

24 July 2020

Ms. Jan Shuard PSM
Family Violence Reform
Implementation Monitor
GPO Box 4912
Melbourne
VIC 3001



Collaboration • Knowledge • Leadership

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Dear Ms. Shuard,

Mental Health Victoria (**MHV**) is the peak body for the mental health sector in Victoria. Our members include consumer and carer groups, community health and mental health services, hospitals, medical associations and colleges, police and emergency services associations, unions, local governments, and other bodies across the health, housing and justice sectors.

MHV welcomes this opportunity to contribute to the Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor (**FVRIM**). We draw particular attention to the consultation question around *looking forward* noting areas for improvement in the family violence system in the future.

It is a crucial time for both the family violence and mental health sectors to come together in partnership. In addition to the known correlations between family violence and mental illness, addiction and suicide, the current COVID-19 pandemic is taking a further toll on the mental health of individuals as well as the families and carers of people with mental ill health. There has been a significant rise in mental health and family violence issues since the pandemic began– a distressing trend that we anticipate will continue as the health, psychological and economic impacts are realised.

Both the Royal Commission into Family Violence and the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System Interim Report highlighted a lack of consistent collaboration between family violence and mental health services.

While significant investment has gone into improving the family violence sector since the Royal Commission, Victoria's mental health system is flailing from decades of underinvestment and a lack of long-term planning. As such, it has been poorly positioned to engage with surrounding systems such as family violence to design and deliver integrated supports.

However, opportunities for collaboration and change are imminent. From 2021, major reforms are expected across the mental health system. The final report from the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System is due to be handed down in February 2021, with a commitment from the Victorian State Government to implement all of its recommendations.

Next year will also see the commencement of the national trial of the Federal Department of Health's Adult Mental Health Centres. These community-based centres will be overseen by Primary Health Networks (PHNs) and are intended to provide a welcoming, low stigma soft entry point to engagement and assessment for people who may be experiencing distress or crisis in relation to their mental health.

We also anticipate a number of other state and federal investments aimed at addressing the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

While these significant commitments will ensure that mental health services are more accessible for people experiencing family violence in the future, it is also vital that these reforms and initiatives consider how people with mental ill health can easily and quickly access family violence services if and when they are required. Consequently, they present extremely important opportunities for family violence agencies, such as the FVRIM and Family Safety Victoria (**FSV**) to engage with the reform processes and the agencies leading them.

Recommendations

To ensure the sectors align to better meet the needs of people requiring family violence and mental health services, we recommend:

1. FVRIM and FSV engage with the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System to ensure that Commissioners are fully cognizant of the impact and interplay between family violence and mental ill health.
2. FVRIM collaborates with Mental Health Reform Victoria as it works towards the implementation of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System Interim Report recommendations to ensure collaboration between both sectors.
3. FVRIM and FSV work closely with Primary Health Networks as they implement national reforms, most notably the Adult Mental Health Centre program, to ensure family violence is considered in service design and delivery.
4. The State Government establish a structured approach to bring together the family violence and mental health sectors for regular dialogue and joint planning.
5. FVRIM continues to monitor the impact of the family violence reform, with a particular focus on access to and the assistance of family violence services for with mental illness, their families and carers.

Mental Health Victoria looks forward to working with agencies across both the family violence and mental health sectors, as well as the Victorian government, to ensure that people in need of family violence and mental health services can access them when they are required through an integrated, holistic and connected system.

Sincerely,



Larissa Taylor
Director of Policy
Mental Health Victoria