

**inTOUCH SUBMISSION IN RESPONSE TO:
*INQUIRY INTO CAPTURING DATA ON FAMILY
VIOLENCE PERPETRATORS IN VICTORIA***

inTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence

May 2024



Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the first inhabitants of this nation and the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we work and live. We pay our respect to their Elders – past and present. We express our gratitude for the sharing of this land, our sorrow for the personal, spiritual and cultural costs of that sharing and hope that we may move forward together in harmony and in the spirit of healing.

Acknowledgement of Victim-Survivors

We also acknowledge the countless women who have experienced family violence, in particular women from migrant and refugee backgrounds. We recognise the courageous path they have travelled to rebuild their lives and honour their stories which continue to inspire and drive our work.

Terminology Note

At inTouch, we use the term people (or men) who use violence when referring to those who have perpetrated family violence. For the purposes of this submission, we will be using to the term family violence perpetrators as it is noted in the Terms of Reference for this Inquiry.

About inTouch

inTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence (inTouch) has provided person-centred, integrated and culturally responsive family violence services to migrant and refugee communities in Victoria since 1984.

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

Our services are informed by an integrated *inLanguage, inCulture* delivery model and supported by our diverse workforce, which is comprised primarily of people who are migrants and refugees themselves. Our team's unique understanding of culture and the migration journey allows inTouch to deliver expert, specialist case management to our clients in over 20 languages.

inTouch's services include:

- Case management that encompasses a first-hand understanding of the migration journey and unique cultural barriers women may face when seeking assistance for family violence.
- An integrated community legal centre (**inTouch Women's Legal Centre**) working at the intersection of family and migration law - the first multidisciplinary practice in Australia to provide this inclusive service response.
- inSpire, a post-recovery initiative for victim-survivors, focusing on economic independence, social connection and emotional wellbeing.
- A policy, advocacy and research unit that informs government legislation, service provision and media coverage and is informed by victim-survivors and our client services' team.
- Prevention and capacity-building projects and resource development for multicultural communities and the family violence sector.
- A specialised *inLanguage, inCulture* program, Motivation for Change, that works with men who use violence, focusing on trauma and the impacts of migration.
- A comprehensive suite of Learning and Development modules centred and informed by the experiences of victim-survivors and inTouch's specialist expertise working across the family violence continuum.
- NOOR Family Violence Survivor-Advocates, a group of migrant and refugee victim-survivors who influence policy, service provision and media reporting with lived experience.

For more information, visit www.intouch.org.au email admin@intouch.org.au or call [03 9413 6500](tel:0394136500)

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Introduction

inTouch welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Legislative Assembly Legal and Social Committee's Inquiry into capturing data on family violence perpetrators in Victoria.

For over 40 years inTouch has been steadfast in our mission to support migrant and refugee women who have endured family violence. We offer comprehensive case management services that acknowledge and address the unique cultural challenges our clients often encounter when seeking assistance. inTouch also plays a critical role in engaging with people who use violence through our inCulture, inLanguage programs and early intervention services.

Through our work with women and men, inTouch collects a broad range of information and data relating to family violence perpetrators. Although, our primary method of engagement with family violence perpetrators is through our Motivation for Change program, we also collect a significant amount of data on perpetrators through our clients who are victim-survivors of family violence.

Data collection and sharing is an integral component to ensuring the safety of our clients who experience family violence. Data is also a key enabler for effective reporting, informing program and service need, evaluating program effectiveness, and supporting the allocation of funding.

To ensure that we achieve a full understanding of family violence perpetrators, data collection processes must be consistent, culturally informed and eliminate any risk of racially, culturally or religiously profiling groups. Data validation and rectification is also necessary in ensuring the accuracy of data collected, both from a cultural perspective as well as to avoid misidentification of the predominant aggressor.

While we acknowledge that there has been much progress since the Royal Commission into Family Violence with improved data collection frameworks and information sharing policies enabling the timely sharing of data and risk information about family violence perpetrators; the mechanisms, capability, processes and systems to support this are still required.

Specialist family violence services including inTouch are not adequately resourced to support the comprehensive level of data collection and storage that is required. Agencies need dedicated resources with the capability and capacity to undertake data related work, so that case managers and other frontline staff are able to focus on assisting clients who are in urgent need of support.

Ensuring that services are equipped with the systems, capacity and capabilities to facilitate the use of real time and accurate data will have a significant impact on improving our response to family violence.

This submission seeks to respond to the key questions posed by the Committee and demonstrate our current forms of data collection, how family violence perpetrator data is used and how these processes can be improved. Addressing these challenges will ensure that we can ultimately provide the most appropriate responses to those using violence, and most importantly ensure the ongoing safety of migrant and refugee women experiencing family violence.

Recommendations

Improving the collection of family violence perpetrator data

1. Review the current Victorian Family Violence Data Collection Framework to ensure that it is up to date and addresses racial profiling, bias in data collection, misidentification of the predominant aggressor and privacy and security.
2. Ensure alignment and consistent approaches across all agencies and government on the collection and measurement of data relating to cultural and language diversity.
3. Improve the collection and storage of qualitative data, including MARAM Risk Assessments, by providing an enhanced and consistent data collection system to all agencies who collect family violence data (also refer to Recommendation 8).
4. Review protocols around information sharing so that all agencies working with perpetrators across the system have the access to the information and data that they need to effectively support and manage risk when working with perpetrators.
5. Provide agencies (in particular Not-for-Profit organisations) with sufficient resourcing to undertake the necessary collection of data and ensure that information on family violence perpetrators is current and readily available.
6. Build capability uplift for agencies to ensure that they are equipped and have the necessary skills and training required to effectively collect and store data.
7. Ensure all agencies who collect family violence data enhance cultural awareness training to focus on the appropriate collection of data and the impact of inaccurate data collection and use, particularly on migrant and refugee communities.
8. Require all agencies to enhance existing processes to ensure that interpreters are appropriately engaged when there is a language barrier.

Improving the use of family violence perpetrator data

9. Increase capacity and capability of agencies to better understand the purpose of data collection with clear and consistent approaches across all agencies working with family violence victim survivors and perpetrators.
10. Prevent the misuse of data by ensuring defined purposes for data collection and use including for both service delivery and criminological purposes.
11. Promote pro-active information sharing with the support of improved systems used across all information sharing entities.
12. Implement streamlined approaches to simplify data reporting that effectively use and analyse both quantitative and qualitative data, and support mapping of community need.

13. Develop a consistent approach or framework for the collection and use of qualitative data to support agencies to effectively measure impact including investment in capability building for agencies to complete outcomes-based evaluations.

Achieving a full understanding of family violence perpetrators

14. Formalise data validation and rectification processes to ensure the accuracy of family violence perpetrator data (including misidentification) from the primary source.
15. Enhance and resource the Central Information Point to provide information and data reports to all Information Sharing Entities.
16. Following consideration of the relevant safeguards and recommendations in this submission, invest in a shared data system or platform for agencies working with family violence victim survivors and perpetrators to enable real time sharing and access to critical risk information (also refer to Recommendation 2).
17. Reduce the administrative burden on frontline staff, by providing dedicated resourcing to enhance capacity within agencies to effectively collect, use, share and report on family violence data.
18. Ensure that all grant and funding agreements have consistent and mandatory components relating to data collection, reporting and evaluation requirements including sufficient resource allocation for these activities.

inTouch and our role in working with family violence perpetrators

Overview

inTouch works across the spectrum of family violence services and support. We provide culturally-responsive case management, perpetrator programs, legal assistance and representation and specialised migration assistance, crisis recovery and learning and development and capacity-building programs across the sector and community.

Our Clients

inTouch supports a client group who have highly complex and intersectional needs. On a daily basis, we have the privilege of seeing first-hand how our trauma informed, *inLanguage* and *inCulture* support enables our clients to receive services and rebuild community and connections. Our unique service delivery not only supports a more effective and efficient client experience, but also provides a strong foundation for our clients' healing and recovery, ensuring the best possible outcomes for our clients, their children and their communities.

During the 2022-23 financial year, inTouch demonstrated its commitment to supporting vulnerable women, providing support to 1,495 women and their 1,551 children through direct response services. A further 1,307 people were engaged through prevention and early intervention programs, and 196 women were supported through our community recovery groups¹. Our clients come from 97 different countries, speaking 91 different languages, with 31% having resided in Australia for less than 5 years².

Working with family violence perpetrators

Although we predominantly work with women and their children who have experienced family violence, we also provide services to men who have used family violence.

Men's Behaviour Change Programs are currently the key intervention for men using family violence. At inTouch, we primarily work with men through our **Motivation for Change** (MfC) program. MfC utilises inTouch's innovative *inLanguage*, *inCulture* delivery model to challenge harmful attitudes and behaviours using culture, language and community as a strength-based response.³ The program works with men who use violence, recognising the complex and intersecting barriers that can make prevention and response challenging.

The key components of MfC include individualised case management, family safety contact work, alongside a 20-week trauma informed, culturally tailored group program. MfC was initially planned to operate as a prevention initiative, however due to the lack of appropriate intervention options for migrant and refugee men, MfC has been used as a key intervention program to support men who use family violence.⁴

¹ InTouch, Annual Report 2022-23 (2024) p.11

² InTouch, Annual Report 2022-23 (2024) p.17

³ inTouch, Annual Report 2021-22 (2022) p7

⁴ inTouch, Annual Report 2022-23 (2024) p.32

MfC specifically works with two cohorts in the community being South Asian and Afghan men. South-Asian groups are delivered in Hindi and English while Afghan groups are exclusively delivered in Dari. All facilitators and Case Managers of MfC are multilingual and have a strong cultural awareness of the communities they work with. The ability to engage with the men who are using violence in their first language and simplify complex concepts relating to family violence in a respectful and culturally informed way is critical to the success of MfC.⁵ In 2022-23, inTouch delivered MfC to 126 men who had used violence against women.⁶

In addition to MfC and following a grant of Federal funding via the Migration Council of Australia, inTouch expanded our outreach to strengthen community engagement working with youth groups, community leaders, and the Afghan community in Geelong and Shepparton, to design and develop our **Respectful Relationships Forums**.⁷ These forums were offered in Hazaragi, Dari, or Farsi and are aimed at addressing the effects of migration and fostering harmony, safety, and communication in intimate and family relationships.⁸ 138 men have been engaged through our Respectful Relationships program.⁹

Perpetrator data and information is frequently collected and used by other services and programs within inTouch. Services including our **Women's Legal Centre**, as well as our intake and case managers, collect information relating to a perpetrator from our clients who are women experiencing family violence. This data is used to inform our understanding of the perpetrator, the risk profile, and to provide our clients with the required supports and advice.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ inTouch, Annual Report 2022-23 (2024) p.8

⁷ inTouch, Annual Report 2022-23 (2024) p.22

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

1. Collection of family violence perpetrator data

What data on the profile and volume of family violence perpetrators is collected in Victoria?

- Who collects it? When and how is it collected?
- Where is it stored? Who has access to it?
- How could these processes be improved?

Through our work with women and men, inTouch collects a broad range of information and data relating to family violence perpetrators. Although, our primary method of engagement with family violence perpetrators is through our MfC program, we also collect a significant amount of data on perpetrators through our clients who are victim survivors of family violence.

Data collection and storage

When family violence occurs, information and data on both the victim survivor and the perpetrator are collected by the first point of contact. This can be a broad range of agencies and services in Victoria including Victoria Police, The Orange Door, the Magistrates' or Children's Court of Victoria and Child Protection. There are also some instances where clients will make contact directly with specialist family violence services after experiencing family violence.

In most cases, inTouch receives client referrals from the first responding agency. These referrals contain high level data relating to the client and are provided via a referral form. At the point of intake, inTouch will also collect relevant information. Our Direct Services team undertakes the intake process for victim survivors and our MfC team conduct the intake process for our clients who are men using family violence. The data collected by inTouch can include the following:

- First Name
- Last Name
- Date of Birth
- Gender
- Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander Status
- Address
- Contact Information (including phone and email)
- Visa status
- Country of origin
- Preferred language
- English proficiency
- Year of arrival
- Current and previous intimate partners including their Date of Birth and contact information
- Information on client's children including Date of Birth and Gender
- Referral Source

inTouch also sources additional information if it is not included in the referral as part of the intake assessment. This includes family violence history, details of any intervention orders, and details about the current family violence incident including types of violence perpetrated. This information is generally sourced from the client and/or Victoria Police and is generally recorded as qualitative narrative information in case notes and across client files. Therefore, it is not easily extracted from systems and may be recorded inconsistently.

Specialist Family Violence Services in Victoria including inTouch use the ***Integrated reports and information system (IRIS)*** to collect and store client data. IRIS was developed to “promote greater consistency and reliability of Family Services data”¹⁰. IRIS is used by our MfC team to capture a broad range of quantitative data on clients as well as case notes. inTouch Family Violence Case Managers use the ***Specialist Homelessness Information Platform (SHIP)*** to collect high level data and case notes when working with our clients who are experiencing family violence, and our Women’s Legal Centre use the ***Actionstep*** file management system.

Following the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Family Violence, the Victorian Government introduced two key reforms which would help in improving the collection and sharing of data and information relating to family violence. The ***Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Risk Management Framework (MARAM)*** was designed to support prescribed organisations to effectively and consistently identify, assess and manage family violence risk. Delivery of the MARAM is also supported by the ***Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme (FVISS)*** and the ***Child Information Sharing Scheme (CISS)***. The FVISS enables ***Information Sharing Entities (ISEs)*** to share information relating to the assessment and management of family violence risk. The CISS enables authorised organisations to share information to promote the wellbeing and safety of children. MARAM and the FVISS and CISS are key enablers for the most effective collection and sharing of data and information relating to family violence perpetrators.

However, these key enablers are not supported by the required system resources for them to operate most effectively. At this stage, IRIS is unable to be used to collect and store MARAM Risk Assessments. SHIP can store MARAM Assessments, however, it is in a limited format making it difficult to extract and use. MARAM Assessments hold critical risk and safety information that is vital in managing safety of clients. Due to the lack of sophisticated data collection systems being made available to agencies, MARAM Risk Assessments are stored securely on inTouch’s Sharepoint. Also, as they are stored separately by agencies, any updates are not visible by those who are co-case managing or needing updated risk information. The information collected and held in MARAM Assessments is unstructured data making it unusable from an effective data usage and management perspective. This is further explored below and in Section 2.

The Royal Commission into Family Violence also made a number of recommendations relating to the collection and reporting family violence data, including Recommendations 204 (Improve state-wide family violence data collection and research), 152 (Improve the collection of Indigenous data relating to family violence) and 170 (Adopt a consistent and comprehensive approach to data collection on people with disabilities). The Victorian Government developed the ***Victorian Family Violence Data Collection Framework (VFVDCF)*** to address these recommendations and it was published in 2019. The VFVDCF acknowledges the challenges and limitations in existing data

¹⁰ Integrated Reports and Information System, DFFH Website, <https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/integrated-reports-and-information-system>

collection processes, several of which are still present today, including privacy and security.¹¹ inTouch would strongly encourage the inquiry to review the VFVDCF and consider the way in which it is used by agencies and its relevance in current data collection practice.

Consistent and thorough data collection is incredibly important, particularly when it comes to removing any bias in collection practices. Data collection processes must be culturally informed and eliminate any risk to racially, culturally or religiously profiling groups. inTouch notes the current **Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Standards for Statistics on Cultural and Language Diversity (SSCLD)** provide a nationally consistent framework for the collection of data on cultural and language diversity¹². The SSCLD were released in 2022, (three years after the VFVDCF was published) and the inquiry may wish to consider their application in the collection of data on family violence perpetrators in Victoria.

Language barriers and limited cultural awareness by agencies can lead to assumptions and inaccurate recording of data. It is important that data is recorded based on the direct input from the client (which may be the victim survivor or the perpetrator), and if required, interpreters must be engaged. This, along with using culturally informed processes, can ensure that there are no assumptions made as part of the collection process.

Case Study

Petra is in Australia on a bridging visa awaiting the outcome of a partner visa application. Her partner Dominic is sponsoring her. They have a 1-year-old child together. Dominic is very abusive, using physical and emotional violence against Petra. Petra has very limited English.

Dominic has told Petra that if she reports the family violence, he will have her deported and keep their child in Australia. He keeps Petra confined to the home most days and doesn't allow her to earn an income. Petra feels trapped – she does not want to lose her child.

One day, the police attended their home after neighbours heard screaming and what sounded like glass breaking. When the police attended, Dominic started to cry and told them that Petra had been violent towards him. The police did not call an interpreter and Petra did not understand what was happening. Petra was arrested and removed from the home.

At the point of data collection, it is also critically important that the primary aggressor is accurately identified. There are instances in which the victim survivor is misidentified as the perpetrator,

¹¹ Victorian Family Violence Data Collection Framework (2019), Victorian Government, p. 12-18

¹² ABS Standards on Cultural and Language Diversity (2022), <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/standards/standards-statistics-cultural-and-language-diversity/latest-release#about-this-release>

which can have significant implications for the victim survivor, their children and the services they receive. The issues and challenges of misidentification are further explored in Section 3.

Despite the positive changes brought by the FVISS, challenges remain with what and how much information is shared and accessible to key stakeholders responsible for risk management across the system. At present, some agencies don't have access to the information they need to inform work with perpetrators. While inTouch's MfC receives perpetrator referrals from courts, child protection and corrections, we are unable to access critical information about the victim survivor's MARAMs and case information related to the perpetrators we work with from these agencies, as it is not mandated under the protocol. This means that our case management of perpetrators is without vital information from the victim survivor's perspective that is essential to effective risk management.

Opportunities for Improvement

In addition to suggestions made above relating to policy improvements, inTouch believe there is opportunity and significant need to **improve the resourcing and capacity of agencies** who collect family violence data.

Data collection and storage requires time, understanding and effort to do so effectively. Services need to be resourced adequately through having effective systems that enable collection and reporting of more comprehensive data and trained staff to undertake the work.

There also needs to be a greater understanding amongst agencies and clients as to why the data is being collected and what it can and will be used for. There is a huge undertaking that goes into the collection of rich quality data (which most agencies hold across various systems), but it cannot be used effectively.

As mentioned above, agencies who are collecting family violence perpetrator data, including Victoria Police, need to have the training and resources required to effectively identify and capture demographic data in a nuanced way that also focuses on an individual's life experience and risk factors, and **reduces a biased approach to data collection** and analysis.

A critical step in addressing this would be to enhance **cultural awareness training** within agencies who collect family violence data to assist in the accurate identification and collection of relevant information and addressing risks of bias. In particular, enhancing existing processes on how to appropriately engage interpreters when there is a language barrier. Our position paper on 'The causes and consequences of misidentification on women from migrant and refugee communities experiencing family violence' explores this in detail. This issue is also discussed further in this submission at Section 3.

inTouch is currently exploring the funding opportunities for and implementation of **a digitisation strategy** aimed improving the quality and accessibility of our services. This strategy is focused on enhancing data collection and management systems that will result in improved data quality, reducing data double handling enabling us to better track and respond to the needs of our clients. The strategy has proposed initiatives that include:

1. *Digitisation of Processes*: We aim to streamline and automate our intake and case management processes through the implementation of digital solutions. This will not only enhance the efficiency of our operations but also improve the accuracy and timeliness of data collection, thereby enabling us to better assess and address the needs of our clients.
2. *Diversification of Support Channels*: Recognising the limitations of our current phone-based approach, we intend to introduce new channels for clients to engage with our support services. This may include online chat support, virtual sessions, and other digital platforms, providing greater flexibility and accessibility for women seeking assistance.
3. *Capacity Building*: We will invest in training and capacity building initiatives to equip our staff with the necessary skills and resources to effectively utilise digital tools and technologies. This will ensure smooth transition to the new system and enhance our ability to provide tailored support to migrant and refugee women.

Digital solutions and initiatives such as these can drastically improve the effectiveness and efficiency of agencies' data collection processes and as a result, the quality of services. We encourage the inquiry to consider these further.

It is however important to note that agency systems cannot be improved in isolation. For data collection and usage to operate most effectively, there must be visibility of information across agencies. Having a ***shared data system or platform*** for information and data on all family violence perpetrators would not only assist with initial data collection at intake, but most critically while monitoring and keeping family violence perpetrators in view and by the whole system. This will be further explored in Section 2.

Recommendations:

1. Review the current Victorian Family Violence Data Collection Framework to ensure that it is up to date and addresses racial profiling, bias in data collection, misidentification of the predominant aggressor and privacy and security.
2. Ensure alignment and consistent approaches across all agencies and government on the collection and measurement of data relating to cultural and language diversity.
3. Improve the collection and storage of qualitative data including MARAM Risk Assessments by providing an enhanced and consistent data collection system to all agencies who collect family violence data, including centralised MARAM Risk Assessments that can be updated by co-case managing agencies (also refer to Recommendation 8).
4. Review protocols around information sharing so that all agencies working with perpetrators across the system have the access to the information and data that they need to effectively support and manage risk when working with perpetrators.
5. Provide agencies (in particular Not-for-Profit organisations) with sufficient resourcing to undertake the necessary collection of data and ensure that information on family violence perpetrators is current and readily available.
6. Build capability uplift for agencies to ensure that they are equipped and have the necessary skills and training required to effectively collect and store data.
7. Ensure all agencies who collect family violence data enhance cultural awareness training to focus on the appropriate collection of data and the impact of inaccurate data collection and use particularly on migrant and refugee communities.
8. Require all agencies to enhance existing processes to ensure that interpreters are appropriately engaged when there is a language barrier.

2. Use of family violence perpetrator data

How is the current data on the profile and volume of family violence perpetrators used in Victoria?

- What is the purpose of data collection?
- How could the way this data is used be improved?

The Royal Commission into Family Violence noted that " Effective and appropriate sharing of information is crucial, playing a significant role in keeping victims safe and holding perpetrators to account. The consequences when information is not shared can be catastrophic."¹³ While information sharing policy and legislative provisions have enabled the timely sharing of data and risk information about family violence perpetrators; the mechanisms, capability, processes and systems to support this are still required.

Purpose of data collection

Data is collected by agencies for a range of reasons at the client and service level, as well as at the systems level. Ultimately, data and information on family violence perpetrators is collected to ensure the safety of victim survivors and their children. Data is also collected to enable effective reporting, inform program and service need, evaluate program effectiveness, and support the seeking of funding.

However, when data is being collected there is a lack of understanding as to why the data is being collected and what it will be used for. At times, collection of data is unintentional without a clearly defined purpose. Ensuring a clear and collective approach for those collecting the data may support a better understanding of the importance of data collection, assist in building trust with clients about the collection and use of their personal information, improve data integrity and ultimately lead to it being used more effectively. This will also assist in avoiding misuse of data which is particularly important when it comes to collecting and using data pertaining to cultural or racial background.

Due to resourcing, capability and capacity restraints, the use of data on family violence perpetrators at inTouch is limited and mostly used **to support and respond to our clients**. Currently, the data we hold on family violence perpetrators is used to:

- establish, assess and manage risk to victim survivors and their children,
- keep women and children safe while engaged with our services,
- to support the provision of programs to perpetrators and
- keeping perpetrators engaged and visible to the service system.

¹³ Royal Commission into Family Violence (2016), Volume 1, p. 155

The purpose of this data collection is to assist in understanding the risk profile of our clients and the nature of family violence offending at an individual level. When collecting this data, the focus is purely on recording information on a particular client, rather than having consideration to how this data can inform a broader understanding of our client group and influence program design and delivery.

Improving the use of data

With enhanced systems and increases in resourcing, capacity and capability uplift, there are a number of opportunities for improvements to the way in which family violence perpetrator data can be used.

inTouch strongly urges that the outcomes of this Inquiry ***must not solely focus on the use of data for criminological purposes***. This should be a secondary emphasis. It is imperative that the Inquiry focuses on more punitive responses and addresses the fundamental gaps in data collection and usage. Most importantly addressing critical issues such as misidentification of the predominant aggressor (which is further detailed in Section 3).

Increased accessibility and readily available data on family violence perpetrators would significantly assist in ***improving our current response to victim survivor clients***. This would enhance our ability to ensure a more comprehensive risk overview can be established and managed. Greater information flow allows for dynamic risk management which is critical in responding to family violence. Strengthening ***pro-active and timely information sharing*** through improved data management practices can assist with the prevention of further family violence from occurring and escalating. Ensuring that services are equipped with the systems, capacity and capabilities to facilitate real time data use and sharing will have a significant impact on improving our response to family violence.

The Royal Commission into Family Violence recommended that the Victorian Government explore options for the development of a single case management data system for relevant agencies to view and share risk information in real time. The Commission noted that “government should have as its aspiration the ***creation of an integrated case management system*** whereby relevant agencies can upload and access in real time the information they need to fulfil their roles and responsibilities as part of the family violence system.”¹⁴ The Victorian Government has noted that this recommendation has been implemented through the delivery of a Client Relationship Management (CRM) system to support the operations of the Orange Door, as well as the implementation of the Central Information Point (CIP)¹⁵. However, it is our view that this does not fully meet the intention of this recommendation with the broader family violence service system still having inadequate systems to support the sharing of family violence data.

Having effective data systems or tools (like those referred to in our proposed digitisation strategy mentioned in Section 1 of this submission) and building capacity within agencies can also support effective and real time ***data reporting***. There is a need to improve the ability of agencies to extract and report on the data that they capture. Having streamlined processes and systems that support

¹⁴ Royal Commission into Family Violence (2016), Volume 1, p. 198

¹⁵ Royal Commission into Family Violence Recommendations, Victorian Government, <https://www.vic.gov.au/family-violence-recommendations/examine-options-single-case-management-data-system>

data extraction are essential to improving the way in which data is used by agencies and the broader service system.

Effective data reporting supports decision making and ***ensures funding is directed and allocated to where it is needed***. Consistency and transparency in the allocation of funding, and ensuring agencies have access to the data required by decision makers (including government) would enable agencies to more effectively seek investment in programs that meet both community need and government requirements and ensure there is clear demonstration that activities are achieving the intended outcomes.

Improving the use and accessibility of the data collected by agencies will also enable effective ***mapping and understanding of community need***. This allows agencies to undertake the required planning to ensure we understand the prevalence of family violence within community and can target program development and delivery. We need high quality data so that we can understand community need and ensure we are delivering the right programs to the right clients at the right time. For example, improved access and use of data on family violence perpetrators would inform increased and more targeted investment in tailored perpetrator interventions including men's behaviour change programs that cater to the diverse needs of men who use violence from migrant and refugee communities.

At inTouch we deliver *inLanguage, inCulture* programs, and it is essential that our workforce is aligned and equipped to meet our client need. Having usable and accessible data to ***inform program design and delivery*** is critical in ensuring effective program outcomes. Accurate, timely and high-quality data is pivotal to the design and development of evidence-based interventions and enables more targeted prevention approaches to community.

Lastly, it is important that we continuously and consistently ***measure our impact***. Access to both quantitative and qualitative data is essential to effective evaluation of our programs and services. We need to be able to understand the nuances involved in delivering *inLanguage, inCulture* programs to family violence perpetrators and ensure that we are delivering tailored perpetrator interventions that are culturally appropriate and informed. At inTouch we are working towards an outcomes-based approach to evaluation and would encourage the inquiry to consider frameworks that support this. Being able to apply our learnings into practice is integral for continuous improvement and delivering positive outcomes for our clients.

Recommendations:

9. Increase capacity and capability of agencies to better understand the purpose of data collection with clear and consistent approaches across all agencies working with family violence victim survivors and perpetrators.
10. Prevent the misuse of data by ensuring defined purposes for data collection and use including for both service delivery and criminological purposes.
11. Promote pro-active information sharing with the support of improved systems used across all information sharing entities.
12. Implement streamlined approaches to simplify data reporting that effectively use and analyse both quantitative and qualitative data, and support mapping of community need.
13. Develop a consistent approach or framework for the collection and use of qualitative data to support agencies to effectively measure impact including investment in capability building for agencies to complete outcomes-based evaluations.

3. Achieving a full understanding of family violence perpetrators

What additional data on the profile and volume of family violence perpetrators should be collected in Victoria?

- How will it help to achieve a full understanding of this cohort?
- What are the barriers to collecting it? How can these be overcome?
- What data cannot be collected?

There is always more we need to know about the people using family violence that would be helpful in improving the response to our clients. Although specialist family violence services including inTouch do capture a lot of data about an individual client of our service, we cannot always see the whole picture. In circumstances where we are supporting a victim survivor, it is not always easy to obtain and capture their history, the story and history of their perpetrator and there is no connection between the systems different services use that can support an understanding of this. Having the whole picture of a client is integral to assessing and managing their risk of further or escalated family violence. The ability to match data across systems also avoids a victim survivor needing to re-tell their story **enabling a more trauma-informed response** to family violence.

Additional data required to understand family violence perpetrators

There is a need to achieve an understanding of family violence perpetrators on an individual level, as well as a need to understand the broader and dynamic cohort of family violence perpetrators. This section of our submission will talk to both.

As an ISE, there is a lot of information that can be obtained through the FVISS, however, this information is not always current or provided in real time. In some cases, ISEs will need to submit a number of information sharing requests to different agencies and services to locate the information they need. Agencies receiving the requests also need to have the ability to easily access and share the information they hold. Having immediate access to **additional information** such as the below would be extremely important in supporting our clients and understanding, in particular, the risk profile of a family violence perpetrator:

- Full record of criminal history and court outcomes of the perpetrator including recidivism related data
- Family Violence history of the children experiencing family violence
- Family Violence history of the perpetrator including that related to other victim survivors
- Any MARAM Assessments completed by other agencies relating to the victim survivor or the perpetrator
- Details of any existing intervention orders and relevant court information
- Details of any services that the perpetrator is engaged with including Men's Behaviour Change Programs

Specialist Family Violence Services including inTouch do not have the same immediate access to information as other government agencies do such as Child Protection and the Orange Door. As noted previously in this submission, timely access to information could be addressed through the investment in shared and accessible data systems and platforms between agencies working with family violence victim survivors and perpetrators.

As a specialist service it is our **role to validate the data** we receive from the referring agency. At the point of intake with our client, it is important that we can confirm the initial set of data provided by primary sources who include Victoria Police, Courts and Child Protection. This is critically important from a cultural perspective and ensures that our clients receive the appropriate support. This is also a key element in ensuring that the predominant aggressor has been accurately identified. If data is accurate at the individual level, it will ultimately inform the system's full understanding of family violence perpetrators.

Historical family violence information is also important and would be a valuable set of data if provided to specialist services to use particularly when assessing risk. The Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor (FVRIM) noted the need for "access to historical Family Violence Report records, which provide an important source of information for recognising misidentification¹⁶."

The family violence service system is constantly aware of the risks around **misidentification of the predominant aggressor** and the inquiry needs to make sure that the outcomes of this inquiry and its findings address the challenges around data and misidentification. The FVRIM noted that a University of Melbourne review found that 48% of family violence reports where a women was listed as a respondent involved misidentification¹⁷.

If there are a significant amount of victim survivors misidentified as perpetrators of family violence, this could potentially skew data sets and limit the ability of the system to achieve a full understanding of family violence perpetrators.

As noted earlier in this submission, misidentification is a significant concern for our client group. Women from migrant and refugee communities who have experienced family violence are at a heightened risk of misidentification, with at least a third of our client group having experienced misidentification during their engagement with the justice system. Our position paper on misidentification provides a more nuanced understanding of the impact of this issue for our client group and makes recommendations to support the improvement of data collection and correction¹⁸. We urge the Inquiry to consider this position paper.

"When a client is misidentified, we have to go through so much to fix it. Different systems don't catch up to each other. The MARAM [family violence risk assessment] doesn't update, the police systems don't update, child protection doesn't update. We have to go through all the systems to fix it. It's very difficult for us and for the client."

inTouch Lawyer

¹⁶ Accurate identification of the predominant aggressor, Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor (2021), p. 32

¹⁷ Accurate identification of the predominant aggressor, Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor (2021), p. 10

¹⁸ The causes and consequences of misidentification on women from migrant and refugee communities experiencing family violence, inTouch (2022) - [inTouch-Position-Paper-Misidentification-February-2022.pdf](#)

It is important that police and courts data are not solely relied upon when it comes to understanding family violence perpetrators. **Data validation and rectification processes** are critical in this and specialist services can help mitigate this. In addition to recommendations in our position paper, the FVRIM's report on 'Accurate identification of the predominant aggressor' also outlines current rectification processes and makes a number of recommendations to address this issue. We encourage the Inquiry to consider this report.

Understanding the cohort of family violence perpetrators is not just about 'who', 'where' and 'what', it is also about the 'how' and the 'why'. This is where **qualitative data is critically important** to achieving a full understanding of those who perpetrate family violence. Agencies do hold a broad range of qualitative data particularly through case notes and MARAM assessments, however, this data is not easily extracted, validated or utilised. It is a critical piece that is missing and could be captured through research and analysis.

A deeper and nuanced **understanding of perpetrator attitudes and patterns of behaviour** will not only assist in informing our knowledge of family violence perpetrators but it would also enable opportunities to identify new prevention and early intervention approaches. We will not achieve a full understanding of family violence perpetrators if data is used to create a single view of people who use violence. This must be done in a way that **addresses intersectionality** and accounts for family violence that occurs across all demographics, religions, cultures, and socio-economic groups.

Barriers to collecting data

Although much progress has been made since the Royal Commission into Family Violence, agencies working with victim survivors and perpetrators of family violence still **operate in silos when it comes to data collection and storage**. The additional data that is required to support clients and also inform the system's understanding of perpetrators exists but is captured in all various parts of the system, by different agencies, whose data platforms do not connect with each other. There is no current way to connect cases or service engagements with perpetrators, so that a history of the perpetrator is visible to all agencies within the system.

While the CIP operates and produces reports for the Orange Door providing a detailed picture of a family violence perpetrator and their history, these reports are not available to the broader family violence service system. **CIP reports should be made accessible to specialist family violence services**, and this would significantly increase agencies' ability to provide more comprehensive risk assessments and support to our clients.

The lack of a shared, sophisticated, data sharing platform is a significant barrier to agencies and the system having a clear and full understanding of people who use family violence. It is also a significant barrier to ensuring the safety of women and children. Having a system in place to support real time information sharing would critically enable agencies to effectively support their clients, however, any shared platform must be considered in line with addressing other gaps and challenges (as highlighted in this submission) in the current collection and use of family violence data. Most specifically ensuring that agencies have the required capability to accurately collect and record data and risks of misidentification and misuse are addressed.

Another barrier to collecting data is the ongoing ***demand on services and agencies*** to support those experiencing family violence. Frontline workers are currently spending hours on data collection, input and reporting. There should be dedicated resources allocated to deliver on data related work, so that case managers and other frontline staff are able to focus on assisting clients who are in urgent need of support. To create a more consistent and efficient approach to the collection and use of data; data collection, reporting and evaluation should be ***mandatory components of grant and funding agreements*** with the required resources allocated through these agreements.

Building capacity and capability within specialist family violence services is essential and investment in resourcing agencies would reduce the administrative burden on frontline staff and improve consistent data collection and sharing functions which will ultimately see improved outcomes for both victim survivors and perpetrators of family violence.

Recommendations:

14. Formalise data validation and rectification processes to ensure the accuracy of family violence perpetrator data (including misidentification) from the primary source.
15. Enhance and resource the Central Information Point to provide information and data reports to all Information Sharing Entities.
16. Following consideration of the relevant safeguards and recommendations in this submission, invest in a shared data system or platform for agencies working with family violence victim survivors and perpetrators to enable real time sharing and access to critical risk information (also refer to Recommendation 2).
17. Reduce the administrative burden on frontline staff, by providing dedicated resourcing to enhance capacity within agencies to effectively collect, use, share and report on family violence data.
18. Ensure that all grant and funding agreements have consistent and mandatory components relating to data collection, reporting and evaluation requirements including sufficient resource allocation for these activities.

Contact

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