

# CRISIS RESPONSE TO RECOVERY MODEL FOR VICTIM SURVIVORS

CHILD AND YOUTH FRIENDLY SUMMARY

MAY 2023



## Acknowledgements

**We proudly acknowledge the Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of this nation as the traditional custodians of the lands, waters and seas.** We pay our respects to Elders past and present and honour the survival of Indigenous Australians. We recognise the continued impacts and violence of colonisation and our role in taking apart systems that cause harm.

We would like to recognise the **lived and living experience** of people who have or are still going through family violence, or who have lost their lives due to family violence.

We would like to thank the **young Lived Experience Consultants from Berry Street's Y-Change initiative** for working with us to develop and write this child and youth-friendly summary.

## Content warning and support

In this summary, **we talk about some hard topics such as family violence, homelessness, grief and loss.** Please go gently with yourself as you read through the report. If you need support, there are services you can reach out to. You can find their contact details towards the end of this summary.

Words in **blue** are explained in the definitions page at the end of this summary.

## Copyright

Authorised by the Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor

© State of Victoria May 2023 (Office of the Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor).

*This work is copyright. All material published in this document is licensed under a Creative Commons – Attribution 4.0 International licence. This licence does not apply to any images or branding.*

Illustrations by Nina Sepahpour.

## Welcome to the report summary

Throughout our monitoring we have been guided and challenged by young people who are victim survivors of family violence. The voices of these young advocates must be heard as they know best what is needed to keep them safe and to support their recovery. This report summary is the result of their knowledge and wise guidance. It has been prepared by young people in language that is clear and meaningful to them and their peers. We are indebted to these courageous champions of change who are committed to using their lived experience to shape the service system so that it can meet the needs of young people.



Jan Shuard PSM

### Jan Shuard PSM

Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor

*Family violence is rarely seen or understood through the experiences of children and young people. Too often, we are the ones you leave behind. It is critical to recognise us as victim survivors in our own right, not as 'secondary victims' of family violence or 'extensions' of our mother. Working in partnership with children and young people must be placed centrally to system reform. We hope that one day, our visions for change directly inform research, policy and practice reforms, and broader social change in a way that becomes everyday practice. That people understand that reform is not just something that happens 'in the system', it begins with each of us – our mindsets, approaches, and capacity to be challenged by young people with lived experience.*

### Berry Street's Y-Change initiative



# What is the Crisis response to recovery model for victim survivors report about?

In 2022 we spoke to **victim survivors** and professionals about the challenges navigating the service systems and their **ideas for change**. Where possible we have included the expertise of people with a lived experience in our reports.

We wanted to hear directly from victim survivors about their experiences getting help when facing **family violence** and from workers about how the **system** responds to victim survivors at their point of **crisis**.

We kept coming back to these key points which guided our conversations:

- how victim survivors felt when trying to get help or reach out
- if there were enough services to help victim survivors
- if services were meeting the needs of a diverse range of people
- whether there was enough focus on long-term recovery
- if services did offer help when victim survivors needed it.

**Family violence** looks different for everyone. It could be a parent, sibling, relative, someone you're in a relationship with, who you live with, or used to live in your home (for example, a parent's ex-partner) who uses violence.

Family violence can look like hitting, punching, screaming, threatening, speaking down to, controlling behaviours and getting people to do sexual things they don't want to. It could also look like hearing, seeing or being around the impacts of violence. It may leave people feeling scared, unsafe, alone, and physically hurt. These are just some of the ways people can experience family violence.

## How did we get here?

After a number of family violence deaths in Victoria, the Victorian State Government held a public investigation in 2015, called a **Royal Commission**, to find ways to stop family violence from happening and improve the support available. The Royal Commission said that it was important to keep victim survivors safe, and to help people who are violent towards their family to change their behaviour.

It also said that all family violence services, and some public services (support services, police, courts) were overwhelmed, and could not keep up with the number of people asking for help. It found at the time that there was a lack of resources to help children and young people experiencing family violence. And that there was not enough support for victim survivors to help them recover from violence and rebuild their lives.

To follow up after the Royal Commission, the Government chose Ms Jan Shuard PSM as the second Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor. Together with her team, they wrote the **Crisis response to recovery model for victim survivors report** that looks at the Victorian Government's progress in helping victim survivors at their point(s) of crisis, and in their journey towards recovery.

The Monitor's job was to find out what was happening in the family violence **implementation** space, and what things could be done better. This is now finished, and the final report has been given to the Premier of Victoria, the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence and other government leaders. The report provides **16 proposed actions for government to consider as it moves into the next stage of the family violence reforms**.

This is a summary of the Crisis response to recovery for victim survivors report which has been prepared by the Office of the Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor (FVRIM) **in partnership with Berry Street's Y-Change initiative**. For the full report, visit: [www.fvrin.vic.gov.au](http://www.fvrin.vic.gov.au)

# 16 proposed actions for the Victorian Government to consider



## Taking a more victim-centred approach

1. Be clear about whose job it is to help victim survivors work out what help they need.
2. Find ways for workers from police, courts, The Orange Door and family violence services to work better together.
3. Act to make sure that children and young people are seen as victims in their own right and have a say in family violence-related court hearings.
4. Keep asking the Australian Government to fix the problems that we know affect victim survivors in the following areas: immigration law, Medicare, Centrelink and the family law system.



## Make sure victim survivors can access the supports they need

5. Make sure that victim survivors can get help with financial support and the law.
6. Make peer support workers available for victim survivors to help in their recovery.
7. Make it clear about how the mental health system works with the family violence system to help support victim survivor recovery.
8. Look at getting male victim survivors their own family violence help.

## More support for the workers that help victim survivors

9. Make sure that workers in family violence and sexual assault services have better pay and more secure work.
10. Help services understand how to employ people, such as victim survivors, who might not have a university degree, but have relevant expertise.
11. Look at how the mental health system has been able to give people with lived victim survivor experience the chance to work in the system to help other victim survivors.



## Funding to help services support victim survivors' needs

12. When giving funding to services, make sure they are focused on providing victim survivors with a good experience every time.
13. Ask for more things that victim survivors need, like housing, help with paying rent and mortgages, help from lawyers about legal problems, financial support and other supports.

## More data and monitoring to understand the issue

14. Get better information about how many people are wanting help, and how long it is taking them to get that help.
15. Look at how people move through the system to see what problems there are and fix them to make it easier to get help, including for children and young people.
16. Keep looking at and understanding service data to fix problems and delays with The Orange Door.





# I. MORE AWARENESS, MORE DELAYS

*When the system response is that you're on a waitlist for months, that's so sad.  
Sleeping rough on the street can be worse than the abusive relationships.  
– Victim Survivors' Advisory Council member*



**More people are aware of family violence and its impacts than ever before, but it can still be difficult to get help.** There is a lot of pressure on workers and organisations because of this increase in awareness, and they are not always able to help everyone the way they would like to.

For many people, the entry point into family violence services is through Victoria Police. Police members are given clear guidance on prioritising safety and support for children, young people and families, responding to the diverse needs of communities and looking at what is best for the child separate from parents and caregivers. But there are still barriers for people to report and access support this way.

Some of the other services where people going through family violence can get support are **The Orange Door** and the Safe Steps Family Violence Response Centre. Although these services provide support, we have heard victim survivors are having to wait a long time before getting the help they need.

## But what can be done?

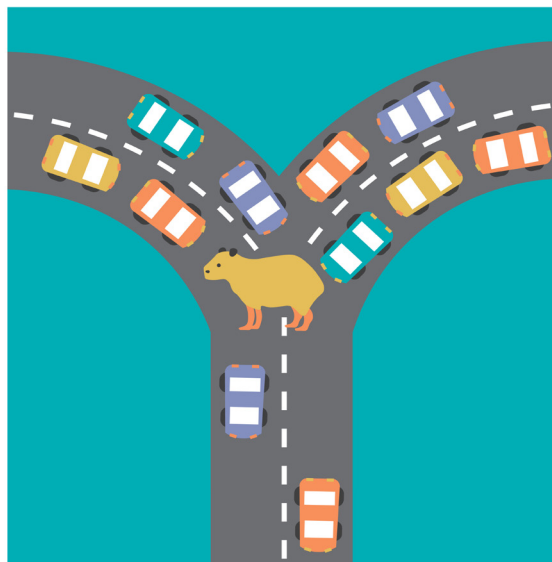


We have suggested actions 1, 2, 8, 14, 15 & 16 for the Victorian Government to tackle these problems.

## 2. TRAFFIC JAM, MOVING SLOWLY AHEAD

*When a survivor is forced to share parenting with a perpetrator, it is near impossible to recover. Perpetrators do not co-parent, they counter-parent. Survivors need ongoing, long-term supports in navigating endlessly coercively controlling behaviour.*

*– Lily, victim survivor*



**Family violence workers and services are so busy they are not always able to help victim survivors when they need it.** Once a victim survivor has accessed **The Orange Door** or Safe Steps, they can be referred to get case management support from a family violence service. After sitting on long waitlists, they may only get support from family violence workers for up to three months. But workers have said that this is not long enough, and that support is ending before victim survivors are ready. This leaves people to find more help and navigate the complex service **system** alone.

Services have been given more money to help people over the past few years, which has included the creation of The Orange Door as the main entry point for victim survivors to share their experiences and access the supports they need. But some victim survivors are having to retell their experiences many times to different workers and by the time the workers can help, they may not need that type of support anymore. There needs to be more thought into developing the service system beyond this point to ensure there are more support options available.

### But what can be done?



We have suggested actions 1, 8, 13, 14 & 15 for the Victorian Government to tackle these problems.

## 3. TOO MANY TASKS, NOT ENOUGH TENTACLES

*Pre-COVID, many community service organisations struggled to secure enough new workers to fill vacancies. Workforce shortages were particularly acute in regional areas. These workforce pressures have been exacerbated by COVID-19, with exponential growth in demand for social assistance...The prolonged nature of the pandemic has left staff stressed and exhausted.*

*– Victorian Council of Social Services*



**Family violence workers** are leaving their jobs for lots of different reasons, such as the ongoing impacts of COVID-19, burnout, insecure work (short contracts) and low pay.

This is having a big impact on victim survivors getting help because there are not as many workers to support people.

The family violence workforce plays a very important role in the recovery of victim survivors and must be supported to do so. Workers and organisations told us that government can support staff wellbeing by paying workers more in the community sector and making sure they have stable jobs.

Victim survivors told us how rewarding it is to support and/or advocate with other victim survivors by engaging in **lived experience** work. But it is not always easy to know how to find these opportunities and how to make this type of work a career. There is an opportunity to have more lived experience workers in the family violence sector to provide **peer support** to many victim survivors recovering from family violence.

### But what can be done?



We have suggested actions 9, 10 & 11 for the Victorian Government to tackle these problems



## 4. TOGETHER WE CAN DO SO MUCH

*As a child ... I felt really excluded from court proceedings ... therefore, a recommendation would be to check with what the child knows and what they want during key moments throughout the process. They may not want to know/care and that's fine too – but providing some sense of autonomy and control would have been great.*

*– Heshani, victim survivor*



**The ways to get help can be very confusing for victim survivors, especially when they need support from lots of different places.** Housing, school, work, health and wellbeing, court and the legal **system** are just some of the areas people may need support from. This can end up being left to the victim survivor to talk to all the different people involved, or they can get completely left out of conversations about their own life.

There are some good examples of coordination in local areas where workers are supporting victim survivors in a wraparound way to get the support they need. Unfortunately, this is not being supported by the broader systems because of a lack of money and strict reporting needs. It is important that **family violence workers** who help with lots of different supports keep talking and working with each other, so individuals and families get the help they need without having to retell their experiences over and over again.

The Royal Commission spoke about the need for a service navigator role which would work with victim survivors to provide practical, guiding, timely support from crisis through to recovery. There needs to be more clarity about whose role it is to do this. There may be an opportunity here for **lived experience** workers to provide this support to victim survivors.

### But what can be done?



We have suggested actions 1, 2, 4, 5 & 12 for the Victorian Government to tackle these problems.

## 5. FINDING YOUR WAY THROUGH THE STORM

*Homelessness services are underfunded ... so people are faced with either returning to unsafe situations or sleeping rough either by themselves or with children.  
– Kelly, victim survivor*



**As well as getting help from [family violence workers](#) and services, victim survivors might need help to find a new home, get a new job, see a nurse or doctor, or to see someone like a lawyer to support them if they need to go to court.**

There are now special courts that aim to make it safer and easier for a victim survivor to go to court. These courts have workers who can support victim survivors to figure out what help they need, understand what is happening, and offer support to access a lawyer. They also need to make sure that children and young people who are victim survivors get to have a say where it is safe for them to do so. But some people are not yet getting that chance.

There is a wide range of [therapeutic supports](#) available, but it is still very difficult for people to get the support they need, especially for children and young people. There is a need to improve the inclusiveness of services to support people and families from a diverse range of groups such as people who are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, older people, people with disabilities, people who identify as [LGBTQIA+](#), rural and regional communities or migrants and refugees.

Without somewhere consistent and stable to live, it is very hard for people to get back on track. There are not enough affordable housing options available for victim survivors and this is often stopping them from moving from [crisis](#) towards stability and recovery.

### But what can be done?



We have suggested actions 2, 3, 5, 12, 13 & 14 for the Victorian Government to tackle these problems.

## 6. WE NEED CARE WHILE WE ARE GROWING

*We need long-term access to mental health supports for victim survivors and their children and the opportunity for stability through stable housing, access to a stable income. Until we have basic needs – like safety, food and shelter – how can we recover?*

*– Jasmine, victim survivor*



**We know that recovery is not easy and can be a challenging journey. For most victim survivors, recovery and healing requires life-long support through specialised support services – but most people have told us that this is not available.**

The support services and **system** currently focus on the **crisis** point and the time straight after. While this is very important, there also needs to be more attention and resources for long-term recovery. This would mean more money being put into **therapeutic supports** so that victim survivors can get help based on their individual needs and can access it when they first reach out for support.

Many victim survivors told us about the importance of connecting with their peers through **lived experience** groups like the Victim Survivors' Advisory Council. There should be more platforms available for victim survivors, including specific groups for children and young people to ensure they are seen, partnered with and heard in systems change work.

### But what can be done?



We have suggested actions 4, 6 & 7 for the Victorian Government to tackle these problems.

## Support options



If you are concerned for your safety or someone else's, please contact the police or call **Triple Zero (000)** for emergency assistance.

We know that young people might have limited access to phone lines due to a lack of privacy or feeling unsafe if they are living with people who might overhear their conversations.

Here are some recommended helplines that also have text or online chat options:

### **Kids Helpline**

**1800 55 1800**

Free, confidential online and phone counselling service for young people aged 5 to 25 years old. Available 24/7.

### **Lifeline**

**13 11 14**

A national service providing Australians experiencing emotional distress with access to 24-hour crisis support and suicide prevention services. Available 24/7.

### **Rainbow Door (Switchboard)**

**1800 729 367**

Switchboard provides peer-driven support services for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and gender diverse, intersex, queer and asexual (LGBTIQ+) Victorians, their friends and family.

### **13Yarn**

**13 92 76**

A support line for mob who are feeling overwhelmed or having difficulty coping. Available 24/7.

### **InTouch**

**1800 755 988**

Specialist family violence provider supporting migrant and refugee women and their communities experiencing family violence. Available Monday to Friday, 9:30am - 4:30pm.

### **1800 Respect**

**1800 737 732**

A national sexual assault, domestic and family violence counselling service. This service is free, confidential and available 24/7.

### **Headspace**

**1800 650 890**

A national free confidential online and phone mental health counselling service.

### **Safe Steps**

**1800 015 188**

Free web chat, phone or email family and domestic violence support for people who live in Victoria. Available 24/7

### **Thirrili Postvention Response Service**

**1800 805 801**

The Indigenous Suicide Postvention Response Service supports individuals, families and communities affected by suicide or other significant trauma. Available 24/7.

### **Victims of Crime Helpline**

**1800 819 817**

Service offering free information and support for people affected by crime. Available from 8am to 11pm, seven days a week.

## Definitions

---

|                               |  |
|-------------------------------|--|
| <b>Crisis</b>                 | Crisis can mean different things for different people. For some, this may be the point where they are in a time of intense difficulty or danger, and they need help quickly to protect themselves. But for others, this may be when they first reached out and asked for help.   |
| <b>Family violence</b>        | <p>Family violence looks different for everyone. It could be a parent, sibling, relative, someone you're in a relationship with, who you live with, or used to live in your home (for example, a parent's ex-partner) who uses violence.</p> <p>Family violence can look like hitting, punching, screaming, threatening, speaking down to, controlling behaviours and getting people to do sexual things they don't want to. It could also look like hearing, seeing or being around the impacts of violence. It may leave people feeling scared, unsafe, alone, and physically hurt. These are just some of the ways people can experience family violence.</p> |
| <b>Family violence worker</b> | A professional that works with victim survivors to understand risk, help them create a safety plan, link in with other support services, and someone they can talk to.   |
| <b>Implementation</b>         | The process of putting a decision or plan into action.   |
| <b>LGBTQIA+</b>               | An abbreviation for lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer/questioning, transgender, intersex and asexual. These terms are used to describe someone's sexuality or gender identity.   |
| <b>Lived experience</b>       | In this report, lived experience is a deep knowledge that is held by someone who has been through or still surviving family violence.  |
| <b>Peer Support Worker</b>    | A peer support worker is someone who has been through hard times like family violence and mental health challenges. They provide emotional and social support and hope to others and help us know that we are not alone in what we are going through.  |
| <b>System</b>                 | A system is a collection of parts that aim to work together. The family violence system includes Child Protection, Police, Courts, The Orange Door, justice and legal, family violence services and education to help and support victim survivors with their needs at the point of crisis, and through their journey towards recovery.  |
| <b>The Orange Door</b>        | A free service for adults, children and young people who are experiencing or have experienced family violence. It is a place where victim survivors can go to get help. They also connect people who use violence with the services they need.   |
| <b>Therapeutic services</b>   | Are made up of professionals and specialised ways of working that provide help or support to victim survivors to feel better about themselves and their future.  |

---



**Family Violence Reform  
Implementation Monitor**