

2012-2015

VICTORIA'S ACTION PLAN TO ADDRESS VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN & CHILDREN

Everyone
has a **responsibility**
to **act**



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FOREWORD

Violence against women and children is unacceptable in any form and under any circumstances and in any community in Victoria. The Coalition Government is committed to preventing violence happening, holding perpetrators to account for their actions and making sure we are supporting those women and children who experience violence.

This Action Plan outlines the government's approach to reducing violence against women and children. Prevention through education, community engagement and early intervention are fundamental to ensure long lasting change across the community.

Our plan provides education and community engagement measures, to help prevent violence against women and children before it occurs.

Our plan provides measures to help identify and assist those women and children who are at risk of experiencing violence. It also provides early intervention measures to help change the behaviour of those at risk of committing violence, before it occurs.

Our plan provides a strong law and order focus, signalling our intention to deter perpetrators from committing violence, hold them accountable for their behaviour and help change their behaviour. Our plan provides compassionate and supportive response services for women and children who experience family violence and sexual assault because these women and children need support to rebuild their lives.

Finally, our plan involves a more co-ordinated and integrated approach by government and other agencies to helping these women and children. It recognises that research, education and early intervention are vital to ensure long lasting change across the community.

The Victorian Government will be committing over \$90 million in 2012-13 to prevent violence against women and children, provide early intervention services and fund support services. This is a 20 per cent increase in funding in just two years. It includes an injection of an additional \$16 million over four years, announced in September 2012, to relieve some of the immediate pressures that have been placed on family violence and sexual assault support and men's behaviour change services as a result of recent increased reporting of family violence.

However, government acting alone will not produce the changes needed – we need the whole community involved. Everyone has a responsibility to act. That's why our plan outlines an extensive range of existing and new measures, and highlights the need to work together across government and across the community to stop violence.



The Hon Ted Baillieu
Premier



The Hon Peter Ryan
Deputy Premier
Minister for Police & Emergency Services



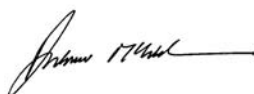
The Hon Mary Wooldridge
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OUR APPROACH

The Victorian Government believes that violence against anyone in any form is unacceptable. Violence against women and children is particularly devastating for families, the community and the state.

Family violence and sexual assault impact negatively on the physical and mental health of women and children. Women living with violence can become isolated, unable to reach out for and receive the support that they need. They may be stopped from going to work and participating in their communities. Children are also deeply affected. When violence is directed at them or when they are otherwise exposed to it, children may be unable to participate fully in education, sports or social events. More generally, the sheer impact of family violence and sexual assault on the health of women and children experiencing it is profound and spans many quality of life measures.

Violence against women and children has massive social and economic costs. The financial costs of family violence are estimated to be over \$3.4 billion per annum for Victoria. Businesses are impacted when employees cannot get to work. Women and families may be forced to forgo earnings. Communities miss out on the valuable contributions of those experiencing violence.

Levels of family violence are unacceptably high and reported family violence in Victoria has more than doubled over the last ten years. While some men are the victims of family violence and sexual assault, women and children of all ages are overwhelmingly the victims of these forms of violence.

Increased reporting is vital to uncovering violence against women and children. We want women to feel more confident to report experiences of violence when they occur and receive the right services at the right time.

Better reporting has been facilitated through the introduction of the Victoria Police Code of Practice for responding to and investigating family violence and the *Family Violence Protection Act 2008*. As a result of these measures, women feel more confident that their experience will be treated seriously by the police and the justice system. Police are responding with more police officers, more call outs, more referrals, more Family Violence Safety Notices, and more criminal charges against perpetrators.

The Victorian Government will continue to encourage reporting of family violence and sexual assault. The Victorian Government will implement a rigorous plan of action to reduce the incidence of family violence and sexual assault and lessen the impact on women, children, other family members and the broader community.

A long-term vision

Our vision is for women and children to live free from violence in Victoria.

Given the extent and complex nature of violence against women and children, our long-term vision is underpinned not just by actions over the next three years, but by directions for the future. Our plan is an important foundation in a longer journey to realise our vision.

We want a future where men do not commit violence against women and children.

We want a future where women do not experience any form of violence by a partner, husband, father or family member and where children do not witness or personally experience violence.

We want women and children in Victoria to be able to realise their potential and participate fully in all aspects of their lives.

To achieve this, women and children must feel and be safe – within their relationships, families and communities.

A shared responsibility across government

Violence against women and children cannot be addressed through the police, justice or community services portfolios alone. Even though these portfolios are integral, other areas such as health, mental health, housing, crime prevention, Aboriginal affairs, education, local government, employment, sport, recreation and youth have roles to play in preventing violence against women and children and in assisting women and children to rebuild their lives if they have experienced violence.

The government will continue to integrate its approach to family violence across all portfolios and broader policy reviews and developments. A snapshot of how our Action Plan sits alongside other Victorian Government policies and strategies is provided at Appendix 3. In particular, our plan will complement the *Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families – Towards a safer future for Indigenous families and communities 10 year plan* which specifically addresses family violence in Aboriginal communities.

The family violence and sexual assault reforms in Victoria to date have been characterised by the establishment of the integrated family violence system, the implementation of sexual assault reforms and significant legislative changes. The work of community and government leaders in initiating and implementing these reforms is recognised and applauded.

While existing efforts to develop integrated and connected policies in relation to family violence and sexual assault will provide a strong base for the actions outlined in our plan, survivors have told us that this is an area still in need of improvement.

Our plan will therefore focus on ensuring that affected women and children receive consistent connected support and service, not endless referrals or multiple application forms. Dedicated reforms, such as the Department of Human Services' new Services Connect model and our innovative approach to homelessness support for women escaping family violence will help (see Appendix 3). There will also need to be ongoing improvement of the mainstream system, including the need to improve information flow across services.

A shared responsibility across the community

The Victorian Government cannot end violence against women on its own. We need change across our community to stop violence against women and children. We need the community talking about this issue and rejecting violence against women and children. We need men to lead and challenge other men about this issue. All of us must take a stand on this issue – violence against women and children is unacceptable.

Realising the long-term vision of all women and children living free from violence in Victoria involves everybody including governments, businesses, media, community organisations, sporting organisations, communities, families and individuals.

We believe that there is increased preparedness across the community to act against violence towards women and children. Our plan encourages and supports this.

Our focus

Reflecting its priority status across government, our plan reflects a whole-of-government approach, linked to other government agendas and strategies. It will be led by ministers across a range of portfolio areas.

Our plan takes a direct approach to the issue: violence against women and children is unacceptable. From this very clear starting point, our plan builds on previous Victorian leadership and works towards a long-term vision of all women and children living free from all forms of violence.

Forms of violence experienced by women and children in Victoria are addressed in the Action Plan and are included in Appendix 1. The context for the Action Plan is outlined in Appendix 2, which sets out the extent of violence against women and children in Victoria and its social and economic impact.

The plan is supported by an investment of \$90 million in 2012–2013 which includes expanded family violence and sexual assault counselling services, alongside broader reforms to legal, police and court processes and better connected services for women and children who experience violence.

This Action Plan will leverage partnerships with other organisations and communities to:

- prevent family violence from occurring
- intervene earlier to identify and support women and children who are at risk of violence
- respond to violence by holding perpetrators to account, ensure connected services are available, and provide strong deterrents to stop re-offending.

Prevention

Prevention is at the core of our Action Plan. Our emphasis is on educating the community to change attitudes and behaviours that have allowed violence against women and children to continue.

Major new initiatives in schools, media and workplaces will be implemented to educate and promote respectful and non-violent relationships and to ensure that all Victorians reject the use of violence against women and children.

Action will also be taken to engage organisations and communities to promote gender equity, cultural respect and a culture of non-violence. Regional action plans with a community focus will be developed to connect community organisations and individuals working on this issue and to raise awareness, share information and educate communities.

New prevention initiatives that are tailored to meet the needs of multicultural communities will also be implemented. Prevention initiatives will also be undertaken to better understand and address the dynamics of family violence experienced by women with disabilities.

Early intervention

Early intervention is a critical part of addressing violence against women and children.

We will act to identify women and children who are at the greatest risk of violence and provide interventions that reduce their risk and increase their safety. Initiatives include the expansion of family violence risk assessment and management training and resources for service professionals to identify and manage the safety of women and children at risk of violence.

Action will also be focused on changing the behaviour of men who use violence. Initiatives will include training for mainstream services so that they are better equipped to work with men who are at risk of being violent and a pilot program for adolescents who use violence in their homes to prevent further escalation of violence, ensure the safety of all family members and change the young person's behaviour.

Response

A comprehensive, integrated system will provide consistent, coordinated and timely responses to women and their children and will hold perpetrators of family violence to account. Under our plan, support services to women and children in areas of greatest need will be expanded, including, women's and children's family violence counselling and case management and sexual assault counselling.

We will continue to build community confidence to report family violence to police.

Reducing family violence is an operational priority for Victoria Police and it remains strongly committed to responding effectively and consistently to violence against women and children.

To improve the way in which it responds to and investigates family violence, Victoria Police has introduced the Enhanced Family Violence Service Delivery Model and currently engages dedicated Family Violence Advisers and Family Violence Liaison Officers. It also utilises family violence teams in areas of high demand across the state.

Victoria Police has strengthened its approach to sexual assault and child abuse through the implementation of Sexual Offences and Child Abuse Investigations Teams and has worked with other agencies such as the Department of Human Services and the Department of Justice to establish and operate multidisciplinary centres to provide holistic responses to victims of these crimes.

Victoria Police will continue to improve responses to sexual assault, family violence and child abuse through *Living Free from Violence: Upholding the Right – Victoria Police's strategy to reduce violence against women and children*, as well as actions outlined in this Action Plan.

Specialist family violence courts have also contributed to increased confidence in the system through consistent specialist support and improved integration with police and services. The justice system must be able to respond swiftly and effectively to increased rates of reporting.

Under our plan, new laws are proposed to hold perpetrators to greater account and to enhance police and court processes, so that family violence matters can be dealt with more expeditiously, meaning swifter justice for perpetrators and improved safety for victims. These reforms will be developed by the Victorian Government in consultation with the community.

New offences and penalties will be introduced for breaches of family violence intervention orders, including the introduction of an indictable offence with a maximum penalty of five years imprisonment.

We will also be extending the operation of Family Violence Safety Notices issued by police so they can operate for up to five days, rather than the current three days. This will better protect women and children by extending the immediate protection police can provide to family violence victims before the case can be heard by a court. It will also give victims more time to obtain advice and make decisions, and will allow cases to be better scheduled for hearings, meaning less congestion and shorter waiting times at court for victims and their families.

Our Action Plan also provides for more mandated men's behaviour change programs, to bring about a fundamental change in the attitudes and behaviours of men who continue to act violently against women and children. The number of places in these programs will almost double. We will also pilot a program for offenders in prison or on community based orders.

These actions will protect and empower women and children, get tough on perpetrators and reduce re-offending.

A strong collective impact

By taking a strong, practical approach based on a fundamental premise that violence against women and children is unacceptable, our Action Plan provides a coordinated plan that will have a strong collective impact.

Our plan recognises that violence against women and children is a complex social and economic problem that affects all Victorians. A complex issue needs a multi-faceted approach based on practical action across many areas of government and across the community as a whole. This plan contains a set of mutually reinforcing initiatives across the spectrum of prevention, early intervention and response.

While the Victorian Government can provide strong leadership and integrated approaches, the task of reducing the incidence and impact of violence against women and children also involves communities, organisations and individuals taking action – everyone has a responsibility to act.

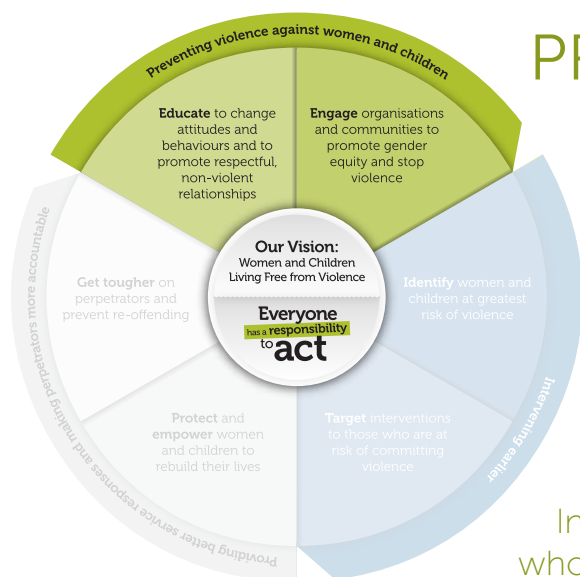
Working together, we can reduce the incidence of family violence and reduce the negative impact on women and children, families and communities.

THE ACTIONS

The Victorian Government initiatives to address violence against women and children fall within three streams:

- **Preventing violence against women and children** by educating to change attitudes and behaviours and to promote respectful non-violent relationships and engaging organisations and communities to promote gender equity and stop violence.
- **Intervening earlier** by identifying and targeting individuals and groups who exhibit early signs of violent behaviour or of being subjected to violence.
- **Responding through an integrated system** which provides consistent, coordinated and timely responses to women and children who experience family violence to protect and empower them to rebuild their lives and to get tougher on perpetrators and prevent re-offending.





PREVENTION

Preventing violence against women and children by fostering relationships, organisations, communities and cultures that are gender equitable and non-violent

Primary prevention strategies seek to prevent violence before it occurs. Interventions can be targeted at the whole population or tailored to particular groups or communities

Areas of focus

Prevention initiatives are grouped into two areas of focus:

- **Educate** to change attitudes and behaviours and to promote respectful, non-violent relationships.
- **Engage** organisations and communities to promote gender equity and stop violence.



Educate to change attitudes and behaviours and to promote respectful, non-violent relationships

Actions to improve attitudes towards women, to promote respectful and non-violent relationships and to ensure that all Victorians reject the use of violence against women and children, in all circumstances

Current Initiatives

- **White Ribbon Awareness Raising** – a male-led initiative to prevent violence against women. The initiative supports awareness raising through White Ribbon activities, including an event where Victorian Members of Parliament make a pledge to say no to violence.
- **Bullying Prevention Programs** – a suite of programs including the Stamp Out Bullying program, to raise community awareness and promote local action to address and prevent bullying (including cyber-bullying) in schools.
- **Media Advocacy Project for Victims/Survivors of Violence against Women** – trains and supports survivors to engage with the media and be spokespeople for media interviews and public events.
- **Eliminating Violence Against Women Media Awards (EVAs)** – recognise excellence in the responsible reporting of violence against women, including family violence or sexual assault.
- **Victoria Police Indigenous Family Violence and Sexual Assault Awareness Campaigns** – locally produced television commercials in four regional locations, that reinforce the message that violence and sexual abuse against women and children is not part of Aboriginal culture and encourages reporting of family violence and sexual assault.

Further Initiatives

- **Respectful Relationships Education** – a whole-of-school program to build respectful relationships education into the curriculum and provide other relevant resources and teacher training, to work with schools to improve student social media literacy and to support the safe use of technology as a platform for respectful relationships.
- **Disability Sector Resources and Training** – information, resources and training programs for people who work with women with disabilities so that they can better understand and address the dynamics of violence that affects women with disabilities.
- **Comprehensive Media Program** – information sessions and resources for journalists and media, (including the ethnic and Aboriginal media) for reporting on violence against women and other issues related to portrayal of women in the media.
- **Promoting Positive Media Portrayal of Women and Girls** – work with other governments across Australia and the media to promote positive media representations of women and girls and consider how we can limit the sexualisation of women and girls in the media and popular culture.

Engage organisations and communities to promote gender equity and stop violence

Actions to address the underlying causes of violence against women and children including unequal power relations, adherence to rigid gender stereotypes and broader cultures of violence



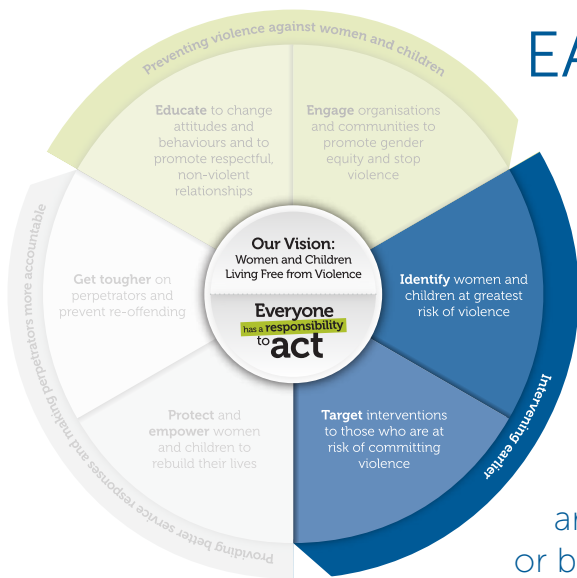
Current Initiatives

- **Preventing Violence Against Women in our Community Project Pilot** – delivering a range of locally relevant initiatives to prevent violence against women in three local government clusters.
- **Reducing Violence Against Women and their Children Grants** – provides regionally-based funding to encourage innovation, strengthen partnerships and build the evidence base for early intervention and primary prevention initiatives, including the Koori Community Safety Grants Program.
- **Local Government Program** – resources and training delivered to Victorian local councils to build their understanding of and capacity to prevent violence against women.
- **Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families Plan** – continue to implement actions from *Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families – Towards a safer future for Indigenous families and communities 10 year plan*.
- **Implementing the Indigenous Family Violence Primary Prevention Framework** and funding for the Indigenous Family Violence Community Initiatives annual grant round.

Further Initiatives

- **Regional Action Plans** – develop and implement coordinated and cohesive regional action plans and activities to engage community organisations across regions in preventing violence against women.
- **Toolkits and Training for Workplaces** – provide resources, toolkits and training for workplaces to develop environments that are inclusive, safe and supportive of women.
- **Bystander Program** – to equip people to know what to do when someone known to them is experiencing or using violence against women.
- **Prevention in Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Communities** – work with targeted culturally and linguistically diverse communities on a program of activities and resources that are culturally sensitive, to raise awareness, provide information and promote leadership on preventing violence against women.
- **Preventing Violence against Women in our Community Pilot Review** – consider findings of the evaluation to inform how we best promote good practice approaches to prevent violence against women in local communities through local government.

EARLY INTERVENTION



Identifying and targeting individuals and groups who exhibit early signs of violent behaviour or of being subjected to violence

Strategies are aimed at identifying vulnerability and developing the skills of individuals and groups where there are indications that violence might occur or be repeated

Areas of focus

Early intervention initiatives are grouped into two areas of focus:

- **Identify** women and children at greatest risk of violence.
- **Target** interventions to those who are at risk of committing violence.

Identify women and children at greatest risk of violence

Actions focused on the identification of vulnerable women and children, and on minimising violence and its impact



Current Initiatives

- **Family Violence Risk Assessment and Risk Management Framework** – provides a standardised, transparent approach and tools to identify family violence and manage risk to improve the safety of women and their children. Recently extended into mainstream community service organisations and sectors as well as to a broad range of other specialist services.
- **Resourcing Health and Education Program** – works to prevent violence, encourage increased reporting and identify perpetrators of violence against sex workers. It also provides support to sex workers when they report assaults to police.
- **Pilot Perinatal Emotional Health Program Model** – this model aims to improve the capacity of the metropolitan perinatal service sector to identify and support women experiencing mental health symptoms, and psychosocial risk factors such as family violence and drug and alcohol use.
- **Antenatal Routine Psychosocial Screening Training** provided to staff in hospital antenatal settings to identify women with psychosocial risk factors, and how to respond to screening results.
- **Protecting Children Protocol** – to ensure ongoing collaboration between Victoria Police and the Department of Human Services in relation to vulnerable children.
- **Mental Health Inpatient Facilities** – improving the safety and security of women in care in mental health inpatient services through defined female areas and other improvements to facilities.
- **On-line Bullying Prevention Toolkit** – to assist schools to identify the prevalence and types of bullying occurring and determine the most effective strategies for addressing bullying.

Further Initiatives

- **Further extend Family Violence Risk Assessment and Risk Management Framework in Health Sector** – to Mental Health and Drug and Alcohol providers, Hospitals, GPs, Ambulance staff and to Emergency Management personal support and recovery staff.
- **Strengthen hospital responses to family violence** – develop a project to review and improve quality processes which strengthen hospitals' responses to family violence and optimise their relationship with the integrated family violence system.
- **Further extend Family Violence Risk Assessment and Risk Management Framework** to community corrections officers across the state.
- **Adapt Family Violence Risk Assessment and Risk Management Framework** for use in Aboriginal communities.

- **Assessing children and young people experiencing family violence** – a specialist practice resource and supporting training for family violence practitioners.
- **Family Violence and Homelessness Innovation Action Project** – as part of the *Victorian Homelessness Action Plan 2011–15*, a Family Violence and Homelessness Innovation Action Project which focuses specifically on early intervention and prevention for families at risk of or experiencing homelessness due to family violence.
- **Online Advice and Information** – improve online visibility of advice and information on sexual assault and family violence.
- **Integrated services** – retain family violence regional integration coordinators to better coordinate services and create strong inter-agency partnerships at a local level.



Target interventions to those who are at risk of committing violence

Actions focused on identifying those at risk of committing violence and intervening to change their behaviour

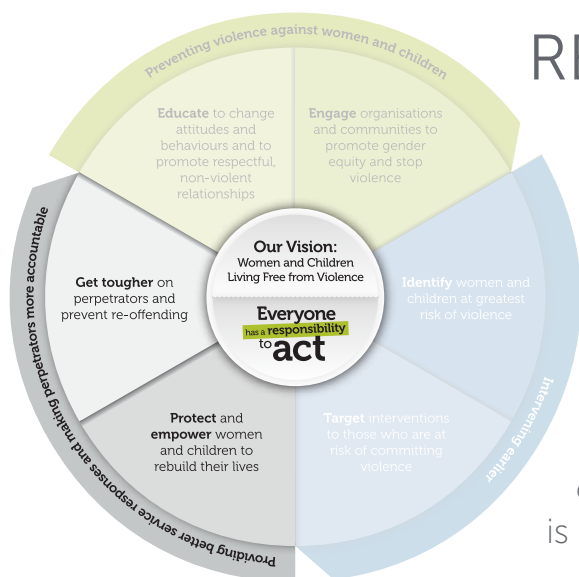
Current Initiatives

- **Voluntary Men's Behaviour Change Programs** – provide ongoing groups for men who use (family) violence with information and skills to change their behaviour and refer them to other services as required.
- **Therapeutic Treatment Orders and specialist treatment services** provided through the Sexually Abusive Behaviour Treatment Program to address problem sexual behaviour or sexually abusive behaviour displayed by children or adolescents.
- **Indigenous Time Out Services and Men's Group Programs** – provide support for Aboriginal men who use violence.

Further Initiatives

- **Pilot Behaviour Change Program for Adolescents** – pilot a new scheme for adolescents who use violence in the home to increase safety and reduce the likelihood that they will offend in adulthood.
- **Expanded Sexually Abusive Behaviours Treatment Program** – increase the number of Sexually Abusive Behaviours Treatment Program places from 240 per annum to 445 and establish an ongoing professional development program.
- **Training for mainstream services to work with men** – training sessions for mainstream services on how to work more effectively with men who have used violence against women.

RESPONSE



Responding to violence after it has occurred through an integrated system which provides consistent, coordinated and timely responses to women and children and which holds perpetrators to account

Strategies aim to deal with violence, its consequences, and reduce the risk that it is repeated or escalates

Response initiatives are grouped into two areas of focus:

- **Protect and empower** women and children to rebuild their lives.
- **Get tougher** on perpetrators and prevent re-offending.



Protect and empower women and children to rebuild their lives

Actions to ensure that service responses protect, support, and empower women and children who are victims of violence

Current Initiatives

- **Immediate crisis care services** – such as emergency accommodation and support for women and children, crisis care responses including through Crisis Care Units, after hours services, police and legal support services.
- **Service responses** – such as women and children's counselling, family violence support services, including outreach support, safe at home options, services for Aboriginal women experiencing family violence and extended after hours support.
- **Family Violence Protection Act 2008** – legislation that aims to protect victims of family violence and hold perpetrators to account.
- **Justice responses** – includes specialist family violence court services and intervention, Child Witness Service, specialist sexual offences lists in the Magistrates' Court and the County Court, training for judges and the legal profession on issues surrounding sexual assault, a forensic nursing network, specialist Sexual Offences Units within the Office of Public Prosecutions, legal support services for Aboriginal women experiencing family violence.
- **Sexual Assault Reform Strategy** – reforms to the justice system's response to sexual assault to meet the objectives of increasing rates of reporting and improving the experience of sexual assault victims in the justice system.
- **Sexual Assault Multidisciplinary Centres** – three centres are currently operating involving co-located partners: police investigators, sexual assault counsellor/advocates and child protection workers, to provide improved support for adult and child victims of sexual assault, enhanced investigation of sexual offences and child abuse, improved quality of evidence in sexual offence cases, increased reporting and reduced complaints withdrawn from justice and ongoing improved engagement with health and support systems.
- **Statewide Advisory Services** – including the Domestic Violence Resource Centre, Domestic Violence Victoria, Women with Disabilities Victoria, In Touch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence, No to Violence and Indigenous Men's Resource and Advisory Service.
- **Strengthening Risk Management Demonstration Projects** – two sites testing the implementation and delivery of coordinated multi-agency approaches to strengthen family violence risk management, providing for consistent and timely responses when assessing, planning and responding to the needs of a woman and her children, regardless of whether she reports family violence to police or other services.
- **Indigenous Healing Services** – services for families who have experienced family violence.
- **New Statewide Aboriginal Women's Response Services** in Mildura and Morwell.
- **Sexual Assault Support Services** – provide counselling, advocacy and support to child and adult victim/survivors of sexual assault.

- **Referral Pathways and Integrated Support for Older Women** – the *Elder Abuse Prevention and Response Guidelines for Action 2012–2014* raise awareness and ensure appropriate service responses are available to older women in the family violence and homelessness sectors.
- **Sexual Offences and Child Abuse Cross Training** – cross training between Sexual Offences and Child Abuse Investigation Teams and other service providers to improve responses to women and children.
- **Disability and Family Violence Crisis Response Pilot** – provides immediate disability support to women who have a disability or who have a child with a disability so they can access family violence crisis accommodation response or remain safely in their own home.
- **Family and Reproductive Rights Education Program** – supports culturally-sensitive, participatory work with affected communities, prioritises women's empowerment and seeks to increase access to, and improve, sexual, reproductive and mainstream health services for those at risk, or affected by female genital mutilation.
- **Responses to sex trafficking** – Sex Industry Coordination Unit established within Victoria Police to monitor legal and illegal brothels and develop intelligence capabilities around human trafficking, including sexual servitude. Victoria Sex Industry Strategic Management Group established, to oversee a multi-agency enforcement program against illegal sex work.
- **Victoria Police Enhanced Family Violence Service Delivery Model** – implementation of the enhanced service delivery model to ensure consistency of service delivery across the state whilst maintaining capacity for local innovation and response.
- **Family Violence Teams** – increased Victoria Police Family Violence Teams, especially in high incidence areas as well as Family Violence Advisers and Family Violence Liaison Officers.
- **Victoria Police Code of Practice for the Investigation of Family Violence** – ongoing implementation of the code to enhance safety and support for victims, early intervention, investigation and prosecution of criminal offences, and to minimise of family violence in the community.

Further Initiatives

- **Services Connect** – extend Services Connect lead sites to incorporate family violence services, police and children's services within an integrated service delivery model.
- **Koori Family Violence Police Protocols** – expansion to three more sites in the Grampians, Shepparton and Dandenong in addition to existing sites in Mildura, Darebin and Bairnsdale.
- **Expanded Women's and Children's Counselling and Case Management** – to support those women and children experiencing family violence.
- **Sexual Assault and Child Abuse Multidisciplinary Centres** – three additional centres to be established to provide improved support for adult and child victims of sexual assault.
- **Expanded Sexual Assault Support Services** – for adult and child victim/survivors of sexual assault.
- **Sexual Assault Reform Strategy** – further work on the use of remote witness facilities, consideration of the most appropriate way for dealing with historical sexual assault matters and exploration of processes to more effectively identify and deal with sexual assault occurring in family violence contexts.
- **Support to Culturally and Linguistically Diverse women who have been trafficked** – to identify options for leaving the sex industry.
- **Resources regarding available protection for service providers and clients** – to help manage contact from offenders and prisoners known to have perpetrated family violence.
- **Strengthened Risk Management Framework and Guidelines** – to be published in 2012–2013.



Get tougher on perpetrators and prevent re-offending

Actions to stop perpetrators from committing violence, bring them to justice, change their behaviours and deter others

Current Initiatives

- **Victoria Police Enhanced Family Violence Service Delivery Model** – Victoria Police effort to ensure consistency of service delivery across the state whilst maintaining capacity for local innovation and response.
- **Enhanced Investigative Responses** – to family violence, sexual assault and child abuse by Victoria Police.
- **Men's Case Management** – men's family violence case management (MCM) support program works with men who are removed from the family home to address immediate needs and assist them to take responsibility for their use of violence and mitigate the risks of re-offending. The MCM program has the primary objective of increasing the safety of women and children by assisting men to stop their violent and abusive behaviours.
- **Post-release programs for serious sex offenders** – group treatment and individual treatment to high risk and complex needs sex offenders subject to post-sentence orders to facilitate their treatment and rehabilitation.
- **Male Adolescent Program for Positive Sexuality** – for youth justice clients aged 10–21 years who have been found guilty by the court of committing a sexual offence and are referred for assessment and treatment.
- **Forensicare Problem Behaviour Program** – provides specialist psychiatric and psychological assessment and treatment services focused on individuals with problem behaviours and includes violence against women.
- **Mandated Men's Behaviour Change Programs** – men's behaviour change programs where attendance has been mandated by a court order.
- **1,700 new police members.**
- **Expansion of Victoria Police family violence teams** in high incidence areas.

Further Initiatives

- **Enhanced Approach to Recidivism** – implement enhanced policing approach to managing recidivist offenders.
- **Graduated Offences Regime for Breaches of Intervention Orders** – to ensure greater consequences for breaches of Intervention Orders.
- **Improving Family Violence Safety Notice and Intervention Orders processes** – streamlining court processes, reducing delays and waiting times.
- **Expanded Court-Directed Men's Behaviour Change Programs** – increased capacity for more court-directed men's behaviour change programs targeting offenders including a pilot for those in prison or on community based orders.
- **Working towards a National Approach** – participate in work being undertaken through the Standing Council on Law and Justice to explore a national approach to domestic and family violence orders and to consider a joint response to recommendations made through the Australian Law Reform Commission/ New South Wales Law Reform Commission Family violence inquiry.

OTHER ELEMENTS TO GIVE EFFECT TO THE ACTION PLAN

Research and evidence

To respond effectively to violence against women and children, we need to better understand the complex causes and contributing factors of such violence and what works in preventing and responding to it. Our plan will draw on research and evidence to support actions.

A comprehensive, coordinated and prioritised program of research is required to enhance our understanding of the complexity of violence against women and to inform our strategies about prevention, early intervention and response.

The problem of violence against women and children extends across Australia and each state and territory is working on this issue. To maximise our research effort and avoid unnecessary duplication, the Victorian Government supports the establishment of a National Centre of Excellence for family violence and sexual assault research and will actively participate in its establishment.

We will also evaluate the impact of programs that we invest in to address violence against women and children and continue to monitor trends through the Victorian Family Violence Database to inform future actions and directions.

Strengthening the workforce

Identifying and responding to violence against women and children requires an effective workforce. We are already collecting information about the family violence workforce through our Community Sector Workforce Knowledgebase and we will use this information to shape future workforce directions. We are also contributing to the National Workforce Agenda on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault.

In this Action Plan, we commit to:

- Training frontline workers across a broad range of sectors in family violence risk assessment and risk management.
- Extending the family violence risk assessment and risk management training and resources into the health sector.
- Working to develop information, resources and training programs for those who work with women with disabilities so that they better understand the dynamics of violence for women with disabilities.
- Delivering training for mainstream services about how to work more effectively with men who have used violence against women.

Information and data

Appropriate collection and sharing of information between agencies is vital to achieving good outcomes for women and children experiencing violence. In the case of family violence, it is a critical element of managing risk to women's safety.

Work is commencing in the Department of Human Services on how to enhance information sharing and referral of clients to ensure that clients tell their stories once and that the service system is connected around them. Work is also underway to improve the flow of information between police, courts and corrections to more effectively identify perpetrators and improve safety for affected women and children. Information from reviewing family violence related homicides will also inform our approach to addressing violence against women.

The Victorian Government will also share learning from examples of good collaborative practice, such as the Multidisciplinary Centres, and work to promote partnerships between family violence specialist service providers and services that support vulnerable children and families.

Reporting on progress

Our Action Plan to Address Violence against Women and Children provides a foundation that must be built on to achieve our long-term vision of eliminating all forms of violence against women and children.

We know from reform experience to date, that we are likely to see a continued increase in the numbers of women and children reporting family violence and sexual assault, before they decrease.

This is in part due to enhanced responses from the police, the justice and service system to protect women and children from men who perpetrate family violence and sexual assault.

There is no single measure to determine whether women and children are safer, or whether men are more accountable or more likely to stop using violence. We will develop a performance framework to identify and use indicators that will most effectively measure the success of our plan and its impact.

The Victorian Government will report annually on progress in implementing our Action Plan. We will establish mechanisms to keep stakeholders informed and involved, and most importantly work side by side with the women and communities in Victoria for whom this plan is critical.

Ongoing governance

Addressing violence against women and children requires strong and committed leadership across government and community. It also requires dedicated effort to take action which changes and challenges attitudes and behaviours that condone such violence and which holds perpetrators to account so that they stop their violence.

To deliver a strategic and integrated plan – we must have the right governance arrangements in place to enable us to work together on this issue.

Our plan will be overseen by a small, high level Addressing Violence against Women and Children Advisory Group. This group will comprise key sector experts, in conjunction with key Ministers, and be convened by the Minister for Women's Affairs. This approach will raise the profile of violence against women and children, improve co-ordination across government and community and will identify major and emerging issues. It will also support the implementation of our plan.

Appropriate departmental and agency arrangements will support and complement the Advisory Group.

While the Advisory Group is the formal government consultation mechanism, individual ministers may choose to have their own ongoing or temporary advisory forums. For example, the Attorney General will continue to convene the Sexual Assault Advisory Committee, with a specific focus on justice related aspects of responses to sexual assault.

The Minister for Aboriginal Affairs will continue to lead the implementation of the Indigenous Family Violence Partnership Forum's *Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families: Towards a safer future for Indigenous families and communities 10 year plan*.

The following principles will underpin our approach to working together in the future:

- Strong leadership and commitment from all government ministers to ensure implementation of our Action Plan.
- Government departments working effectively together on implementing the Action Plan.
- Engagement with organisations and communities that are working with us on this issue.

Only by working together across government and community will we be able to address this issue in a comprehensive way.

Acknowledgement

This plan has been informed by a range of evidence and a public consultation process that involved over 260 participants, as well as women who had personally experienced family violence and sexual assault. Over 130 written submissions were also received. During the consultation process, a number of women shared their experiences of the violence that they and their children had suffered. The determination of these women to bring about systemic and societal change to stop this violence, not just for their families, but for all women and children, is inspirational.

APPENDIX 1 – Forms of violence against women and children

Family violence

Family violence occurs between people who are in a relationship and amongst family members. The violence can take many forms – physical, emotional, sexual, mental or using financial power – and it is used to control other family members. Family violence includes physical, sexual, emotional and psychological abuse and threatening or coercive behaviour, including towards or witnessed by children.

Physical violence can include slaps, shoves, hits, punches, pushes, being thrown down stairs or across the room, kicking, twisting of arms, choking, and being burnt or stabbed.

Psychological and emotional abuse can include a range of controlling behaviours such as control of finances, isolation from family and friends, continual humiliation, threats against children or being threatened with injury or death.

Although only some aspects of family violence are criminal offences, any behaviour that causes the victim to live in fear is unacceptable.

For the purpose of action taken through the Victorian judicial system, the *Family Violence Protection Act 2008* defines family violence as:

- (a) behaviour by a person towards a family member of that person if that behaviour –
 - (i) is physically or sexually abusive; or
 - (ii) is emotionally or psychologically abusive; or
 - (iii) is economically abusive; or
 - (iv) is threatening; or
 - (v) is coercive; or
 - (vi) in any other way controls or dominates the family member and causes that family member to feel fear for the safety or wellbeing of that family member or another person; or
- (b) behaviour by a person that causes a child to hear or witness, or otherwise be exposed to the effects of, behaviour referred to in paragraph (a).

Sexual assault or violence

Sexual assault is unwanted sexual behaviour or activity that makes the victim feel uncomfortable, frightened or threatened. It is sexual activity that the person has not consented to and refers to a broad range of sexual behaviours, including the use or threat of violence to force another person to engage in a sexual activity against their will. The definition of sexual assault includes rape, incest, child abuse and unwanted sexual behaviour, such as unwanted kissing and touching. It also includes behaviour that does not involve actual touch such as forcing someone to watch pornography.¹ Some of these acts are serious indictable crimes. Sexual assault is an abuse of power. Sexual assault is never the fault or responsibility of the victim/survivor.

General sexual offences under the *Crimes Act 1958 (Vic)* include:

- rape and assault with intent to rape
- indecent assault
- incest
- administering drugs to enable sexual penetration
- sexual offences against young people
- offences against people with impaired mental functioning.²

Sexual harassment

Sexual harassment is any unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favours, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature. Sexual harassment often manifests itself in subtle ways, such as sexually suggestive comments, unwanted touching, risqué jokes, or blatant demand for sexual contact. These actions may take place within a range of settings, including work or educational settings. *The Equal Opportunity Act 2010* (Vic) prohibits sexual harassment.

Child sexual abuse

Child sexual abuse can be defined as any situation in which an adult or another child threatens forces or manipulates a child into sexual activity. Many times the offender does not need to use physical force with the victim. Instead, they take advantage of their own position of trust and authority. Child sexual abuse can include exposing a child to pornography, fondling the sexual parts of a child's body, making a child engage in sexual activity with others, and sexually penetrating a child, orally, anally or vaginally with the penis, hand or any object. Incest is intercourse or touching of sexual parts between an adult family member and a child or between siblings. Child sexual abuse includes children and young people up to and including 17 years of age. Child sexual abuse is a criminal offence.

Sex trafficking

Sex trafficking is the trafficking in persons (recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons), by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of sexual exploitation, including prostitution.³

Sexual exploitation

Sexual exploitation involves exploitative situations, contexts and relationships where people receive something (e.g. food, accommodation, drugs, alcohol, money) as a result of them performing and/or another or others performing on them, sexual activities.

Stalking, cyber-stalking and bullying

Stalking is when one person engages in a course of conduct with the intention of causing physical or mental harm to another person. This includes making a person fearful or concerned for their safety or conduct that causes another person to self-harm. Stalking often includes repeated unwanted contact and/or communications that cause the victim fear or distress. Cyber-stalking and cyber-bullying include the use of technology such as the internet or mobile phones as a means to harass. The communications may be used to intimidate, control, manipulate, or humiliate the recipient. Stalking and serious bullying offences are covered by the *Crimes Act 1958* (Vic).

Female genital mutilation

Female genital mutilation is performed on girls and women for cultural rather than medical reasons. It is internationally recognised as a violation of human rights, and is banned in Australia.

APPENDIX 2 – The context

The scope of the problem

Violence against women and children remains a serious problem for our community. It has a devastating and lasting effect on women, children, families and whole communities. It undermines women's rights, their health, their education and employment prospects, their economic security and, in the most tragic circumstances, their lives or the lives of their children.⁴

Violence against women and children is a major social and economic concern facing Victoria and leads to crime, homelessness, unemployment, and lower productivity.

Violence against women describes forms of violence that are mostly experienced by women and are mostly perpetrated by men. The extent and range of violent actions perpetrated against women is broad. It can include family violence, sexual abuse and assault, sex trafficking, female genital mutilation, sexual exploitation and sexual harassment. For women in Victoria, family violence and sexual assault are the most prevalent forms of violence experienced. While sex trafficking and female genital mutilation are not experienced by as many women, their effect is profound.

Through the use of new technologies, new forms of violence against women – such as cyber-stalking and 'sexting' are becoming more prevalent.

Violence against women damages the health and wellbeing of children and young people directly and indirectly, as they witness or fear violence being perpetrated against their mothers or female care givers. Different forms of violence against women share many of the same underlying causes and result in short and long-term impacts on women, children and families.

The evidence suggests that the key drivers of violence against women are:

- unequal power relations between men and women
- adherence to rigid gender stereotypes
- broader cultures of violence.

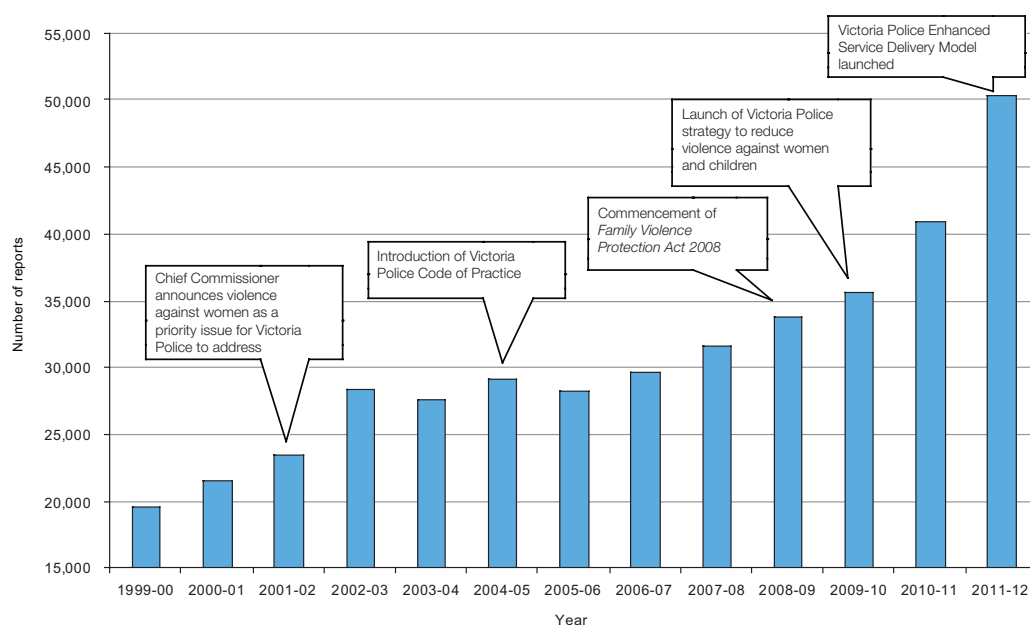
Gender stereotypes are reinforced throughout our culture. There is research which indicates links between a culture of sexualisation of women and girls and acceptance of violence against women. Studies have shown that regular exposure to material which sexually objectifies women reinforces sexist attitudes and gender stereotypes.⁵

Pornography is also increasingly accessible, and may often contain scenes of aggression against women. A recent study found that 92 per cent of boys and 61 per cent of girls reported exposure to online pornography (13–16 year olds).⁶

Increased reporting

Reporting of family violence and sexual assault is vital to addressing it. Unfortunately it is only in recent years that reporting has been encouraged by the community and that more women have been confident to report such violence – knowing that their reports will be taken seriously by the police and judicial system.

Victoria Police Crime Statistics for 2011–2012 show that the incidence of family violence remains unacceptably high, with 50,382 family violence incidents reported, up by 23.4 per cent from the previous year. The incidence of sexual assault is also disturbing with 2,044 incidents of rape recorded in Victoria in 2011–2012, up by 11.8 per cent from 2010–2011.⁷

Figure 1 Family Violence Reports to Police, Victoria, 1999 to 2012⁸

Over the past ten years legislative reforms and improvements to the way that Victoria Police respond to and investigate family violence (as highlighted in Figure 1) have resulted in greater confidence in the system and thus higher levels of reports of family violence.

Most violence against women is committed by men. According to Victoria Police Crime Statistics for 2011–2012, women make up 75.8 per cent of family violence victims, 88.7 per cent of rape victims and 79.5 per cent of victims of sex (non rape) offences. Children were present in 36 per cent of family violence incidents attended by Victoria Police in 2011–2012.

In Victoria, the number of children recorded as affected family members in police family violence incidents reports has tripled since 1999. The number of children identified in the court data as affected family members (aged 17 years and under) has risen 341 per cent over the 11 year period, from 4,530 children in 1999–2000 to 19,974 children in 2009–2010.⁹

More than half of the women seeking assistance for family violence through a specialist family violence court in 2010–2011 had children in their care, and one fifth included a child on their intervention order application.¹⁰

The Australian Bureau of Statistics Personal Safety Survey in 2005 found that almost one million Australian women experienced sexual abuse *before* the age of 15. Over 40 per cent were five to eight years of age. Almost half were between the ages of nine and 14 (48.7 per cent). Close to 43 per cent of these were perpetrated by non-family members and an additional nine per cent were perpetrated by strangers.¹¹

The Personal Safety Survey also reported that in almost 80 per cent of cases, women knew the men who had assaulted them.¹² Victorian court and police data also indicates that around 80 per cent of adult female victims experienced the violence from an intimate partner (including current and former domestic partner as well as intimate personal relationship).¹³

Repeat offenders

Violence against women is often repeated. Since 2006–2007, one quarter of incidents reported to police had a history of between one and three previous reports to police.¹⁴ Of reports to police by affected family members, two out of five indicate that the family violence had been occurring for more than two years.¹⁵

We can identify a group of men who are repeatedly violent against women and indeed against many women. As a community we cannot condone this abhorrent behaviour – which robs women and children of their rights and ability to participate fully in Victoria's economic and social life.

Community attitudes

Community attitudes about violence against women have improved but are still disturbing. The National Survey on Community Attitudes to Violence Against Women¹⁶ revealed that around one in five people believe that family violence can be excused if it results from people 'temporarily losing control' or if they 'truly regret' what they have done.

This survey also found that:

- One in twenty Australians believed that 'women who are raped ask for it'.
- Just over one-quarter of the community still believed it is not rare for women to make false claims of being raped.
- Thirteen per cent agreed that women 'often say no when they mean yes' and 16 per cent agreed that a woman 'is partly responsible if she is raped when drunk or drug-affected'.
- One fifth of the community believed that men and women are equal perpetrators of violence in the home.
- Over one third of the community believed that 'rape results from men being unable to control their need for sex' (VicHealth 2010).¹⁷

These attitudes are not based on the evidence we have about violence against women, but they highlight the need for additional education and engagement to ensure that more Victorians are prepared to act to stop violence. The Victorian Government believes that all forms of violence against women and children are unacceptable.

Women who are most vulnerable

Violence against women happens in many settings – at home, on the street, on public transport, in the workplace and within a range of relationships, from family members and partners to complete strangers. However, in the majority of cases, women know the men who are violent towards them.

We know that violence against women occurs in all cultures, socio economic groups, and areas across Victoria. For women who are affected, the experience is profound and painful.

However, statistics indicate that some women may be at increased risk of family violence and sexual assault, including women from some culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, women with a disability, women with mental health issues or illnesses, older women, and girls. Other factors known to increase the risk of women experiencing violence include separation, pregnancy and social isolation.

Women from some communities face additional barriers to access the right services and support – these include distance, language barriers, the fear of being excluded by their family or community on reporting violence by a man known to them, the fear of being deported, the fear of being abandoned when the abuser is their carer, and the fear of being denied access to their children.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women report higher levels of physical violence in their lifetime than do other Australian women and they are more likely to experience sexual violence, sustain injuries or be killed. While family violence is not part of Indigenous culture, the causes of destructive behaviours, including alcohol and other drug abuse and violence against women and children, in Indigenous communities include breakdown of community kinship systems, traditional culture and Indigenous law, racism and vilification, economic exclusion and entrenched poverty and loss of traditional roles and status.¹⁸

Women with disabilities are more likely to experience partner or sexual violence, of great severity, and over a longer period of time, than women without a disability.¹⁹ Women with disabilities who are dependent on their carer for access to, and communication with, the outside world, their home, to administer medication and support their mobility are particularly vulnerable and isolated when their carer is also their abuser. Abuse of women with disabilities may also manifest by having equipment, food and medication withheld.²⁰

Older women experience an increasing vulnerability and risk of violence as they become increasingly frail. Older persons are more likely to report abuse from their children or another family member than their partners. However, the rates of abuse from a current partner is higher among older women than younger women, with 29 per cent aged between 45 and 55 years and 26 per cent aged 56 years and older.²¹

The research indicates that pregnancy is also a risk factor for family violence and women often experience their first assault during pregnancy, or experience an increase in the form or intensity of violence.²² The Australian Bureau of Statistics Personal Safety Survey in 2005 found that 59 per cent of women who experienced violence by a previous partner were pregnant at some time during the relationship; of these, 36 per cent reported that violence occurred during a pregnancy and 17 per cent experienced violence for the first time when they were pregnant.²³

Geographical and social isolation compound problems of sexual assault and family violence, mainly because they reduce the victim's access to support networks. There is evidence of a higher reported incidence of sexual assault and family violence in rural and remote communities than in urban Australia.

Sex trafficking

The number of women trafficked in Australia for sexual purposes is difficult to ascertain as official statistics do not capture the extent of the problem. There are a number of ways that women are trafficked, which include coercion and deception about legitimate employment.

Sex trafficking is hidden, as women who have been trafficked may fear disclosing information to the police and fear retribution from traffickers. It can leave women with long-term psychological and physical health issues due to the physical and sexual violence perpetrated against them.

Female genital mutilation

Like sex trafficking, information about female genital mutilation is also difficult to obtain. However, the impact can be damaging to women's health. Female genital mutilation is addressed by the Department of Health through the Family and Reproductive Rights Education Program.

Causes and contributing factors

To prevent violence against women, we need to understand its causes and contributing factors, and determine why it persists.

There is no single cause of violence against women and children; rather, it appears to arise from a complex interaction between individual attitudes towards women, and social and cultural practices and values across our society and communities. These attitudes and practices can foster unequal and abusive power relations between men and women, gender stereotypes and can often exist in broader cultures of violence.

Factors which are known to increase or correlate with the risk of men perpetrating family violence include drug and alcohol misuse, a history of violent behaviour, threats of or previous use of violence, against their current or former partners, children, pets, other family members, stalking, and obsessive and controlling behaviour and separation. In the period of 2009–2010 police identified separation as a factor in 26 per cent of family violence incidences and controlling behaviour in 16 per cent incidences. Both of these factors were identified as a risk for twice as many women as men.²⁴

Most men who drink alcohol do not use violence against women. However in the 2009–2010 data, police identified alcohol as a definite factor in 43 per cent of family violence incidences (either party) and a possible factor in 27 per cent of incidences.²⁵ Alcohol is a contributing factor of individual men's violence against women and children rather than a cause.

Financial difficulties and psychological illness or depression were also identified in more than one in ten reports of family violence.²⁶ These factors do not cause family violence nor do they mean that a person who has a psychological illness or is experiencing financial difficulty will use violence against women.

The social costs

The impact of family violence and sexual assault against women, children and young people is profound, wide-ranging and long term. It affects women's personal wellbeing, disrupts families and community relationships.

For women

Violence against women has an enormous cost to a woman's health and wellbeing.

Sexual assault can cause major physical and mental health effects. Physical effects include the immediate injuries, sexually transmitted infections, unwanted pregnancies and ongoing physical problems. Sexual assault can cause severe psychological effects, including intense fear of death and disassociation during the assault, anxiety and ongoing fears, low self-esteem, self-blame, guilt, shock and confusion, self-harm and attempted suicide, suicide, and post-traumatic stress disorder.²⁷

Women's perception of threat of sexual assault also creates fear in women generally. Women often try to reduce their risk in public places and at night.²⁸ This limits women's actions and their full participation in our society and economy.

Australia-wide, women who have experienced intimate partner violence are likely to use health services more often, and have poorer health. Intimate partner violence is responsible for more ill health and premature death in Victorian women aged 15 to 44 than any other of the well known risk factors, including high blood pressure, obesity and smoking.²⁹

Women who have experienced violence perpetrated by their partners are more likely to suffer from mental health issues such as post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, self-harm tendencies and suicidal thoughts.³⁰ It has also been estimated that between 50 to 80 per cent of women using psychiatric services are recorded as having a history of sexual abuse or assault.³¹

Family violence is also one of the main causes of homelessness among women in Australia.³² Homelessness for young women can also be related to the experience of sexual assault. This in turn, increases their vulnerability to further sexual assault – on the street, in hostels, refuges and squats, and through links with drug use and prostitution.³³

Australian women who have lived with a violent partner are more likely to experience financial difficulty.³⁴ Many women are economically dependent on their partners and this can make it more difficult for women to escape violent partners.

Women who have experienced violence may not have the confidence and skills, may have health issues, or experience ongoing interruptions to their lives such as court appearances, needing to move home, making it difficult to hold down a stable job. This impacts on women's short term and long-term economic security.

For children

Violence against women damages the health and wellbeing of children and young people directly and indirectly, as they witness or fear violence being perpetrated against their mothers or female care givers.

The evidence indicates that even when children are not direct victims, exposure to violence can have significant psychological, emotional and behavioural impacts and adverse developmental effects on them, comparable to children experiencing violence directly.³⁵ This may include anger, trauma, sadness, shame, guilt, confusion, helplessness and despair. Children do not have to be physically present when the violence occurs to suffer the negative consequences associated with exposure.

Children's exposure to family violence can increase the risk of mental health, behavioural and learning difficulties in the short term and development of mental health problems later in life. It is also a key indicator of both adolescent male and female victimisation in intimate relationships.³⁶

The evidence is unclear as to whether boys who have witnessed an incident of physical violence towards their mother or stepmother have an increased risk of perpetrating violence against their partners. Where children and their mothers or stepmothers are provided a safe and supportive environment to recover, where there is exposure to healthy relationships and parenting models, children and young people can build their own respectful and non-violent relationships and can become some of the strongest advocates against violence.³⁷

The economic costs

Violence against women and children exacts unacceptable and immeasurable costs to its victims, as well as our community more widely. It severely curtails the ability of women and children to participate fully in so many aspects of life – in education, in sport, in the community, in employment. It ultimately means that violence against women and children is undermining Victoria's productivity.

The estimated economic cost of violence against women and children in Australia was approximately \$13.6 billion in 2008–2009 of which \$3.4 billion was the estimated cost to Victoria.³⁸ Unless appropriate action is taken to prevent violence against women that sum will increase to \$15.6 billion per year by 2021, with Victoria's share of that cost reaching approximately \$3.9 billion.³⁹

Most of the direct costs associated with violence against women are borne by the government and community sector, with income support and accommodation costs being the largest components of this. Most of the indirect costs are associated with pain and suffering and premature mortality borne by the victims, their children, families and friends.

Ending violence against women and children will enhance the ability of women and children to participate in all aspects of life.

APPENDIX 3 – Connection with other government strategies

Our Action Plan also complements and supports government strategies.

- In responding to the *Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children Inquiry* recommendation to develop a stronger systems approach to protecting vulnerable children, the Victorian Government's *Victoria's Vulnerable Children Directions Paper* (May 2012), emphasised the importance of effectively responding to family violence to prevent the incidence of abuse and neglect. The Directions Paper committed the government to the development of **Victoria's Vulnerable Children** strategy. This strategy will detail a whole-of-government strategy to prevent child abuse and neglect, reduce its negative impact and improve outcomes for vulnerable children and young people. Violence against women and children is a critical factor in this work and our approach will be developed to ensure connectedness at every level of leadership and practice. Both strategies will work towards ensuring more integrated supports and services to women and their children across government and government funded services.
- *Victoria's Vulnerable Children* strategy will be accompanied by the establishment of a new **Commission for Children and Young People** to monitor the protection and safety of vulnerable children and young people.
- **The Sexual Assault Reform Strategy Final Evaluation Report.** Reforms to the justice system's response to sexual assault continue to be supported. These reforms aim to meet the objectives of increasing rates of reporting and improving the experience of sexual assault victims in the justice system. The next steps in progressing these reforms include: undertaking further work on the use of remote witness facilities, considering the most appropriate way for dealing with historical sexual assault matters and exploring processes to more effectively identify, and deal with, sexual assault that occurs in family violence contexts.
- **Living free from Violence – Upholding the Right, Victoria Police's strategy to reduce violence against women and children 2009–2014.** Victoria Police will continue to improve responses to sexual assault, family violence and child abuse by implementing the actions outlined in this strategy. Victoria Police is also playing a leading role in the government's effort to respond to illegal activity in licensed and illegal brothels as part of effort to address sex trafficking in Victoria. This is in addition to the broader effort by Victoria Police to implement actions under the Australian Policing Strategy to Combat Trafficking in Persons 2011–2013.
- **Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families: Towards a safer future for Indigenous families and communities 10 year plan,** the Victorian Government's strategy to prevent and respond to family violence in Aboriginal communities 2008–2018 and supporting *Indigenous Family Violence Primary Prevention Framework*. Where Aboriginal communities or family violence in Aboriginal communities are referenced in this Plan, the principles set out in the 10-year plan are the framework for understanding and working on these issues as they affect Aboriginal families and communities.
- **Victorian Homelessness Action Plan 2011–2015,** the Victorian Government's four-year plan to deliver services to people experiencing homelessness in a new way. This includes the *Family Violence and Homelessness Innovation Action Project* that will focus specifically on early intervention and prevention for families at risk of or experiencing homelessness due to family violence.

- **The Elder Abuse Prevention and Response Guidelines for Action 2012–14** outlines the government's priorities, actions and measures to prevent and respond to elder abuse and include specific actions to address the specific needs of older women in the family violence service system who experience elder abuse.
- This plan will further inform the **Whole of Government Victorian Alcohol and Drug Strategy** to address alcohol and drug-related harms in Victoria and include reforms to the Alcohol and Drug Treatment Services. One of the priorities of the treatment strategy is to include initiatives to make treatment more family-inclusive.
- **Services Connect** is the improved way the Department of Human Services and its service providers will support clients in the future. Focusing on the needs of clients and their families to achieve outcomes that measurably improve their lives, Services Connect will seek to deliver integrated responses to clients' needs based on one needs identification, one client record, one key worker and team and one (family) plan.
- **The Victorian Health Priorities Framework 2012–2022** states that reviews of the women's and men's health plans should be a priority for the Department of Health. These plans and *Koolin Balit: Victorian Government Strategic Directions for Aboriginal Health 2012–2022*, are relevant to the prevention, early intervention and response to violence against women and children.
- **National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022.** The Victorian Government signed up to the plan in February 2011. Victoria's Action Plan will form Victoria's jurisdictional implementation plan under the National Plan.
- **The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)** is about lifetime support for people with a disability, based on their individual needs. We are working with our Commonwealth and state counterparts and will be trialling the scheme in Barwon region commencing July 2013.

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