



Submission to Victoria Police

Strategy to reduce the harm from family violence, sexual
offences and child abuse 2017-2022

Good Shepherd Australia New Zealand

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About Good Shepherd Australia New Zealand

This submission has been prepared by Good Shepherd Australia New Zealand.

Good Shepherd Australia New Zealand provides community-based programs, services and research that supports women, girls and children to build their safety and resilience, increase their access to education opportunities and improve their financial security. Good Shepherd strives to make a lasting, positive impact on the lives of women and their families through research into new and emerging social issues.

Our specific expertise is in:

- **Safety and resilience** - supporting women to be resilient provides a buffer between an individual and adversity, allowing them to achieve improved outcomes in spite of difficulties.
- **Financial security** - supporting women to ensure they have access to sufficient economic resources to meet their material needs so that they can live with dignity.
- **Educational pathways** - assisting women and girls to overcome the obstacles in their life that hinder them from achieving their educational/vocational capacity.
- **Outcomes and evaluations** - developing evidence-based program designs across all Good Shepherd Australia New Zealand programs and services.
- **Research, social policy and advocacy** - needs research into emerging issues, identifying effective change interventions for program design, policy analysis and advocacy.

GSANZ is part of a global network of services and advocates established by the Congregation of the Good Shepherd, with representation at the United Nations as a Non-Government Organisation with special consultative status on women and girls.

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Recommendations

Recommendation one: To support and strengthen proposed strategic priority 1.1, we recommend that more detail is included in the strategy as to how Victoria Police will improve the safety and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victim/survivors, victim/survivors with a disability, those from refugee and/or migrant backgrounds, and those who are from LGBTI communities.

Recommendation two: Victoria Police consider, as part of this strategy, how they will work within the Support and Safety Hubs.

Recommendation three: A robust outcomes framework includes monitoring of the impact of workforce development, safety and wellbeing initiatives on frontline members.

Recommendation four: Victoria Police seek expert advice and direction from gender equality specialists to ensure that a ‘gender lens’ is applied across all Victoria Police policies, procedures and practices, and that corresponding performance measures capture shifts in workplace culture within Victoria Police.

Recommendation five: Performance measures are designed in a way to capture this cultural change stemming from acceptance of *Independent Review into sex discrimination and sexual harassment, including predatory behaviour in Victoria Police*, with specific indicators that relate to people from LGBTI communities, as well as from other population groups.

Introduction

Good Shepherd Australia New Zealand (GSANZ) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback to the Victoria Police’s Family Violence, Sexual Offences and Child Abuse Strategy 2017 - 2022 (herein referred to as the Strategy). We support the collaborative process undertaken by Victoria Police, and welcome future opportunities to work closely with Victoria Police to support victim/survivors of family violence, sexual offences, and/or child abuse.

This submission is informed by our work with women and girls, and in particular our work in family violence practice and research. The submission also draws upon our practice experience and sector networks built in the course of delivering family violence refuge and outreach support, youth crisis accommodation, financial counselling and community supports to service participants at times of vulnerability. We provide a range of services and support to people who are experiencing family violence and/or times of disadvantage in our community. These include:

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- Bayside Peninsula Family Violence Program - family violence support, including safe refuges, phone and face-to-face counselling, support and referral, case management, outreach and group work for women and their children
- Firmer Foundations - a program dedicated to increasing economic independence for women, including those at risk of family violence
- Family Services West & Family Services Peninsula - service partnerships for Child FIRST assessment and referral for families with children at risk, providing family support through one-to-one case management and group work for families who experience difficulties that affect their children's safety, stability and development
- Financial Counselling - financial information, advocacy and referral for people experiencing financial stress and/or vulnerability

As well as significant practice experience, GSANZ has extensive research and policy expertise. GSANZ's Women's Research Advocacy and Policy (WRAP) Centre supports our service delivery programs, and strives to influence the policy environment by undertaking and collating relevant research, policy analysis, advocacy and outcomes measurement. Research reports include:

- Economic Security for Survivors of Domestic and Family Violence: Understanding and measuring the impact (2016)
- Restoring Financial Safety: Legal responses to economic abuse (2015)
- The right to refuse: Examining forced marriage in Australia (2014)
- Economic Abuse: Searching for solutions (2013)
- Spotlight on Economic Abuse: A literature and policy review (2012)
- Filling the gap: Integrated post crisis response to women and children who have experienced family violence (2011)
- Researching the gaps: The needs of women who have experienced long-term domestic violence (2009)

We have also provided the following submissions on Federal and State policy:

- Submission to Victorian Government Family Violence Protection Act (Amendment) (2017)
- Submission to Parliamentary Inquiry to Consider Family Violence in the Family Law System (2017)
- Submission to Federal Government Modern Slavery Act (2017)
- Submission to New South Wales Government Inquiry into Child Protection (2016)
- Enquiry into domestic violence in Australia: Submission to the Finance and Public Administration References Committee (jointly with Wyndham Legal Service Inc.) (2014)

- Submission to comments on Exposure Draft Australia's National Human Rights Action Plan (2012)
- Submission to the Action Plan Consultation Framework for Addressing Violence Against Women and their Children (2012)

Our submission to the Victoria Police Strategy is informed by this practice, policy and research background.

Do your current organizational objectives align (where appropriate) with the objectives proposed here? Are there any significant differences or conflicts?

Strategic Priority 1 – Victim safety: Service delivery improves safety and wellbeing of victims

GSANZ commends Victoria Police's prioritisation of victim safety in addressing family violence, sexual offences and child abuse. Set as strategic priority one, this clearly indicates Victoria Police's understanding that the safety of victim/survivors is paramount, and thus must be central to the work of Victoria Police. Indeed, this is closely aligned with the strategic objectives of GSANZ.

The recognition that many victim/survivors of family violence, sex offences and child abuse also experience 'additional vulnerabilities' or additional forms of disadvantage and inequality, is pivotal in ensuring a more inclusive approach to policing. As such we would recommend that Victoria Police include more detail on how they might approach these additional vulnerabilities.

Recommendation one: To support and strengthen proposed strategic priority 1.1, we recommend that more detail is included in the strategy as to how Victoria Police will improve the safety and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victim/survivors, victim/survivors with a disability, those from refugee and/or migrant backgrounds, and those who are from LGBTI communities.

This will require consideration of how different population groups in our society experience disadvantage and discrimination, and how experiences of multiple forms of inequality influence, shape and compound lived experiences of violence. We believe undertaking this task, and providing this additional detail in the Strategy will also support the following strategic priorities:

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- 1.4 - victims of sex offences and family violence engage and stay engaged with the justice system throughout the process;
- 1.5 - Victoria Police is a leader in improving victim experiences and outcomes in the criminal justice system;
- 3.4 - better understanding of the complexity around children who may be both victims and offenders;
- 3.6 - partnerships with other service providers (Gov & non-Gov) ensure continually improving responses for children; and
- All objectives under Strategic Priority 4.

The Bayside Peninsula region has been identified as one of the five ‘launch’ sites of the Support and Safety Hubs (the Hubs), therefore the Good Shepherd Bayside Peninsula Family Violence Program will be involved in the provision of services through this regional Hub. It has been our experience in the Alexis Response Model that having one of our family violence specialists embedded at the Somerville Police Complex’s Family Violence Unit (SFVU) has been positive in both engagement of victim/survivors with support services, as well as building relationships between our respective services. The collaborative triaging process which brings together members of the SFVU as well as our specialist family violence practitioner has also been positive in terms of reducing recidivism of family violence, as well as increasing awareness and understanding of our respective roles.

We notice that there is no detail in the Strategy with regards to what role Victoria Police will play in relation to the Hubs, and we feel that this is a gap, particularly given the overlap between sexual abuse/sexual assault within the context of family violence. Further, we also note from the Consultation Paper that there is strong support from Victoria Police to see the roll out of Multidisciplinary Centres (MDCs) across Victoria. We acknowledge that the MDC model is respected, and recognised internationally as a best practice model for the coordinated response to victim/survivors of sexual violence. As such we are concerned about the possible implications on police responses to family violence, sexual offences and/or child abuse. Greater detail about the role of Victoria Police in the Hubs will be beneficial.

Recommendation two: Victoria Policy consider, as part of this strategy, how they will work within the Support and Safety Hubs.

Strategic Priority 2 – Offence and Offender Management: Perpetrators are actively managed and accountable

We defer to the submission made by DV Vic.

Strategic Priority 3 – Child safety is front of mind: Ensuring children are safe and supported to recover

The Royal Commission into Family Violence concluded that the rights, interests and welfare of children and young people “should be a primary focus - not a secondary consideration for action after the needs of the parents have been accommodated. In view of their unique experiences and vulnerabilities, young people also need to be recognised by the family violence system as a specific cohort, independent of adults and children.”¹ GSANZ is pleased to see that the safety of children has been given greater focus.

Recently, GSANZ undertook a practice enquiry to examine the family violence referrals made from Victoria Police to the three family violence services in the Bayside Peninsula, where the incident involved children (i.e. whether a child(ren) were present at the home, and/or were subject to victimisation). Over the five month period, 1,492 L17 referrals were received, and 2,000 children were represented. Overall, it was found that 68 percent of referrals had missing and/or inconsistent information about children, and in nearly one quarter (20 percent) of all referrals, children’s details were omitted or only partially completed. For example, 20 percent of referrals identified ‘zero’ children were present at the family violence incident, whereas other parts of these referrals include information that identifies children. On 11 referrals, no children’s information was completed, yet referrals to a children’s agency was indicated. Additionally, L17 referrals were often unclear as to whether or not children had been referred to appropriate agencies. As a result, in some instances children who are missed do not get the required support, and in other instances they receive potentially confusing responses when their mothers are contacted by multiple agencies.²

Although this practice enquiry was only a small study, our findings do highlight significant gaps in relation to the recording and/or reporting of the needs of children who are present at family violence incidents. This in turn, has implications on the way our specialist family violence practitioners engage with children. GSANZ is happy to share our practice enquiry report with Victoria Police upon request, and would welcome an opportunity to track improvements within the Bayside Peninsula region, with the introduction of the Information Sharing Scheme.

¹ Royal Commission into Family Violence (2016), Report and Recommendations, Vol 2, p. 143

² Report details still being finalised and will be made available later in 2017

Strategic Priority 4 – Workforce development, safety and wellbeing

GSANZ supports the investment and implementation of supports and resources for all frontline officers to mitigate any risks of vicarious trauma, particularly in relation to members who respond to family violence, sexual offending and child abuse incidents. Indeed, the provision of organisational support, including the provision of training, professional development, and supervision is a workplace health and safety issue, and we commend Victoria Police’s commitment to the recommendations made in its Mental Health Review. This is in recognition that much of the work that members do, particularly in relation to family violence, is similar to the work of trained and qualified social workers. As such, we would welcome any opportunities to provide “practice-leader” support to Victoria Police members in our region. This could be in the form of a Community of Practice where our specialist family violence practitioners meet with local Victoria Police members within a framework of reflective practice with the aim of providing ‘peer’ support to aid good health and wellbeing; opportunities for shared learnings; and the development of best practice across our organisations. We recommend that a robust outcomes framework includes monitoring of the impact of workforce development, safety and wellbeing on frontline members.

Recommendation three: A robust outcomes framework includes monitoring of the impact of workforce development, safety and wellbeing initiatives on frontline members.

We are pleased to see Victoria Police’s commitment to leadership and role modelling under this Strategy. We are of the belief that the successful implementation of the objectives under this strategic priority will ensure the success of priorities 1, 2 and 3, and will further aid the embedding of its vision across the organisation.

We particularly commend Victoria Police for its stance on “demonstrating zero tolerance towards anyone perpetrating family violence, sexual offences and/or child abuse, and to challenge the condoning of violence against women, gender stereotypes and rigid roles wherever they find them.”³ To be successful in preventing all forms of violence against women and children, we must work to transform the attitudes, practices and norms that drive this violence. This work is necessary at all levels of society, and as a key figure within our community, Victoria Police’s efforts towards gender equality is important and critical in our overall primary prevention agenda. As articulated in *Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia*:

³ Consultation paper, page 13

Gender inequality is maintained and perpetuated today through structures that continue to organise and reinforce an unequal distribution of economic, social and political power and resources between women and men; limiting social norms that prescribe the type of conduct, roles, interests and contributions expected from women and men; and the practices, behaviours, choices made on a daily basis that reinforce these gendered structures and norms.⁴

Figure one: Essential actions to address the gendered drivers of violence against women



As an organisation with over 17,000 FTE employees, Victoria Police is a key workplace where prevention strategies and initiatives can facilitate the transformation required to prevent violence against women, whilst promoting gender equality. We encourage Victoria Police to seek expert advice and direction from gender equality specialists to ensure that a 'gender lens' is applied across all Victoria Police policies, procedures and practices, and that corresponding performance measures capture shifts in workplace culture within Victoria Police.

Recommendation four: Victoria Police seek expert advice and direction from gender equality specialists to ensure that a 'gender lens' is applied across all Victoria Police policies, procedures and practices, and that corresponding performance measures capture shifts in workplace culture within Victoria Police.

⁴ Our Watch, Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) and VicHealth (2015) Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia, Our Watch, Melbourne, Australia, pg. 8

Further to this, GSANZ commends Victoria Police’s commitment to implementing all the recommendations made by the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission *Independent Review into sex discrimination and sexual harassment, including predatory behaviour in Victoria Police*. The commissioning of this review followed by the subsequent acceptance of all the recommendations signifies Victoria Police’s willingness and determination in transforming its workplace culture to one where women, and people from LGBTI communities feel safe, and valued as employees.

Recommendation five: Performance measures are designed in a way to capture this cultural change stemming from acceptance of *Independent Review into sex discrimination and sexual harassment, including predatory behaviour in Victoria Police*, with specific indicators that relate to people from LGBTI communities, as well as from other population groups.

Taking into account that referrals from police for family violence will be going direct to Support and Safety Hubs, are there any gaps in the proposed policing response?

The establishment of the Hubs is one of the seven main initiatives that make up the Family Violence Rolling action Plan 2017 - 2020, which describes activities being undertaken in the first phase of implementing the 227 recommendations of the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence.

According to the Support and Safety Hubs Statewide Concept, released in July 2017, Hubs are intended as a “doorway to a system” and will become the primary intake for family violence services by:

- Identifying family violence and child wellbeing concerns;
- Supporting people who choose not to engage with specialist services;
- Undertaking an initial screening of people who are referred or come into contact with them, and work out whether hubs can help or whether referral to another service is needed, and to work out whether there are immediate safety needs;

- Either directly or through referrals, providing supports such as accommodation, advice on legal options, medical needs and flexible support packages.⁵

Whilst it is recognised that Hubs are not intended to replace or duplicate the specialist and longer term roles of family violence services, as stated above, we would be concerned if the Victoria Police strategy did not include some clarification of the relationship between the Hubs and the MDCs. We feel that the presence of Victoria Police within the Hubs, and the joint work undertaken between Victoria Police and Family Violence Services would support victim engagement, risk assessment and overall response to family violence. The value of this joint work is evidenced in the data collected from the Alexis Response Model operating in police divisions 1, 2 and 4. We feel that the integration of Victoria Police in the Hubs will certainly facilitate greater collaboration and strengthen our working relationship, along with leading to improved engagement of victims and management of offenders. This is covered under Recommendation Two.

What do you consider to be the main opportunities and challenges for integrating family violence and sexual offence responses?

The integration of family violence and sexual offence responses in the one strategy clearly recognises that gender inequality is a driver of these forms of violence, whilst not discounting male victims. This recognition is pivotal in broader awareness of gender base violence, which includes the crime of early and/or forced marriage (which is another likely point of intersection between family violence, sexual offences, and child abuse). The integration of these distinct, yet sometimes overlapping crimes also provides great potential for shared learnings across all Victoria Police members, greater consistency in response and investigation, as well as a more coordinated response, particularly where two or three of these crimes are present at an incident. For example, integrating family violence and sexual offence responses will likely aid in the greater understanding within Victoria Police of sexual assaults that are perpetrated within an intimate partner relationship (including sexual offences committed by ex-partners). As such, we would also recommend that the Strategy include initiatives that seek to provide ongoing professional development, training and/or education options for Victoria Police to solidify the collective understanding of the trauma and long-term effects of this form of victimisation, as well as motivations for its perpetration.

⁵ Victorian Government (2017) *Support and Safety Hubs Statewide Concept Paper*, Victorian Government Department of Health and Human Services

The judicial standards of evidentiary proof of sexual offending which lead to successful conviction are understood and present barriers for victims in reporting offences. One challenge that we do foresee through the amalgamation, is the potential for Victoria Police members to apply the higher standard of evidence required for sexual offences to incidents of family violence. This will then have implications on police responses, and engagement with victim/survivors. For example, if a victim/survivor discloses sexual assault and/or rape within the context of family violence within her intimate partner relationship, it is our understanding that the disclosure of sexual assault is insufficient to proceed with charges, in the absence of corroborating evidence. And as such, the response that she receives from Victoria Police to respond to the rape and/or sexual assault is determined by what evidence is available. Conversely, the same level of 'evidence' is not required in relation to reports of family violence (in any of its forms). It is our concern that without sufficient and comprehensive training and understanding of the two forms of violence (i.e. family violence and sexual offences), women will be required to 'prove' family violence victimisation to the same level that they are required to 'prove' sexual offence victimisation.

A significant challenge would be in the delivery of training to police officers in their understanding of trauma indicators in children and adults. Adults and adolescents who have experienced trauma, often have criminogenic factors and present with substance misuse, mental health issues and the criminogenic factors contribute to their commission of offences which require a police response. The training would need to include the impacts of trauma on both victims and perpetrators of family violence and sexual abuse, including children who offend, whilst balancing the need for prosecution.

GSANZ would also like to highlight that like all victims of violence, children who are victims of family violence, sexual offences and/or child abuse are not a homogenous group. We would recommend that appropriate expert advice and training is sought for all members to ensuring that responses to children are trauma-informed, inclusive, and sensitive.

Is there anything you would particularly like to see in the performance measures for Victoria Police?

The recognition of the need to improve responses to victim/survivors who also experience additional forms of structural discrimination and disadvantage requires consideration with respect to the development of performance measures. For many victim/survivors of family violence, sexual offences and/or child abuse, police are often the first point of contact, therefore providing Victoria Police, and the broader family violence sector, with a critical opportunity to gather important information about victimology and perpetration. This information not only supports the work of

specialist family violence services, sexual assault services, child protective services, and others within the sector, it also provides rich data that can inform the further understanding of these gendered crimes which will facilitate broader response and prevention efforts. As such, tools used to record and collect information should provide options to accurately record information for instance, sex (outside of the male/female binary) and affirmed gender (outside of the man/woman binary). Victim/survivors are not a homogenous group, thus to measure Victoria Police's "ability to recognise and positively respond to diverse and vulnerable victims, including children,"⁶ consideration should be given to the ways that data is collected, disaggregated, collated, and analysed. This includes data and information pertaining to children.

Our work within the Bayside Peninsula Family Violence Program, specifically in responding to L17s has highlighted the often inconsistent provision of information from responding members. We understand that the Information Sharing Scheme (to commence in early 2018) will support sharing of information, and thus we would anticipate that this will also facilitate improvements in relation to the recording of information to ensure that Victoria Police and service agencies deliver timely and tailored responses to victims of family violence, including children.

Lastly, we would encourage that the performance management framework include the necessary resources and activities to ensure sector consultation, robust monitoring and evaluation of the Strategy.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment to this consultation, and we are happy to elaborate on any of the points made.

⁶ Consultation Paper, p. 15