

A new approach to family violence

Issue 4, April 2007

Welcome to the fourth Family Violence e-bulletin, *New Approach*.

I am pleased to write to you as the new coordinating Minister for Family Violence in Victoria.

The Premier invited me to coordinate family violence reform shortly after the Victorian Government was re-elected in November 2006. My other Ministerial areas of responsibility are Skills, Education Services, Employment and Women's Affairs.

While my responsibility is new, my interest in family violence is long standing. I have followed the development and implementation of the new approach to family violence very closely and I enthusiastically supported the reforms introduced in 2005.

Family violence is never acceptable. Family safety is central to the wellbeing and opportunities of all Victorians, in the home, and in education, training and work. Every family member should have an equal chance to succeed.

The five Ministers joining me with responsibility for family violence reform are:

- The Attorney General, Rob Hulls
- The Minister for Housing and Local Government, Richard Wynne
- The Minister for Children, Aged Care, and Mental Health, Lisa Neville
- The Minister for Police, Bob Cameron
- The Minister for Community Services and Aboriginal Affairs, Gavin Jennings.

The government's strong focus will continue to be on the reforms outlined in the *New Approach* and to ensure that they stay on track.

The new regional family violence leadership positions, which have commenced in all regions, will have an important role in providing feedback on the practical issues that arise as the reforms are implemented.

For further information see www.dhs.vic.gov.au/integratedfamilyviolence

Indigenous Family Violence

Culturally appropriate responses are essential for an effective response to Indigenous family violence. It is also important that they are complemented by improved access to mainstream services.

The Indigenous Family Violence Partnership Forum was established in 2005 to develop and implement a ten-year plan to address the issue of Indigenous family violence in Victoria. The Partnership Forum will meet again in May 2007.

Child First and Family Violence

Over the past six years the government has committed to improving services to families. The state-wide expansion of the Family Support Innovation Projects (FSIP), the creation of Child FIRST teams and family violence reform are examples of this commitment. There are strong and important connections between each of these initiatives. Child FIRST and Family Services provide support services to families, with an early intervention focus on children's safety and well being. Many children

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and families being supported by Family Services have experienced family violence. Family violence services provide early intervention support to women and children at risk. In about fifty per cent of child protection cases reported to police, family violence is also present. The latest research tells us that family violence harms children physically, emotionally and developmentally.

It will therefore be important that in addressing the needs of families, especially women and children at risk, our responses and the services we provide develop in a consistent and complementary way.

The new Children, Youth and Families Act commences in April 2007. Child FIRST (Child and Family Information, Referral and Support Teams) will be established in sub-regional areas across Victoria to provide a community-based referral point into family services (including Family Support Innovation Projects). In April 2007, nine Child FIRST sites will be established, with a further 16 sites to be established in 2007-08 and 2008-09.

Some providers of both family violence and family services will also provide the new Child FIRST services. These 'one agency' intake providers will play a key role in demonstrating how family violence, Child FIRST and Family Services can work together. Important to both service areas will be the police referral system, holding perpetrators of abuse accountable and keeping a focus on all victims, women and children, when family violence is at the centre of child abuse.

I have asked the Family Violence Interdepartmental Committee to ensure that the Child FIRST and family violence reform initiatives are complementary, particularly in the key areas of assessment and referral.

For more information visit www.dhs.vic.gov.au/everychildeverychance

New family violence legislation

This year marks the twentieth anniversary of the *Crimes Family Violence Act*. In November 2002 the Attorney General asked the Victorian Law Reform Commission (VLRC) to examine the efficacy of the *Crimes (Family Violence) Act 1987*, which governs the making of family violence intervention orders – the first review of the Act since its inception.

Over the past two decades, thousands of Victorian women have turned to this Act for protection. A new Family Violence Act will be enacted as part of a comprehensive response to the Victorian Law Reform Commission's recommendations for administrative, procedural and legislative reforms.

A new Family Violence Act will strengthen protection for women and children by making the law more comprehensive, recognising different forms of violence and with a clearer focus on safety. Consultation on the new legislation will occur later this year.

New state-wide advisory arrangements

The State-wide Steering Committee to Reduce Family Violence has played a pivotal role in developing the integrated approach that underpins the family violence reforms. As the reform process moves forward, it is timely to ensure that our advisory arrangements are adapted to be consistent with the main implementation tasks of the reforms. An expanded State-wide Family Violence Advisory Committee will continue to provide advice to government through the Family Violence Interdepartmental Committee on implementation progress.

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I am confident that the partnership approach that has stood us in good stead will continue into the future.

Common Family Violence Risk Assessment Framework

KPMG have completed the development of the Common Risk Assessment and Risk Management Framework which will reinforce the main directions of family violence reform in Victoria: women's and children's safety and men's accountability, consistently applied throughout the family violence service system. The next step is to develop an implementation plan, based on the experience gained through the initial pilot process in the Hume and North and West DHS Regions. The strong support for the regional pilots is much appreciated and provides us with a strong base to move forward.

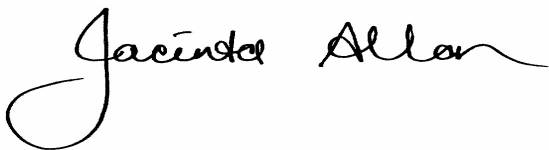
Family law

The Victorian Government's interest in the family law changes is to ensure that federal and state services are provided cooperatively to families in need. I have asked for regular information on how the Family Relationship Centres and Family Courts are working. It is important that families are not left to work out for themselves how the different service systems, state and federal, link with each other. I am also monitoring the federal changes to ensure that family violence continues to be identified and that women who seek help are protected not penalised.

For information about the new changes go to www.familyrelationships.gov.au/

I am looking forward to further meetings with representatives of the family violence service system and hearing about how family violence reforms are progressing. This year is about bedding down the reforms, implementing common risk assessment, and ensuring our service system is linked up, for women and children and men. We will also give priority to the development of a framework for a stronger, integrated focus on prevention of family violence.

Thank you for supporting victims of family violence and for your part in making Victorian families safer and stronger.



Jacinta Allan
Minister coordinating the new approach to family violence in Victoria