



CONTINUING THE MOMENTUM: FAMILY VIOLENCE RESPONSE AND PREVENTION IN VICTORIA

Pre-election Position Paper - November 2022

The countless family violence reforms implemented by the Victorian Government since the Royal Commission into Family Violence have positioned our state at the forefront of response and prevention.

The government's significant commitment to these issues over the past 7 years has resulted in the development of many innovative programs, resources and services working with communities and across the family violence sector.

As Victoria moves towards another state election, it is important to continue the momentum of these reforms, while strengthening our policies and programs. We must work to improve the services system to effectively and comprehensively meet the needs of diverse victim-survivors, while building our knowledge and abilities to work closely with people who have chosen to use violence against their families.

inTouch calls on all incumbent Members of Parliament as well as State Election candidates to commit to the continued focus, resourcing and improvement of the family violence services system. In particular, we call on renewed attention and urgent resourcing of the following critical areas:

1. Housing

At inTouch, 19 percent of our clients were in temporary or emergency housing, and 3 percent were sleeping rough at the time in which they engaged our services. Our estimates also indicate that between 15-25 percent of our clients are staying with friends and relatives because they do not have their own housing. These clients are at risk of experiencing homelessness.

Family violence is the leading cause of homelessness for our clients. Many of these women have been forced to leave the home due to the danger they face from the family violence, or because the person using violence has been removed from the home and the victim-survivor cannot maintain rental, mortgage, and other household payments on her own.

When our clients become homeless, it can be for extended periods of time due to the barriers they face in the public and private housing sectors. For clients on temporary visas, their visa and their migration status can frequently make them ineligible for social security payments and steady income, and therefore ineligible for support from housing services. Additionally, clients that have recently migrated to Australia often do not have a rental history or referees that they can submit as part of a housing application.

However, one of the greatest barriers to housing for victim-survivors is the lack of affordable housing. Demand for affordable housing is at an all-time high in Australia. For many of our clients, securing medium to long-term safe, stable and secure housing is incredibly challenging and the lack of access continues to endanger the lives of women and their children.

Recommendation: Invest in more social and affordable housing for low-income earners, including those on temporary visas experiencing family violence.

Recommendation: Provide additional funding to expand women's refuges, ensuring that all women – including those with diverse needs – are catered to.

2. Keeping men in view

Any effective policy and campaign relating to the prevention and response to family violence must include working with men. Our work with men must be multifaceted and relevant to the communities, cultural and language groups, and faith groups that they belong to. Programs and activities must include community-led prevention programs as well as behaviour change initiatives.

Motivation for Change, inTouch's culturally-tailored perpetrator intervention program provides both group work and case management to men who have used violence. Men who are engaged in this program work with facilitators and case managers who speak their language and are from the same cultural background.

This program has a retention and completion rate of over 90 percent. Our view is that such tailored programming, where a person's attitudes and behaviour are challenged from within their own cultural and language group, is highly effective. Furthermore, programs that are developed in-language, alleviate the barriers that many men from migrant and refugee backgrounds face when they are engaging with mainstream services such as men's behaviour change programs.

Motivation for Change unpacks the nuances of cultural beliefs and practices that are often attributed by the men as their source of authority and power over women. These views and behaviours are challenged directly by men from their own cultures and communities.

Recommendation: Establish and sustainably fund culturally responsive case management and group work models, such as the Motivation for Change program, to perpetrator interventions across the state.

3. Misidentification of the predominant aggressor

As identified by the Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor, misidentification is an issue that must be addressed urgently.

Misidentification can occur for different reasons and some cohorts are more vulnerable to misidentification than others. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, women from migrant and refugee communities, LGBTIAQ+ individuals and women with disabilities are at higher risk of misidentification than the general population.

Misidentification occurs when a victim-survivor's account of an incident has not been properly heard, understood, or believed. This can be most commonly attributed to the methods employed by police officers when investigating an incident. Although police are required to engage interpreters when language barriers are identified, we are aware that there are many occasions in which this does not occur. Often family members or even the perpetrator is asked to act as an interpreter between law enforcement and the victim survivor. Many reports also indicate that victim-survivors feel that police officers have simply not taken the time to listen to the client.

In some instances of misidentification, police have misconstrued the visible emotional distress of the client as an indication of violent behaviour or aggression. Similarly, if the victim-survivor has used some form of aggression or self-defence in response to the abuser, the officer has perceived this to be indicative of her role as the perpetrator of violence in the relationship.

In all of these situations, the victim-survivor's account of the incident has not been accurately represented or reported to law enforcement.

The consequences of misidentification are incredibly detrimental, with many women facing a multitude of legal issues including intervention orders, criminal charges, reputational damage and reduction in access to services. Some women also lose access to their children due to child protection proceedings.

Recommendation: Implement urgent, widespread reform and cultural change in the policing and justice systems to prevent and rectify misidentification. We also call on the State Government to commit to the recommendations made by the Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor.

About inTouch

inTouch provides person-centred, integrated and culturally responsive family violence services to people from migrant and refugee communities across Victoria. We have assisted over 20,000 women and children experiencing family violence throughout our 37 years of operation, providing a holistic service that centres the experiences of victim-survivors in everything we do.

inTouch works across the family violence continuum, providing culturally-informed early intervention, case management, perpetrator programs, legal advice, crisis recovery and enhanced capacity-building across the sector and community. We are proud to provide high-level leadership and guidance to all levels of government with our evidence-based, victim-survivor informed advocacy and policy work.

Our services include:

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- An accredited community legal centre working at the intersection of Family Law, Family Violence and Migration Law
- Learning and development programs for family violence providers and multicultural organisations to build their knowledge and skills when supporting women from refugee and migrant communities
- Case management that encompasses a first-hand understanding of the migration journey and unique cultural barriers women may face when seeking assistance
- Post-recovery initiatives for victim-survivors, focusing on economic independence, social and family connection and emotional wellbeing
- Prevention projects and resource development for migrant and refugee communities
- Programs focusing on trauma and culturally-informed perpetrator intervention.

inTouch is a critical piece in Victoria's family violence response system and an organisation that is growing in size, scope and capacity. We are a unique and vital service, with specialist expertise working with people of migrant and refugee backgrounds. This is reflected in our workforce, which is comprised primarily of people who are migrants and refugees themselves – the inTouch team is from over 20 different countries and communities globally.

This paper has been informed directly through ongoing discussions with our client-facing case management team, and staff from Motivation for Change – our perpetrator intervention program.

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**If you are experiencing family violence and need immediate support,
please call 1800 RESPECT on 1800 737 328**

inTouch

Multicultural Centre
Against Family Violence