. Meanwhile, the process of making separate requests to different agencies takes a significant amount of time for service providers that are stretched for resources. These information sharing processes limit service providers' ability to provide safe, timely and effective responses to men using family violence in Victoria.



### Member insight – Relationship Matters

“The current challenge is around information sharing. By the time a client is booked in for service with us, we’ve usually completed intake assessment by the time any information, *if it does come back*, comes back.”

These information sharing gaps mean that specialist family violence services are often unable to obtain the information they need map a person using violence’s history engagement with agencies and services. As a result, practitioners do not know how risk has been assessed previously or to what extent a person using family violence has engaged with interventions or whether affected family members are receiving support services. This subsequently limits opportunities for collaboration between service providers, encourages siloed responses, and increases the potential for systems abuse. This can specifically negatively impact the consistency and effectiveness of risk assessments of high-risk offenders with multiple victims and contacts with different social and health services. These information gaps are pronounced in metropolitan areas where there are a greater number of services to accommodate denser populations, allowing people, predominantly men, using violence to slip through the cracks as they engage with new services in different locations.

**Specialist family violence service providers need access to accurate and timely information about men using family violence to make informed, best practice risk assessments and deliver impactful intervention services.** The CIP offers an ideal mechanism to facilitate more informed responses, but the current limited access restricts its utility.

Based on our consultations with our members and the broader family violence sector, we recommend that the CIP is expanded so that all specialist family violence services can directly access CIP reports. This expansion must be accompanied by training for specialist family violence service staff on how to use the CIP system and assess and manage related risk, such as when to disclose risk-related information to victim-survivors.

The safety of service users must be paramount in an expansion of the CIP, as outlined in the following recommendation. The purpose of expansion is to support improved service responses. There needs to be processes embedded in the expansion that ensure information collected cannot be used for criminal proceedings.

Many services currently don’t receive notification that a client has breached an intervention order or committed another type of offence, which jeopardises their ability to assess risk effectively. As part of expanding access to the CIP, mechanisms should also be explored to introduce automated data sharing between the justice system and specialist family violence service providers.

## Member insight – Family Life

“We need to improve the feedback loop from the criminal justice system and intake services to service providers. If a client reoffends, or there are further incidences of reported family violence, how are service providers informed?”

Expanded access to the CIP will require increased resourcing for CIP workers at the four agencies that report into it to ensure a timely response to increased demand for reports. Currently, reports already take weeks to be generated for services operating within the Orange Door.

The Victorian Budget 2024/25 outlined a Government commitment to the continuation of the operation of the CIP, and the most recent package of reforms announced by the Victorian Government promised an upgrade to the process to ensure it operates more efficiently to share information faster.<sup>3</sup> No to Violence contends this would be best realised by expanding access to the CIP so that all specialist family violence services can directly access CIP reports to support more informed responses to people using violence.

## Safe and Equal submission

“The system would benefit from strengthening its capacity and capability in ‘connecting the dots’ of patterns of behaviour for perpetrators and to work collaboratively to support victim survivor safety and maintain perpetrator visibility.”

## Recommendation 7: Develop statewide processes for seeking and communicating the consent of affected family members for intervention services for people using family violence to contact

Family safety advocacy supports affected family members through the participation of the person using violence in behaviour change programs and informs interventions to respond to issues raised by victim-survivors. **Family safety advocacy is central to safe and effective interventions as it informs risk assessments and provides more complete understandings of the behaviour of persons using violence.**

Crucial to enabling family safety advocacy is the Orange Doors. However, intervention services for people using violence often do not receive affected family member contact details when clients are referred to them because affected family members have not been asked to or have not provided consent to be contacted. Several NTV members contend some Orange Door processes are creating a

<sup>3</sup> Premier of Victoria, Jacinta Allen (2024) Changing Laws And Culture To Save Women's Lives. <https://www.premier.vic.gov.au/changing-laws-and-culture-save-womens-lives>

barrier to the delivery of family safety advocacy, including through the redaction of L17 police referrals. They have communicated serious concerns to NTV, including concerns men using violence are not always receiving a specialist response at specific Orange Doors. Family safety advocacy is already difficult to do, and chronically under-funded, but members are reporting a reticence to pass on affected family member contact details makes this situation worse. It is believed there are concerns that providers will misuse that information. Consequently, the intention of the Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme (FVISS) and Child Information Sharing Scheme (CISS) is being compromised.

### Member insight

“We have very few family safety advocates, but we are also struggling to get in touch with the women – this goes to my point about the Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme.

We cannot get the women’s details or current contact information because it is not considered high enough risk to attain that. Even though the man has disclosed her information, and by her choice – and rightly so – she may change her phone number. If another service is already engaging with her, it would be nice to know if our service is having an impact or reduction in his use of FV towards her – that to me is a huge barrier in us understanding change.

We can measure their attitudes and beliefs around women in general, and their partners and all of that – but the real [measure is] how FV has or has not reduced. [That’s what] really matters.”

Without access to this information, services working with people using violence are unable to provide family safety advocacy. They also have no official mechanisms to find out if an affected family member is engaged with a victim-survivor service, so they have no sense of their safety. While these improvements in information sharing must be done in ways that limit the potential for increasing risk, they are critical to ensure that interventions for people using family violence centre the experiences and perspectives of victim-survivors, including children.

### Recommendation 8: Develop an accessible, effective, and responsive mechanism to rectify misidentification of the predominant aggressor across relevant data systems

Misidentification of the predominant aggressor in family violence is an enormous issue that must be centred in work to better understand the scale and scope of perpetration in Victorian. An updated study on the prevalence of misidentification is due, but investigations have shown that over half of women on Family Violence Intervention Orders (FVIO) in Victoria have been misidentified as the

predominant aggressor.<sup>4</sup> More recent data revealed that the proportion of respondents on Family Violence Reports who had previously been recorded as a victim were disproportionately high for women (58.7%) and higher still for Aboriginal women (79.4%), compared to the rate for men at 26.7%.<sup>5</sup> **Despite this, there are no reliable and consistent escalation pathways to review cases of suspected misidentification across Victoria.**

Misidentification poses a serious safety risk to victim-survivors and points to the ways in which the criminal justice system can be unsafe, especially for Victoria's most marginalised people and communities. As outlined by Djirra in their submission, misidentification of the predominant aggressor happens more frequently for Aboriginal women, which makes them less safe and more vulnerable to criminalisation, incarceration, and removal of their children.

The two key aspects for the Inquiry to consider on misidentification of the predominant aggressor is the MARAM work by Family Safety Victoria on misidentification and the work underway by Victoria Police to reduce and rectify misidentification by police officers.

Family Safety Victoria's Tools for Risk Assessment and Management (TRAM) includes a Predominant Aggressor Identification Tool to support specialist family violence services to identify the need to explore misidentification. For example, where men using violence may engage in systems abuse by presenting themselves to the police and services as the victim and accusing the other party of being the predominant aggressor. While containing adult and child victim survivor MARAM risk assessments and safety plans, the TRAM does not yet contain all MARAM resources, is not fully rolled out across the community sector, and the Predominant Aggressor Identification Tool is only available for agencies onboarded to TRAM.<sup>6</sup>

On Victoria Police, misidentification through L17s has devastating impact for victim-survivors. This includes making them more vulnerable to increased systems abuse. For example, where a victim-survivor is misidentified as the predominant aggressor and is a respondent to a FVIO, they are at risk of criminalisation. The actual predominant aggressor then has increased opportunity to perpetrate systems abuse by seeking to report breaches of the FVIO, which can lead to criminal charges and even incarceration for the victim-survivor. This is of most danger to marginalised people, particularly First Nations women, culturally and racially marginalised women, LGBTIQ+ people and people with a disability. Some L17s can be reversed, but this is a very difficult process and is dependent on the specific charges or orders. Many systemic issues drive misidentification, and critical interventions are needed to reduce the number of people subjected to this additional violence. More needs to be done to prevent misidentification from happening in the first place, as well as work to enable rectification. Victoria Police is currently working on rectification processes, including a pilot program, but we urgently need further clarity on that work and the evaluation of the pilot.

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<sup>4</sup> Women's Legal Services Victoria (2018) Policy Paper 1: "Officer she's psychotic and I need protection": Police misidentification of the 'primary aggressor' in family violence incidents in Victoria. <https://womenslegal.org.au/files/file/WLSV%20Policy%20Brief%201%20MisID%20July%202018.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor (2021) Monitoring Victoria's family violence reforms Accurate identification of the predominant aggressor. Victoria Government. [https://content.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-12/FVRIM%20Predominant%20Aggressor%20December%202021\\_0.pdf](https://content.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-12/FVRIM%20Predominant%20Aggressor%20December%202021_0.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Victoria Government (2023) MARAM tools in TRAM - Predominant Aggressor Identification Tool. <https://www.vic.gov.au/maramis-quarterly-newsletter-quarter-1-2023-24/q1-maram-tools-tram-predominant-aggressor>

Despite these two pieces of work, there remains enormous difficulties in rectifying misidentification, and more work is needed to reduce misidentification and the associated risks it poses. As Djirra outline in their submission, it is difficult, time-consuming, and sometimes impossible for services to correct their records, even when a court has deemed misidentification has occurred.

With increased information sharing, the potential for compounding the negative impacts of misidentification is intensified. Increased data capture, as pursued by this Inquiry, must prioritise an accessible and effective mechanism to quickly rectify misidentification of the predominant aggressor across the Government service system. **We support Djirra’s recommendation to the Inquiry that the Government must establish a formal mechanism to enable the fast correction of any misinformation and other errors held by Police, Child Protection, Central Information Point and other relevant Government record holders.**

### Recommendation 9: Transparently outline and conduct a review into how perpetration data feeds into unit costings for intervention service funding

To ensure there is appropriate service provision and service contracts are properly costed, this Inquiry must also ascertain what data is used to frame government funding for perpetration interventions and how that data is operationalised. Currently, the family violence sector does not know how perpetration data is used to determine service contracts. There is a vague shared understanding that service contracts are calculated by using information about the number of police-recorded family violence incidents (L17s) in each local government area, and that this feeds into a calculation that includes a unit costing for each client. However, there is a lack of transparency as to how these calculations take place. This lack of transparency raises concern about the rigorousness of funding models.



# Developing a deeper understanding of pathways into and out of family violence perpetration

Men using family violence are a diverse cohort. Treating them as a homogenous group risks missing the complexities of family violence perpetration and developing responses that fail to respond to its diverse and intersecting drivers. These include compounding forms of violence through processes of colonisation, racism, classism, ableism, and homophobia experienced by marginalised men, and also those whose family violence use intersects with complex needs due to life experiences, including acquired brain injury, cognitive impairment, and childhood experiences of violence and/or trauma. Understanding the impacts of these diverse and complex experiences is crucial to ensuring the development and implementation of effective, appropriate interventions to end family violence.

Overall, there is very little detailed research on family violence perpetration. For example, there is no reliable data on the proportion of Australian men using family violence. This means there is limited understanding of who perpetrates family violence, why they do, and what works to stop them. As a result, the current intervention system is based on an incomplete understanding of the nature, scale, and scope of the problem. Consequently, it does not provide the most effective and appropriate responses to reduce and end family violence. To change this, this Inquiry must advance data mechanisms that build understanding of pathways into, and pathways out of, using violence.

## Pathways into using violence

As outlined in the recent Australian National Research Agenda to End Violence against Women and Children,<sup>7</sup> the following knowledge needs to be developed to build understanding of pathways into using violence:

- What systems, institutions and social norms enable perpetration (i.e., what are the motivating factors that lead to family violence perpetration)?
- What are the key intervention points to prevent people using violence? And, in what ways do factors such as age, cultural background, sexuality, mental illness, alcohol and other drug abuse, problem gambling, and childhood trauma shape these?

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<sup>7</sup> Lloyd et al. (2023). The Australian National Research Agenda to End Violence against Women and Children (ANRA) 2023–2028. Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety ANROWS. [https://anrowsdev.wpenginepowered.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/ANROWS\\_ANRA\\_2023-2028\\_WEB\\_FINAL.pdf](https://anrowsdev.wpenginepowered.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/ANROWS_ANRA_2023-2028_WEB_FINAL.pdf)

## Recommendation 10: Invest in analysis of behaviour patterns of people using violence across service engagement to develop effective, appropriate interventions

There is opportunity to build understanding of pathways into using violence by examining engagement with key service touchpoints. **Analysis should look at data from L17s and other justice system touchpoints, specialist family violence services, and allied social services, such as health, housing and child protection.** Data captured by family safety advocates and other practitioners working directly with victim-survivors should also feed into this analysis to build understanding of violent behaviour patterns. For the most part, these datasets are currently siloed from each other. Consequently, there is a missed opportunity to advance deeper understandings of family violence perpetration, especially client journeys through and across service provision.

## Recommendation 11: Fund and support research on men using family violence who don't come into contact with the service system

Most men using family violence never come in to contact with the criminal justice or family violence service systems because of their manipulation and evasion, inadequate police and service responses, and underreporting.<sup>89</sup> **This means there is currently an over-reliance on service system data, which leads to constructing family violence perpetration as a problem of men that are engaged with these systems.** These men are often marginalised and already at increased risk of criminalisation and incarceration. Unless active measures are taken to challenge these skewed representations of family violence perpetration, efforts to prevent and stop people using violence will miss the mark. Thus, targeted research is needed to build understanding of men who are not engaged with service systems, how they perpetrate violence, and what can be done to identify them and stop their use of family violence. This can be achieved by supporting:

- **A Victorian population-based perpetration study that is part of a national perpetration study:** Currently there is no state or nationally representative data on the prevalence of family violence, and there is minimal understanding of the patterns and dynamics of perpetration.<sup>10</sup> As a result, we do not have the data to measure one of the National Plan's key long-term outcomes: that "People who choose to use violence are accountable for their actions and stop their violent, coercive and abusive behaviours."<sup>11</sup> Such a study would work best as part of a

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<sup>8</sup> Meyer (2016) Still blaming the victim of intimate partner violence? Women's narratives of victim desistance and redemption when seeking support. *Theoretical Criminology*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362480615585399>

<sup>9</sup> Douglas (2019) Policing domestic and family violence. *International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy*. DOI: 10.5204/ijcjsd.v8i2.1122

<sup>10</sup> Flood et al. (2022) Who uses domestic, family, and sexual violence, how, and why? The State of Knowledge Report on Violence Perpetration. Queensland University of Technology. <https://research.qut.edu.au/centre-for-justice/wp-content/uploads/sites/304/2023/01/Who-uses-domestic-family-and-sexual-violence-how-and-why-The-State-of-Knowledge-Report-on-Violence-Perpetration-2023.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> Department of Social Services (2023) Outcomes Framework 2023–2032, Commonwealth of Australia. [https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/08\\_2023/np-outcomes-framework.pdf](https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/08_2023/np-outcomes-framework.pdf)

national perpetration study, that sits alongside the National Community Attitudes Survey (NCAS) and the Personal Safety Survey.

- **Addition of questions about perpetration to the NCAS:** The NCAS' exclusion of questions about perpetration misses an opportunity to build understanding of how Australians' attitudes influence perpetration of family violence. With careful wording and the confidential nature of the NCAS may also mean that individuals are more willing to disclose their own use of violence, which would help to build understanding of the scale and dynamics of perpetration.
- **Development and evaluation of community-led prevention and intervention programs:** As community-led programs can be more accessible and trusted by community members, they have potential to identify family violence perpetration not formally reported, for example to Victoria Police or family violence services. Community-led programs are usually more culturally appropriate and, thus, overcome barriers to reporting and response that may exist in relation to mainstream service systems. It is critical that in leveraging the strengths of community-led programs to build understanding of family violence perpetration, that evaluation of these programs is not used to increase criminal proceedings, by which reducing community trust and engagement with programs.

These research initiatives need to integrate with, and not replicate, existing research commitments or newly announced funding. For example, NSW government's announced \$5 million for perpetration research and \$4.3 million for Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) to further build the evidence base on pathways into and out of family violence perpetration.

## Pathways out of using violence

As outlined in the ANRA,<sup>12</sup> there is an urgent need to build understanding of pathways out of using violence. There needs to be a stronger understanding of what interventions work best for which men to change their violent behaviour, and what factors encourage them to do so.

### Recommendation 12: Develop an Outcome Measurement Framework for perpetration interventions to improve service provision impact

The current prioritisation of output measurements, rather than outcome measurements, for interventions for people using violence inhibits achieving a full understanding of what works best to stop men using family violence. While output measurements – such as how many men attend a program and/or completion rates – are useful for understanding the level of activity and engagement with intervention services, they provide little insight into the impact of these services.

In contrast, outcome measurements – such as changes in attitudes and behaviours of men using violence, and reports of safety and wellbeing of affected family members – provide a deeper level of

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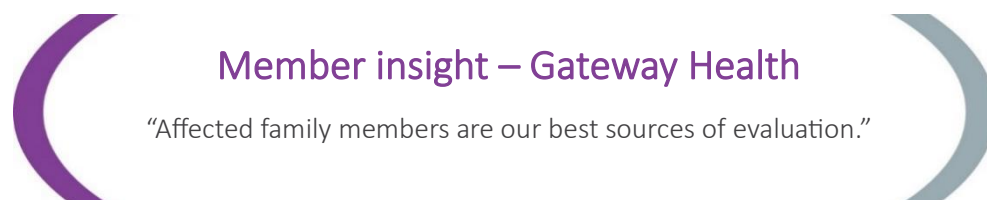
<sup>12</sup> Lloyd et al. (2023). The Australian National Research Agenda to End Violence against Women and Children (ANRA) 2023–2028. ANROWS.

insight into the impact of service provision on reducing family violence. **Outcome measurements are critical to broadening understanding of what ‘success’ looks like for services working with people using violence to better recognise the complexity of behaviour change journeys.** Intervention services aim to shift deeply embedded values and behaviours, which often means that men using violence require lengthy engagement with a range of services. In this way, outcome measurements are best placed to capture data on how intervention services support men’s behaviour change journeys, moving beyond unrealistic and oversimplistic expectations that men using violence will be ‘fixed’ by attending a single, time-limited program.

Although outcome measurements are generally more difficult to capture, there must be a greater emphasis on them in the evaluation of interventions for people using violence to build understanding of what works best to stop men using family violence. In turn, the insights from outcome measurements can drive more targeted and effective interventions, ensuring that all men have access to effective, appropriate services to reduce and end their use of violence.

**The Outcome Measurement Framework should seek to measure demonstrable changes in attitudes and behaviours and taking accountability for the harm people using violence have caused, in their relationships with (ex-) partners, children and other family members.** These measurements can be captured by training and resourcing practitioners to evaluate the attitudes and behaviours of men in programs.

**The framework should also include measures of safety and wellbeing of affected family members, with data capturing facilitated through family safety advocacy and collaboration with victim-survivor services.** This can help close a significant gap in the current evaluation approach. Despite standards for interventions for people using violence emphasising women’s and children’s safety, measuring the safety of affected family members is generally not part of evaluation<sup>13</sup>.



The framework must be supported by delivering adequate and sustainable funding for family safety advocacy that is connected to clear contract targets. At present, family safety advocacy is required in funding agreements and as part of the Victorian Minimum Standards, but it is not reflected in targets. NTV members shared that a significant portion of the work is not recorded in the data at all as there are no reportable targets related to family safety contact work. It is imperative that these processes prioritise victim-survivor safety and mitigate the reporting burden for victim-survivors by supporting practitioners to undertake evaluations.

The Victorian Government must work closely with the specialist family violence sector to develop the framework, ensuring the knowledge of frontline service practitioners shapes its design and implementation. Investment will be needed to train practitioners to complete outcome evaluations, as

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<sup>13</sup> Australia’s National Research Organisation for Women’s Safety. (2020). Evaluating behaviour change programs for men who use domestic and family violence. ANROWS. [https://anrowsdev.wpenginepowered.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/ANROWS-Nicholas\\_Evaluation-MBCP\\_RtPP.pdf](https://anrowsdev.wpenginepowered.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/ANROWS-Nicholas_Evaluation-MBCP_RtPP.pdf)

well as additional funding for service providers to resource the capturing and reporting of accurate data.

The potential for the framework to improve service responses is dependent on its alignment with the Government's contractual frameworks. This must be part of a move to ensure funding reflects the real cost of delivering best practice interventions, as current funding contracts are often inadequate to meet target output measures, let alone capture and achieve measurable outcome success. In doing so, alignment of the framework with Government contracts would enable deeper and more targeted understanding of the impacts of interventions. **By working with service providers to meaningfully measure the impact of service delivery, rather than contractually scrutinising providers against outputs, the Victorian Government and specialist family violence sector can build a deeper understanding of what works to stop people using violence.**

The framework needs to align with the National Outcome Standards for Perpetrator Interventions (NOPSIS) and with outcome measurements for victim-survivor services. The NOPSIS was an important step to outlining what intervention services should achieve and what principles should guide their operation. However, the six measures reported against in the NOPSIS Baseline Report 2015-16 were all output measures, with the report encouraging jurisdictions to develop outcome measures as data development improves.<sup>14</sup> Almost a decade on from the development of the NOPSIS, Victoria has an opportunity to lead this progress by developing an Outcome Measurement Framework.

## Recommendation 13: Integrate emerging research findings to develop a broad suite of targeted, effective, and timely interventions to end family violence

Knowledge of what interventions work best for which men is being developed (and can be advanced by actioning the above recommendations) and must be integrated into practice. By funding the development and evaluation of programs that embed these findings, the Victorian Government can further test and refine this knowledge. The integration of research findings should be done by expanding the scale and diversity of interventions. **This includes funding the development and evaluation of interventions that include trauma-informed one-to-one counselling, case management, First Nations healing-focused programs, community-led programs for culturally and racially marginalised men, and targeted programs for men with complex factors that overlap with their use of family violence.** Urgently developing and embedding a broad suite of interventions is critical. While men's behaviour change programs are an important piece of the puzzle, they are not a one-stop-shop for all men using violence.

This can be actioned by funding ongoing programs that integrate findings from completed evaluations of pilot programs. There is a wealth of knowledge about how best respond to people's use of violence that is developed through pilot programs, but not leveraged because programs only receive short-term, one-off funding. This is despite evidence that longer-term, holistic interventions are needed to

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<sup>14</sup> Department of Social Services (2018) National Outcome Standards for Perpetrator Interventions: Baseline report, 2015–16. <https://plan4womenssafety.dss.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/nationaloutcomestandardsreportweb.pdf>

achieve real change<sup>15</sup>, which requires sustainable funding so that programs can learn and grow. Additionally, current and future pilot and innovative programs must have evaluation funding embedded into contracts.

Research findings can also be integrated into practice by committing to develop and evaluate intervention services based on the information gathered and actions resulting from this Inquiry. **The value of the knowledge developed by advancing research and data collection of pathways into, and out of, using violence is ultimately determined by how it is integrated into practice.** That is, how it practically keeps victim-survivors safe. To capitalise on the knowledge that this Inquiry builds, the Victorian Government needs to invest additional funding to support the development of intervention programs that fill service gaps – which as identified above, must include a suite of interventions that provide alternatives to mainstream men’s behaviour change programs.

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<sup>15</sup> Bell & Coates (2022) The effectiveness of interventions for perpetrators of domestic and family violence: An overview of findings from reviews. ANROWS. <https://anrowsdev.wenginepowered.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/ANROWS-OofR-Perpetrator-Interventions.pdf>