

Our Advocacy Framework

About Us

The Eastern Metropolitan Region Regional Family Violence Partnership (EMR RFVP) works to address family violence in the Eastern Metropolitan Region of Melbourne. Our aim is to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the family violence service system. We do this by developing structures and processes that strengthen and coordinate service delivery, including establishing a common risk assessment and referral process, co-locating agencies, better monitoring and evaluating services, and developing agreed protocols and codes of practice for service providers.

The EMR RFVP is also tasked with identifying and addressing service gaps and areas for reform, in order to mitigate the social and economic costs of family violence. This work includes regional advocacy that is informed by stakeholders across the system. Our advocacy aims to progress social change and eliminate family violence, and to improve responsiveness so that when family violence does occur, its impacts are minimised.

Over the next two years, the Partnership will lead and support advocacy initiatives that contribute to:

- preventing family violence
- improving women's safety
- promoting the safety and independent rights and needs of children and young people who experience family violence, and
- strengthening mechanisms for holding perpetrators to account.

These priorities were adopted by the EMR RVFP's Executive Committee and reflect the Partnership's Memorandum of Understanding 2011-2014. Our Advocacy Framework aligns with various national and state plans for addressing violence against women and children.

The EMR RFVP includes representatives from Family Violence Services, Women's Health Services, CALD Services, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services, Family, Youth and Children's Services, Legal Aid, Mental Health Services, Men's Behaviour Change Services, Police, Statutory Child Protection, and the Courts.

Principles that guide our advocacy

Working in a community co-ordinated partnership

The EMR RFVP recognises that advocacy that only speaks to or for one sector, or group of stakeholders, is rarely successful. Working in a community co-ordinated partnership means we prioritise collaborative efforts to address violence against women and children so that we can deliver systemic improvements not easily achieved by working alone.

We are committed to progressing our advocacy priorities in a non-partisan manner across all levels of government, and in partnership with the police, courts, and men's support services.

Promoting women's agency over their lives and future

The EMR RFVP is linked to both regional and statewide family violence service providers, and our members have specialist family violence knowledge and expertise. Our advocacy is informed by our members, the community, and by consultation with people who use family violence services.

Respect for the autonomy of survivors is a key principle of our advocacy. We recognise that survivors of violence often know better than anyone else what they need to be safe, and that an important step in reducing violence is to resource and empower women to take action to protect themselves and their children.

Recognising the human right to be free from violence

The Australian and international community recognise that violence, whether occurring in public or in private, is an abuse of human rights.

While family violence is perpetrated by individuals and breaches the rights of individuals, it is also indicative of a societal culture of discrimination against women. Effective family violence intervention requires redress for the individuals affected, as well as protecting and promoting women and children's human rights through laws, policies and service provision.

Using a feminist framework

A feminist analysis assists in addressing the causal factors of family violence and links us to a global movement committed to achieving positive change in the lives of women and children. The EMR RVFP recognises that family violence is primarily about men imposing and consolidating power and control over women and children.

Despite significant social and legal change, violence against women and children is often normalised within the context of family relationships, and tolerance of men's violence against women continues to be reinforced in the community, education, in work environments and through media representations.

A feminist approach values diversity and advocates for the equality of women and men in all aspects of public and private life.

Valuing diversity and eliminating racism

The EMR RFVP is opposed to discrimination based on sex, race, sexual orientation, age, spiritual choice, citizenship or ability, and is committed to advocating for policies and programs that celebrate diversity and eliminate racism.

We seek to ensure that women across community, political, social, and cultural sectors are acknowledged and supported through our advocacy.

Acknowledging the distinct rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples when responding to family violence

Indigenous communities share with the wider community the underlying conditions contributing to violence against women, such as gender power imbalances and violence-supporting social norms. However, the EMR RFVP recognises that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities experience family violence within a particular context of colonisation, oppression and injustice, and that the higher prevalence of violence in this community is due to the inter-generational trauma caused by colonisation, and the ongoing social and economic marginalisation of Indigenous Victorians.

The family disintegration created by State imposed policies such as the forced removal and institutionalisation of Aboriginal children, and systemic racism throughout government departments, police forces and mainstream support agencies, requires particular consideration of culturally safe family violence responses for Indigenous communities.

We seek to work in partnership with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. Our advocacy is guided by principles identified by the Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Taskforce, including healing for victims and perpetrators, and addressing violence in the home, family, community and workplace.

Our Advocacy Priorities

Priority One: Preventing violence before it happens

The estimated cost of violence against women and their children in Australia - including the cost of medical and crisis services, police, child protection, judicial services, and lost productivity due to sick leave and underperformance - is \$13.6 billion annually, of which approximately \$3.4 billion is the cost to Victoria.

It is estimated that by 2021, the cost of violence against women and their children in Australia will rise to \$15.6 billion with Victoria's share rising to \$3.9 billion.

Victorian Family Violence Database Volume 5: Eleven-Year Trend Analysis (1999-2010) at 23

Family violence is too prevalent, and its consequences too great, to limit our efforts to responding after violence has occurred.

Family violence is preventable. It is more likely to occur in circumstances where there is unequal distribution of power between men and women, where rigid gender roles are assumed, and where social sanctions against violence are weak. Preventing violence requires challenging inequality between men and women, eliminating social norms that

perpetuate this inequality, and promoting social norms that support equality and non-violence.

As well as being a moral imperative, preventing family violence makes economic sense. The economic cost of family violence to government and communities is significant and growing. The billions of dollars that family violence consumes can be better spent.

Prevention programs to date have generally targeted women, recognising that shifts in women's perceptions and responses to violence are critical to achieving and sustaining change in the attitudes and behaviours of men. As men make up the majority of perpetrators of violence, and male socialisation is a significant determinant of violence, preventative action must also target men.

The EMR RFVP recognises that successfully preventing family violence requires programs and campaigns that target the whole community, and that emphasise how everyone benefits when families and communities value equality and are safe. The EMR RFVP further recognises that men can be collaborators in and beneficiaries of prevention efforts.

The EMR RVFP is committed to working at multiple levels to challenge gender inequality and a social culture that tolerates, normalises or sensationalises violence. We advocate for respectful and equitable relationships between men and women.

Preventing family violence will:

- reduce mortalities
- improve the quality of life of women, children and men
- improve productivity
- save billions of dollars for government and communities.

Priority Two: Safety of Women

The majority of homicides occurring in Australia are domestic homicides, involving one or more victims who share a family or domestic relationship with the offender.

More than half of Australian women experience some form of physical or sexual violence in their lifetime.

Almost 80% of reported family violence victims in Victoria are women.

In Victoria, family violence has been identified as the leading contributor to preventable death, illness and disability in Victorian women aged 15-44 years.

Victoria Police recorded over 5 800 incidents of family violence in the Eastern Metropolitan Region in 2011-2012.

It is estimated that only 36% of women report family violence. The reasons for not reporting violence include fear of repercussions from the perpetrator and lack of confidence in the legal process.

Aboriginal women and women with disabilities experience disproportionately high levels of family violence.

The influences of class, ethnicity and disadvantage increase the vulnerability of CALD women to violence and its effects.

Victorian Family Violence Database Volume 5: Eleven-Year Trend Analysis (1999-2010) at 22 and 36-40

Victoria Police, Family Incident Reports 2007-2008 to 2011-2012

The EMR RFVP recognises that family violence, including physical, sexual, financial and psychological abuse, primarily affects women and children, and cuts across boundaries of class, ethnicity, religion, ability and age. Family violence is difficult for women to respond to alone. Often when women attempt to stop it, or to leave, men escalate their violence to reassert control. This is enabled because the broader social response is inadequate for ensuring women's safety.

The impacts of family violence include physical injury and death, psychological distress and social alienation. The risk to women's long-term health increases once violence occurs, including higher rates of chronic illness and pain, reproductive health problems, smoking, alcohol and drug misuse, and mental illness.

Acts and threats of violence create fear and insecurity in the private and public lives of all women, regardless of whether they personally experience violence. These impacts are often intergenerational. Family violence has a corrosive effect on the whole community and creates a significant economic burden.

The EMR RFVP supports the right of women to physical and mental health and integrity, and is committed to a society free from violence. We advocate for programs, policies and laws that enhance women's safety and security, and that will end violence against women.

Freedom from violence is vital to a cohesive and prosperous society, in which women have the opportunity to

- enjoy physical and mental health
- enjoy equality and the respect of family and peers
- give and receive love
- contribute to meaningful work
- have a sense of trust and belonging in the community
- participate without fear or shame in their private and public lives.

Advocacy projects

[Summary of the campaign to establish a FV Court at Ringwood Magistrates Court here]

Priority Three: Safety and independent rights and needs of children and young people who experience family violence

Children are now the primary affected family member for newly initiated intervention orders.

25% of Australian children and young people have witnessed or been exposed to acts of violence against their mother or stepmother.

Victorian Family Violence Database Volume 5: Eleven Year Trend Analysis (1999-2010) at 18 and 23.

The EMR RFVP recognises that children and young people who experience family violence have independent rights and needs, which are often overlooked. These rights and needs include the right to a safe childhood, the right to a secure relationship with their mother, and the need to be acknowledged and supported to make sense of their experiences. Children are particularly vulnerable because they have the least capacity to influence their environment and to self-determine their safety and security.

The effects of family violence on children constitute child abuse. This abuse is linked with witnessing verbal, physical and sexual assaults perpetrated upon their mother, direct physical assaults on children themselves (including when they attempt to intervene to stop the violence), and living with men who they experience as frightening, inconsistent and intolerant. In violent families children are at increased risk of neglect because the parenting capacity of both parents is diminished.

Family violence jeopardises children's abilities and key developmental processes. The toxic impact of chronic physiological and emotional stress can interfere with healthy brain and body development. Children's exposure to violence increases their risk of mental health, behavioural and learning difficulties in the short term, and developing mental health problems later in life.

Childhood experience of family violence is also an indicator, particularly in the case of girls, for victimisation in later relationships, and particularly in the case of boys, of perpetrating violence as adults. Recognising the rights and needs of children and young people is therefore vital to reducing the intergenerational transmission of violence and eliminating violence into the future.

The EMR RFVP advocates for programs, policies, laws and service approaches that more effectively meet the needs of vulnerable children and young people, and support their physical, emotional, social and spiritual wellbeing and growth into adulthood.

The EMR RFVP understands that of critical concern for planning effective interventions in relation to Indigenous children is the need to maintain contact, and seek to work positively and constructively with their family and community.

Freedom from violence allows children to enjoy and reap the benefits of their childhood. A safe and secure childhood significantly increases the capacity of children to

- make friends, be creative, learn and problem solve
- trust themselves and those around them
- initiate and maintain healthy relationships
- grow into mature social beings who can participate in and contribute to their communities.

Advocacy projects

[Summary of the Safe and Secure practice guide, its purpose and positive impacts here]

Priority Four: Developing and strengthening accountability mechanisms for perpetrators

Most perpetrators of family violence are men.

A woman is killed almost every week in Australia by a male partner or ex-partner.

18% of the community believe that domestic violence can be excused if it results from people getting so angry that they temporarily lose control.

22% of the community believe that domestic violence can be excused if the perpetrator regrets what they have done.

Victorian Family Violence Database Volume 5: Eleven Year Trend Analysis (1999-2010) at 22 and 36-37.

Men are overwhelmingly the perpetrators of violence, especially severe and injurious violence. An essential part of addressing and eliminating family violence is holding men to account for choosing to assert power and control over women and children through violent behaviour.

The primary cause of family violence is an individual attitude, underpinned by social structures, which legitimises the use of violence by men as a form of relational power. Other significant factors contributing to men's violence include an inability to manage personal stressors, lack of social supports, unmanaged childhood experiences of trauma, dislocation from cultural identity, undiagnosed or untreated mental health problems, and alcohol and drug addiction.

Men are ultimately responsible for their use of violence and must take responsibility for learning to negotiate relationships without violence. However, men who use violence are likely to repeatedly engage in violent behaviour if the social and systems issues underpinning this violence remain unaddressed.

The EMR RFVP acknowledges that while women and children experience the worst impacts of family violence, perpetrators are also the victims of their violence. Negotiating relationships through violence impedes men's emotional development, deprives them of the respect and affection of their children, and denies them the benefits of meaningful partnerships with women.

The EMR RFVP advocates for a society where men are held accountable for their violence and where men no longer consider violence an option. We are committed to seeking a stronger criminal justice response, including prompt prosecution and monitoring of offender compliance with court conditions.

The EMR RFVP recognises that focusing just on punishing perpetrators will not bring about behaviour change. Perpetrators need assistance to end their violence. The EMR RFVP advocates for proactive and comprehensive programs that support men to stop being violent.

Men's commitment not to perpetrate violence presents new opportunities for men to

- connect with family and have happy relationships
- be a positive role model for children and have their children look up to them
- trust themselves and experience the benefits of being trusted
- have meaningful, non-violent control and autonomy over their lives
- live openly and honestly.

Resources that have informed this Framework

United Nations' Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW.)

Family Violence Protection Act 2008.

Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2007.

Jan Seeley and Catherine Plunkett, Women and Domestic Violence: Standards for Counselling Practice (2002) Salvation Army Crisis Service, St Kilda.

Preventing violence before it occurs: A framework and background paper to guide the primary prevention of violence against women in Victoria (2007) VicHealth.

National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and Children 2010-2022, Australian Council of Governments.

Strong Cultures, Strong Peoples, Strong Families: 10 Year Plan (2008) Indigenous Family Violence Partnership Forum.

Safe and Secure: A trauma informed practice guide for understanding and responding to children and young people affected by family violence (2013) Australian Childhood Foundation.

Together for Equality and Respect: A Strategy to Prevent Violence Against Women in Melbourne's East 2013-2017, Women's Health East.

Victorian Family Violence Database Volume 5: Eleven-Year Trend Analysis (1999-2010).

