



13 July 2022

Dear Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor

Submission to FVRIM's Legislative Review of MARAM

Early Childhood Australia (ECA) is pleased to make a submission to the Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor's (FVRIM) legislative review of the Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme (FVISS) and Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Risk Management Framework (MARAM).

Since 19 April 2021, centre-based education and care services in Victoria are prescribed:

- organisations with responsibilities under MARAM; and
- Information Sharing Entities for the purposes of FVISS, as well as the Child Information Sharing Scheme (CISS) (together, the information sharing schemes).

In July 2021, Family Safety Victoria (FSV) engaged ECA to scope current practice in the early childhood sector to prevent and respond to family violence, and to provide advice on future practice to better support early childhood services to align to MARAM. In September-October 2021, ECA led a comprehensive consultation process that engaged 25 organisations across the sector, including peak bodies, Early Years Management (EYM Organisations) and service providers.

In response to sector feedback, ECA developed and is currently piloting a MARAM toolkit for early childhood services. Following an evaluation of the pilot later this year, ECA intends to distribute the final toolkit to the sector more broadly in 2023. This toolkit will complement the Department of Education and Training's contextualised guidance for education workforces, including the [Information Sharing and Family Violence Reforms Toolkit and Guidance](#).

ECA advocates for the critical importance and fundamental value of MARAM and FVISS in driving the more effective identification and response to family violence across the service sector. However, ECA heard from the early childhood sector that a broad range of barriers exist to implementing the reforms effectively in practice. As set out below in our findings, this includes varied awareness of the reforms, limited awareness and use of existing resources, gaps in workforce capability and the need to better support the mental health and wellbeing of staff when they respond to family violence.

By addressing the barriers to implementation, ECA considers that the Victorian Government has a significant opportunity to realise the full potential of MARAM and the information sharing schemes in the early childhood sector. This includes investing in the capability of early childhood workforces to identify and respond to family violence to ensure that every child thrives.

ECA's 2021 findings related to MARAM and information sharing

Awareness and alignment

Finding 1: Awareness of the family violence and information sharing reforms varies depending on the type of service, resources, size and access to information and support. Larger providers and EYM Organisations have greater awareness of the reforms, whereas smaller providers, standalone kindergartens and Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services have less awareness.

Finding 2: Organisational alignment with the family violence and information sharing reforms also varies across the early childhood sector. Some industry leaders and service providers have started to develop tailored organisational policies, resources and training on MARAM. However, in general, the sector is at the start of the maturity model for embedding MARAM in practice.

Resources and training

Finding 3: Awareness and use of the Victorian Government's resources on the family violence and information sharing reforms is varied across the early childhood sector. In many cases, early childhood services and staff perceive the resources as too complex to implement in practice.

Finding 4: There is currently no sector-specific template policy available for early childhood education and care services on the family violence and information sharing reforms.

Finding 5: There is no content on preventing and responding to family violence as core or electives for pre-service qualifications available to early childhood teachers and educators. However, early childhood staff can enrol in free accredited training for universal services or DET's information sharing webinars and eLearn's for education leaders and professionals.

Finding 6: Support for early childhood teachers and educators to attend family violence training varies considerably, depending on which agreement or award a staff member is covered by and on awareness of backfill available to attend DET's webinars.

Finding 7: There is a demonstrated need to develop simple, practical, sector-specific resources for the early childhood sector. These resources could be located on DET's PROTECT website and link to related reforms and frameworks.

Workforce capability

Finding 8: Workforce capability to prevent and respond to family violence varies across the sector, depending on the type of service, size, available resources and access to information and support. Capability can also depend on a service's exposure to or awareness of family violence.

Finding 9: The early childhood sector currently has a stronger focus on family violence response rather than prevention. This is in part due to knowledge and skills gaps, limited time and resources, and greater sector knowledge and experience of the mandatory reporting scheme.

Finding 10: The key workforce capability gaps in the early childhood sector are identifying family violence, screening and safe conversations, and undertaking secondary consultations and referrals.

Finding 11: The key barriers to building workforce capability are workforce shortages and reform fatigue, limited non-contact time, lack of staff confidence and experience, and attitudes and fears. The barriers to building workforce capability are often compounded for standalone kindergartens.

Staff support and networks

Finding 12: Staff in the early childhood sector can experience a significant emotional toll and vicarious trauma from responding to family violence. As a result, there is a critical need to support the mental health and wellbeing of staff when they respond to family violence in their services.

Finding 13: During COVID, there has been a significant increase in family violence disclosures and reporting in the early childhood sector. This includes disclosures from staff in early childhood services who have personally experienced family violence.

Finding 14: Given the diversity of service providers in the early childhood sector, support for staff can vary depending on the type of service, size and available resources. In general, there is not enough support in the early childhood sector for staff who respond to family violence.

Source: Early Childhood Australia, Interim Report: Building Family Violence Prevention and Response Workforce Capability Project, 29 November 2021 (funded by Family Safety Victoria).

Yours sincerely

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