

**Victorian
Government
Response to the
Victorian Indigenous
Family Violence
Task Force
Final Report**



Ministers' Foreword

The Shared Path Ahead

Family violence in Indigenous Communities remains a serious issue and a sensitive problem for many Indigenous Communities to raise and discuss.

The work of the Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Task Force has been crucial in raising awareness and developing the strengths in Victoria's Indigenous Communities to tackle the causes of family violence.

The excellent work of the Task Force means we now have an Indigenous led strategy to prevent, reduce and respond to the high levels of family violence in Indigenous Communities in Victoria.

The Bracks Government will continue to work in partnership with Indigenous Victorians on long term solutions to family violence.

We now have a much better understanding that destructive and violent behaviour is linked to the impacts of dispossession of land and culture and the breakdown of Community kinship systems.

The work of the Task Force and our own experience has helped make us aware that intervention methods rarely work when imposed by Government.

The Bracks Government is very pleased to endorse the findings of the Task Force and work in partnership with Indigenous people in the design, delivery and management of efforts to prevent family violence.

This report is another step forward in the Reconciliation journey.

Since 1999, the Bracks Government has worked in partnership with Indigenous Victorians in a wide range of areas – from land justice agreements to implementing the Stolen Generations report.

Currently before the Parliament we have introduced a Bill to recognise the unique status and contribution of Aboriginal people in Victoria's Constitution.

The Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Task Force Report is another important step in the path towards Reconciliation.

The Bracks Government supports the Key Statements in the Task Force Report. We recognise that from an Indigenous perspective, the causes of family violence are located in the history of colonisation and family violence includes a wide range of physical, emotional, sexual, social, spiritual, cultural and economic abuses that can occur within families, extended families, kinship networks and Communities.

The Bracks Government will support and build on the recommendations of the Task Force. For example, Holistic Family Healing Centres will help prevent, reduce and respond to Indigenous family violence by healing grief and trauma and breaking the cycle of family violence.

The Government will establish an Indigenous Family Violence Partnership Forum to oversee the development and implementation of a ten-year agreement between the Victorian Government and Indigenous Communities to address Indigenous Family Violence.

We will also continue to work in partnership with Victorian Indigenous Communities to prevent, reduce and respond to Indigenous family violence through a ten-year planning and action process. Longer term initiatives beyond the scope of this response will require further development through consultation between Indigenous Communities and service providers.

The Indigenous Family Violence Partnership Forum will oversee the ongoing planning and action process and there will be whole-of-government coordination and continuing commitment to address Indigenous disadvantage.

We thank the Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Task Force members for their tireless work and outstanding Report. We also thank the Local Indigenous Family Violence Action Groups for their unflagging commitment to raising awareness of Indigenous family violence issues within their local Communities.

Through our collective efforts, we can break the cycle of violence and begin the healing.





Sherryl Garbutt MP
Minister for Community Services




Gavin Jennings MLC
Minister for Aboriginal Affairs




Mary Delahunty MP
Minister for Women's Affairs

Principles underpinning the development of an Indigenous Family Violence Strategy

The development of an Indigenous Family Violence Strategy is based on the principle of respectful partnership between Governments and Indigenous Communities. The Victorian Government supports and adopts the key points highlighted in the Task Force Report (page 17). The key points include:

- › Safety and security for victims of violence is the number one priority.
- › Introducing structural changes to Court processes so that more support is given to victims.
- › Investing in new services that focus specifically on supporting victims of violent acts – especially those who are most vulnerable and those who are sexually assaulted or abused.
- › Providing service responses to perpetrators to ensure they have opportunities to address their issues in a manner that will lead to fewer family violence incidences in the short, medium and longer term.
- › Providing support to Indigenous people to engage in discussions about family violence so they can share information and focus their efforts on implementing ‘good practice’ processes.
- › Supporting activities which focus on specific groups within Indigenous Communities – such as children, youth, women, men, Elders, people in same sex relationships and staff of Indigenous service providers.
- › Confirmation that Indigenous people want not only to identify the priorities but also drive the process at the local Community level.
- › Building stronger partnerships with Government and other services to enhance service responses at the local Community level.
- › Developing integrated strategic processes which involve Indigenous representatives participating in decision making activities that focus on service planning and implementation.
- › Strengthening service responses to Indigenous family violence issues by building the capacity of Indigenous services in a manner which supports sustainability in the long term.
- › Providing access to data gathered by service providers and passing this on to Indigenous groups so they can make more informed decisions about what needs to happen in their Communities.
- › Undertaking research activities which gather up-to-date information about what is happening in specific areas which can be used to inform decision making about what changes could be made to enhance service responses so they are more culturally secure for Indigenous people.
- › Developing a marketing strategy that includes access to resources to support local Community education and awareness campaigns that seek to change attitudes about family violence.
- › Empowering Indigenous people by ensuring Indigenous participation occurs in all planning and decision-making processes set up by Government – at a central and regional level.

There is a need to put in place a ten-year plan to address Victorian Indigenous family violence issues. The issues associated with family violence must be built on strong foundations that can sustain themselves for future generations.

BACKGROUND

Purpose of this document

In 2002, the Victorian Government released the *Framework for the development of the Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Strategy: a partnership approach between Indigenous Communities and Government (the Framework)*. The Framework outlined a three stage process to develop and implement an Indigenous Family Violence Strategy in Victoria.

Stage One involved establishing an Indigenous-led Task Force to provide the Government with advice about how to effectively address family violence within Indigenous Communities.

Stage Two requires the Government to respond to the recommendations of the Task Force.

Stage Three will see the development and implementation of the Indigenous Family Violence Plan.

This Government Response outlines the way forward to implementing the third stage of the Strategy.

This Indigenous Community-led approach is supported by parallel and complementary whole of government processes including the *Women's Safety Strategy*, *Whole of Government Indigenous Affairs Framework*, *Aboriginal Justice Agreement*, *Aboriginal Services Plan* and *Yalca – a partnership in Education and Training for the New Millennium*. There will be formal linkages between these complementary strategies and policies and the Indigenous Family Violence Strategy, through the Partnership Forum.

What is Indigenous family violence?

The Indigenous Family Violence Task Force (the Task Force) defined family violence as issues focussed around:

a wide range of physical, emotional, sexual, social, spiritual, cultural, psychological and economic abuses that occur within families, intimate relationships, extended families, kinship networks and Communities. It extends to one-on-one fighting, abuse of Indigenous Community workers as well as self-harm, injury and suicide.

The Task Force further believes that family violence includes:

- > inter-generational violence and abuse and recognises all victims, whether they are affected directly or indirectly;
- > perpetrators and victims of family violence can include parents, uncles, aunts, (step) children, (step) siblings, cousins, grandparents, in-laws and distant relatives.
- > an individual can be a perpetrator and a victim at the same time in a family situation.
- > it includes Elder abuse and child abuse
- > it encompasses a range of acts that are criminal under the *Crimes Act 1958* and non-criminal acts such as emotional abuse and economic abuse.

The Victorian Government supports using the Task Force definition of family violence to underpin the Indigenous Family Violence Strategy.

Family violence is an unacceptable practice that is not a part of Indigenous culture.

Why is Indigenous Family Violence an issue of concern in Victoria?

Family violence is an issue of serious concern to Indigenous families and Communities in Victoria and throughout Australia. While official statistics concerning the extent and nature of family violence are very limited, several studies indicate that violence is disproportionately high and that has a detrimental impact on the social and emotional wellbeing of Indigenous people, families and Communities. National research found that Indigenous people were 10 times more likely than other Australians to become a victim or a perpetrator of homicide, and that in some areas of Australia, Indigenous women were 45 times more likely to experience violence, and ten times more likely to die as a result.¹ Victorian data shows that Indigenous children are six times more likely to be removed from their families by welfare authorities than non-Indigenous children because of child abuse and neglect.²

This high incidence and prevalence of family violence in Indigenous Communities may be seen in the context of colonisation and dispossession of Indigenous Victorians. From an Indigenous perspective the causes of family violence are related to a wide range of factors, including:

- > dispossession of land and traditional culture;
- > breakdown of Community kinship systems and Aboriginal law;
- > racism and vilification;
- > economic exclusion and entrenched poverty;
- > alcohol and drug abuse;
- > the effects of institutionalisation and child removal policies;
- > inherited grief and trauma; and
- > the loss of traditional Aboriginal male roles and status.

The overrepresentation of Indigenous Victorians in family violence data led the Victorian Government and Indigenous Communities to develop targeted initiatives to address Indigenous family violence. Details of these programs are outlined under the section *Victorian Government Initiatives to Address Indigenous Family Violence* in this document. Briefly, they include:

- > Holistic Family Healing Centres: to heal individuals, families and Communities affected by family violence;
- > Family Support Innovation Projects: which aim to divert a significant proportion of Aboriginal families notified to child protection services to Community-based services;
- > The establishment of a Family Violence Division of the Magistrates' Court; and
- > The establishment and ongoing support of Local Indigenous Family Violence Action Groups and Local Indigenous Family Violence Support Workers.

The Victorian Government supports the Indigenous Family Violence Task Force approach to preventing, reducing and responding to family violence in Indigenous Communities.

¹ *Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Task Force Final Report*, Appendix 3 Literature Review, p.47

² Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Task Force, Interim Report p.12

What was the *Framework for the Development of the Indigenous Family Violence Strategy*?

The *Framework for the development of the Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Strategy: A partnership approach between the Victorian Indigenous Communities and Government* ('the Framework') established a Community led approach to developing an Indigenous Family Violence Strategy.

The Framework envisaged a three-stage process for the development and implementation of the Strategy.

Stage One: Indigenous Family Violence Task Force and Local Indigenous Family Violence Action Groups

The Framework established an Indigenous Family Violence Task Force, which was a panel of Indigenous Victorians who consulted with the Victorian Indigenous Community and made recommendations to Government on ways that the Government and Indigenous Communities could work together to address family violence. The Task Force membership included the Indigenous members of the Premier's Aboriginal Advisory Council (PAAC) and Indigenous women, men, youth and Elders from Communities throughout Victoria. The Task Force was not a representative structure but was rather a mechanism for ensuring the participation of all Indigenous stakeholders and members of the Aboriginal Community in the development of the Indigenous Family Violence Plan.

The Task Force undertook consultations, forums and focus groups with Indigenous Victorians to learn from their experiences and knowledge for the most appropriate means to address Indigenous family violence in Victoria.

The Task Force delivered its final Report to Government in December 2003. The Report "takes us on a journey that acknowledges the Task Force, where we began, what we did, what was done, what we found, what we know and hopefully the path ahead. It also identifies options, recommendations and suggestions to help progress this process and assist our Indigenous Communities and Government in their deliberations."

Stage One also involved the establishment of the Local Indigenous Family Violence Action Groups. These Groups were formed to raise awareness of issues of Indigenous Family Violence within local Communities and to develop local solutions to prevent and respond to local issues of family violence.

The final part of Stage One of the Strategy was the establishment of Indigenous Family Violence Community Initiatives Funds grants. Over the past two financial years, the Government has delivered small grants totalling \$650,000 per year to local Community projects to address Indigenous family violence.

A key achievement of the Task Force and Local Action Groups has been the discussion and actions that they have generated within Indigenous Communities about addressing Indigenous family violence. The issue has moved from one that was rarely discussed within Communities, to one where a strong message from Indigenous Communities is that "violence is not a part of our culture".

The Local Indigenous Family Violence Action Groups have carried this message forward in their Communities, by raising awareness of family violence at the local level and creating local strategies to prevent and respond to family violence. The Victorian Government thanks the Task Force and the Local Indigenous Family Violence Action Groups for their commitment and energy in generating the Task Force Report and addressing the issue of family violence at the local level.

Stage Two: The Government Response to the Task Force Report

In response to the Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Task Force Final Report, the Victorian Government will make some important initial changes to the family violence service system, in line with the recommendations of the Report.

The initiatives include the establishment of Holistic Family Healing Centres, counselling services, Indigenous Men's Resource Advisory Service, extending the Aboriginal Family Decision Making program, which includes programs for Indigenous families that are involved in the child protection system, and a Family Violence division of the Magistrates' Court.

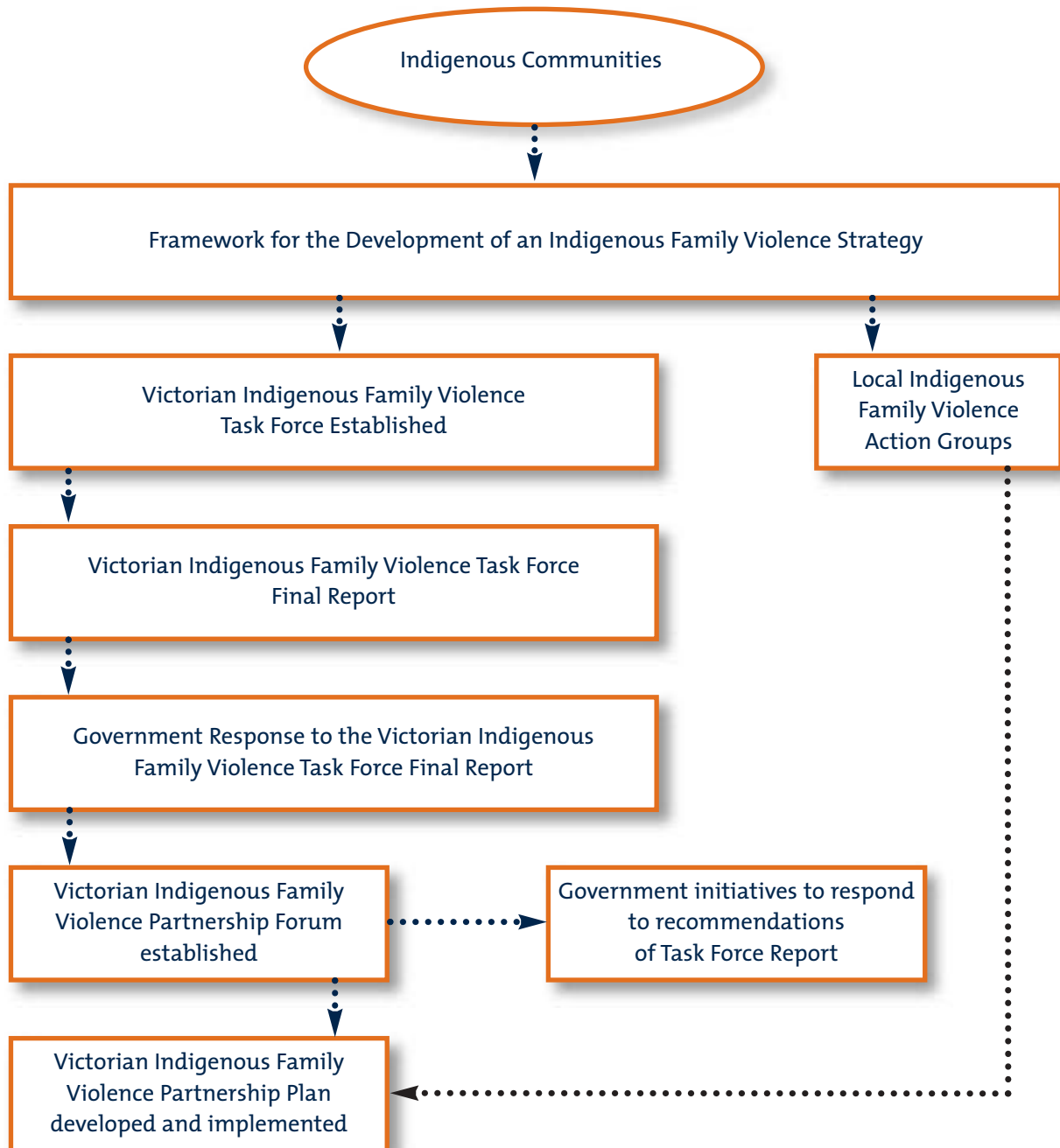
The Government will also establish an Indigenous Family Violence Partnership Forum to oversee the development and implementation of an Indigenous Family Violence Plan, based on a genuine commitment between the Government and the Community to work with each other in addressing family violence issues. The Partnership Forum will develop the Indigenous Family Violence Plan, with secretariat support from Aboriginal Affairs Victoria.

Stage Three: Indigenous Family Violence Plan and establishment of the Partnership Forum

The Indigenous Family Violence Partnership Forum will provide a forum for ongoing, high level dialogue between Government Departments and Indigenous Communities about the needs of Indigenous Communities in confronting issues of family violence. The Partnership Forum will also oversee the development and implementation of a ten-year Indigenous Family Violence Plan.

Aboriginal Affairs Victoria, in consultation with the Victorian Indigenous Community, Victorian Government Departments and the Australian Government will develop the Indigenous Family Violence Plan. The Partnership Forum will endorse the Plan and monitor its implementation. It is anticipated that priorities for implementation of the Report's Recommendations will be contained in this Indigenous Family Violence Plan.

Summary of the process to develop and implement the Indigenous Family Violence Plan



This process diagram describes the steps in the development of the Indigenous Family Violence Plan in partnership with Indigenous Communities.

Key outcomes of Government investment in Indigenous Family Violence

The Government will measure its performance in preventing, reducing and responding to Indigenous Family Violence through a comprehensive evaluation strategy, to be developed by the Partnership Forum. This evaluation strategy will include the following indicator:

- › A decrease in the rate of renotification of Indigenous children to child protection services.

In the long term, the following measure will be also be used:

- › A decrease in the number of Indigenous victims of repeat family incident reports to police.

This is a long-term measure in recognition that Indigenous family violence is believed to be significantly underreported to police at the moment. A short-term increase in reports to police may therefore be expected under the Strategy as reporting levels approach the levels of actual incidence of family violence. However, once reporting of Indigenous family violence to police has reached a level that approaches the actual incidence of family violence, the Government would anticipate that a reduction in the rate of repeat family violence incident reports would signal a reduction in the incidence of family violence.

The targets for each indicator will be established in consultation with Indigenous Communities through the Partnership Forum, which may also consider the need for additional indicators (see more detail about the Partnership Forum on page 16).

Victorian Government initiatives to address Indigenous family violence

In recent years, Victorian Government has committed significant new resources to address Indigenous family violence. In 2002-03, the Victorian Government committed \$1.9 million ongoing to underpin the development of an Indigenous Family Violence Strategy. In the 2004-05 budget, the Government committed \$10.2 million for strengthening Aboriginal families, including \$4.1 million over four years to establish three Holistic Family Healing Centres, an Indigenous Men's Resource Advisory Service and scholarships for Indigenous counselling students. The Government further committed to a number of other new initiatives to prevent, reduce and respond to Indigenous family violence. The Victorian Government is also pursuing opportunities to collaborate with the Commonwealth Government to increase the pool of funding available.

These service system responses will be delivered under the following overarching themes:

1. Safety and security of victims/survivors of violence
2. Healing: emotional and spiritual wellbeing
3. Making the family violence service sector more culturally responsive to the needs of Indigenous people
4. Empowering Indigenous Communities to address family violence.

The Government will implement new service system initiatives for each of these themes, with further initiatives to be considered in future budgets.

1. Safety and security of victims/survivors of violence

Family Violence Court

The Family Violence Division of the Magistrates Court (to be trialled in Ballarat and Heidelberg from early 2005) aims to make the court process more explicable, accessible and responsive to those experiencing family violence.

The Court will aim to minimise the number and complexity of hearings in family violence matters, make court appearances less intimidating and focus on the needs of children. The Family Violence Division will address needs beyond legal remedies - such as housing, employment, financial, health - by appropriate referral to local agencies. In this way, legal and other strategies to reduce family violence will be integrated.

The Family Violence Division is not specifically targeted to Indigenous Communities. However, a core component of the Family Violence Division Project is to ensure that training, recruitment, court processes and interagency protocols provide a court service that will respond to the nature, needs and expectations of Victoria's diverse Community including the Indigenous Community.

Like the Koori Court, the Family Violence Division will be carefully evaluated to establish whether the model developed meets the needs of the Indigenous Community. These evaluations will inform future policy about the most effective ways for courts to respond to family violence in Indigenous Communities.

Men's Behaviour Change Program

The Family Violence Court Intervention Program (FVCIP) will trial mandated behaviour change counselling for men subject to an intervention order for family violence in the two Family Violence Division Courts.

The behaviour change counselling aims to make men using violence accountable for their behaviour and to stop violent behaviour. The Program will also offer support to family members who have experienced violence.

Whilst the FVCIP will be part of a mainstream pilot the counselling and support available to Indigenous families will be culturally appropriate and address the needs of Indigenous Communities.

The evaluation of the FVCIP will specifically assess how effective it has been in addressing family violence among Indigenous participants. The evaluation of the FVCIP will inform the further development of court directed counselling programs for Indigenous men who use family violence.

Family Violence Housing Pilot Program

A Victorian Homelessness Strategy family violence pilot program in Gippsland is being run through a partnership of a family violence provider and a local Indigenous Family Reconciliation program, focussing on providing specific advice regarding housing options to Indigenous women and children escaping family violence.

Rural and Remote Family Violence Initiative

The Rural and Remote Family Violence Initiative seeks to address the issue of recruitment of appropriately skilled Indigenous family violence workers. This initiative provides for family violence agencies to establish partnerships with Indigenous agencies to support the employment and mentoring of Indigenous support workers to assist Indigenous women and their children experiencing family violence in rural and remote areas.

These actions are the immediate response to the Task Force Recommendations 14, 16, and components of the Recommendations-Actions Service System Responses for Victims and Perpetrators and New Programs, Activities and Service Responses.

2. Healing: emotional and spiritual wellbeing

Healing Centres

The Victorian Government will establish three Holistic Family Healing Centres, in consultation with Indigenous Communities. Healing Centres will heal individuals, families and Communities affected by family violence within local Indigenous Communities. The role of Holistic Family Healing Centres will be to provide a comprehensive range of services designed to prevent, reduce and respond to all forms of family violence within local Indigenous Communities. The Healing Centres will create links with other local services that prevent family violence, including Community education and awareness raising, and provide a venue for culturally appropriate programs and services.

The Healing Centres will include family violence counsellors and family support workers. Family violence counselling services will assist women and families experiencing or recovering from family violence with safety planning, support and referral services. Family support services will help families integrate with other services in the Community and local areas, such as maternal and child health centres, kindergartens and other government services such as housing.

Healing Centres will be implemented to addresses Task Force Recommendations-Actions New Programs, Activities and Service Responses

3. Developing a more culturally-responsive family violence service sector

Improving the cultural responsiveness of Victoria Police

Victoria Police has developed a *Code of Practice for the Investigation of Family Violence*. This code acknowledges the need for sensitivity in responding to people from Indigenous Communities who experience family violence, and outlines strategies for making police interventions more culturally responsive. In developing the code, consultation occurred with key Indigenous family violence service providers. Cultural awareness programs have been incorporated into the training program that forms part of the implementation plan for the Code of practice.

Victoria police will employ a research officer to examine family violence within Indigenous Communities and to identify culturally sensitive responses. This research will examine the nature of

culturally sensitive conditions that may be sought in intervention orders. It is anticipated that this research will commence in June 2004. A reference group, that includes representatives from the Indigenous Community, is currently being established to oversee this research.

Victoria Police will employ two Aboriginal Community Liaison Officers. These Officers will be unsworn people who provide a non-operational, follow-up service to Indigenous people who have had contact with police. The Officers will be responsible for facilitating partnerships between police and community groups.

Scholarships for Indigenous students

The Victorian Government will broaden the Indigenous Scholarships Scheme to provide three new scholarships for Indigenous students who are undertaking counselling studies at a tertiary level per annum. The Drugs Policy and Services Branch of the Department of Human Services will also fund three scholarships for Indigenous students studying in an alcohol and drugs related area, which could include counselling as part of the course.

Capacity building for the service sector: Aboriginal Services Plan

In the Aboriginal Services Plan (January 2004) the Department of Human Services committed to a number of strategies to build the capacity of the funded Victorian Indigenous Community services agencies. These strategies include a commitment for Departmental regional and divisional officers to offer regular in-service and on and off the job training opportunities to staff from local Aboriginal Community organisations, to develop expertise in Aboriginal workers, and increase understanding of Aboriginal aspirations and cultural issues by departmental staff. It is expected that that the Community services sector becomes more responsive to the needs of Indigenous Victorians.

Family Support Innovation Projects

Indigenous Family Support Innovation Projects aim to divert a significant proportion of Aboriginal families notified to child protection services to community-based services, as well as minimise re-notifications of Aboriginal children and young people and the progression of families into the child protection system. These Projects provide more integrated and sustained support to at-risk families with complex and long-term needs before they reach crisis point. These projects use a number of service models, including joint case work, assertive outreach and practical in-home support. Each Innovation Project has the capacity to establish a funded service network of coordinated Community-based services, including child protection, family support, health, justice and education.

Currently, Indigenous Family Support Innovation Projects are located in Greater Shepparton, Latrobe, East Gippsland and Darebin. The Victorian Government has committed additional funds in 2004-05 to further expand Family Support Innovation Projects, including four new Indigenous projects in the Greater Geelong, Campaspe, Mildura and Casey Local Government areas. These services will be an integral part of a holistic response to families that have experienced family violence.

Indigenous Men's Resource and Advisory Service

This service will provide culturally appropriate information, advice and consultancy support to mainstream and Indigenous workers to improve their capacity to deliver culturally appropriate services and programs to Indigenous men who use violence. Key elements will include resource and program development, regional consultations and training. Regional Forums will be conducted to enhance cultural awareness and capacity building for services.

Initial funds will be targeted to supporting existing men's behaviour change programs in piloting specific programs targeting Indigenous men who use violence. These programs would also provide support services to women and children affected by men's violence. Medium to longer term implementation will involve the development of culturally sensitive and relevant services for Indigenous men.

These initiatives are designed to address recommendations 12, 14, 16, 21 and 23 and the Recommendations-Actions Service System Responses for Victims

4. Empowering Indigenous Communities to address family violence

Aboriginal Family Decision-Making Programs

An Aboriginal Family Decision Making Pilot Program is located in Shepparton, which aims to assist Aboriginal families who are involved with child protection services to find solutions which protect the child(ren) and maintain the child's care within the family and Aboriginal Community.

The Government has committed \$800,000 in 2004-05, rising to \$1.9 million in 2007-08 to extend Aboriginal Family Decision Making Services to a further five Indigenous Communities. These services enable extended family and respected Indigenous Community leaders to participate in decisions made about the care and protection of the children in their Community who have been notified to child protection. With family violence identified as a characteristic of 56% of parents of children notified to child protection, it is hoped that the Aboriginal Family Decision Making Programs will add to the security of Indigenous children who experience family violence.

Education and Awareness Raising

The Victorian Government recognises the need for education and awareness raising within Indigenous Communities about issues of Indigenous family violence. The Government currently funds nine Local Indigenous Family Violence Action Groups and Support Officers to raise awareness of issues of family violence in local Indigenous Communities. These groups are active in educating and supporting young people, elders, women, men and people in same-sex relationships to address issues of family violence at the local level. These groups are active in promoting the message that "family violence is not a part of our culture". Education and awareness raising will be a consideration for Government investment in future budgets.

Training and support for Indigenous Family Violence Support Workers and Local Indigenous Family Violence Action Groups

The Victorian Government will build the capacity of Indigenous Communities to prevent and respond to Indigenous family violence by providing strong support for Indigenous Family Violence Support Workers and Local Action Groups, through training and information support.

The Indigenous Family Violence Support Worker positions have a strategic focus in supporting local Communities. Indigenous Family Violence Support Workers will be provided with ongoing support and training.

Data and Research

The Victorian Government recognises that the incidence and prevalence of Indigenous family violence in Victoria is not well understood. The Government acknowledges that gaining a better understanding of Victorian Indigenous family violence is necessary to target service delivery more effectively. Improved data and research will also be necessary to inform the implementation and evaluation of the Indigenous Family Violence Plan, once it is developed. Protocols for the collection of data will be developed through the Partnership Forum in partnership with Indigenous Communities.

The Government will spend \$50,000 in 2004-05 to undertake further research to better understand Indigenous family violence in Victoria. This research will assist the Government and local Communities to better respond to issues of Indigenous family violence. The Government will also develop improved data collection and monitoring systems by establishing an Indigenous Statistics Working Group across Departments. This Group will operate as a sub-group of the Indigenous Family Violence Working Group in consultation with the representatives of the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the Council of Australian Governments, the Victorian Community Council Against Violence and other relevant organisations. Recommendations about improved data collection will be forwarded to Partnership Forum for consideration and endorsement.

Indigenous Family Violence Community Initiatives Funds

Over the past two financial years, the Government has delivered small grants totalling \$650,000 per year to local Community projects to address Indigenous family violence. A list of projects funded to date is at [Attachment A](#).

These grants will continue to be distributed and will provide good practice examples of Community initiatives to address Indigenous family violence. These projects will assist the Partnership Forum to develop and refine the implementation of the Indigenous Family Violence Plan and will refine Government service delivery at the local level.

The Government is currently refining the process for delivering these grants, to give Local Action Groups more of a say in how they are distributed. This process will be developed through the Partnership Forum in consultation with Local Action Groups.

These initiatives are designed to address Recommendations 6 and 25 by empowering Indigenous Communities to prevent, reduce and respond to Indigenous family violence.

Implementation of the Indigenous Family Violence Plan

The Victorian Government is committed to working in partnership with Indigenous Communities to address Indigenous family violence. The Government believes that it is only by entering into respectful partnerships with Indigenous Communities that policy initiatives in this area can be successful.

The Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Plan will inform, and be informed by, a number of policies and strategies across Government that aim to improve the safety and wellbeing of Indigenous people. These policies and strategies include:

- › **Whole of Government Indigenous Affairs Framework:** Work has begun to develop a long term plan and whole of government management and coordination framework for Indigenous affairs in Victoria. This will involve extensive consultation between government agencies and Indigenous Communities to establish a practical tool for Government and Community organisations to monitor the impact of specific programs on areas of Indigenous disadvantage and assist in identifying what further work is required.
- › **Women's Safety Strategy:** which is a comprehensive strategy to reduce the level, and fear, of violence against women in Victoria.
- › **Aboriginal Justice Agreement:** which aims to address the ongoing issue of Aboriginal over-representation within all levels of the criminal justice system; improve Aboriginal access to justice-related services; and promote greater awareness in the Aboriginal Community of their civil, legal and political rights.
- › **Aboriginal Services Plan:** which aims to achieve a demonstrable improvement in the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal People in Victorian in line with that of the general population by understanding the factors contributing to the disparity in health and wellbeing; maximising the use of primary and preventative services; and minimising the representation of Aboriginal people in identified secondary and tertiary services.
- › **Yalca – a partnership in Education and Training for the New Millennium:** which reflects a birth to death philosophy of education for Koories and which aims to place the Koorie student at the centre of educational policy development, implementation and decision making at all levels of education.

Each of these frameworks and strategies will be linked in to the development and implementation of the Indigenous Family Violence Plan through representation on the Partnership Forum.

These interlocking policies and strategies address Task Force recommendations 1, 2, 3, 8, 9, 13, 24 and 26 and Recommendations-Actions Building on and Strengthening Existing Infrastructure, Activities and Service Responses

The Partnership Forum

The Task Force Report recommended that a Partnership Forum be established to oversee the development and implementation of a ten-year Partnership Agreement between the Victorian Government and Indigenous Communities to address Indigenous family violence. The Task Force proposed that this Partnership Forum contain senior representatives from Government and Indigenous Communities, to ensure that Indigenous voices are heard at senior levels of Government where programs to address Indigenous family violence are developed.

The Victorian Government agrees that, in order for the Government to effectively address Indigenous family violence, it must work in meaningful partnership with Indigenous Communities.

The Victorian Government currently has a number of processes to consult, and work in partnership, with Indigenous Communities. These processes include the Aboriginal Justice Forum, the Aboriginal Human Services Forum, the Local Indigenous Education Advisory Groups, the Indigenous Women's Ministerial Advisory Committee and the Local Indigenous Family Violence Action Groups. Each of these groups has some responsibility for addressing Indigenous family violence. The Partnership Forum therefore needs to be linked in to each of these processes.

However, the Government is also conscious that Indigenous Communities carry a heavy burden of consultations and negotiations with all levels of Government. In many cases, it is the same Community members who sit on a number of these committees and this entails a significant time commitment for them.

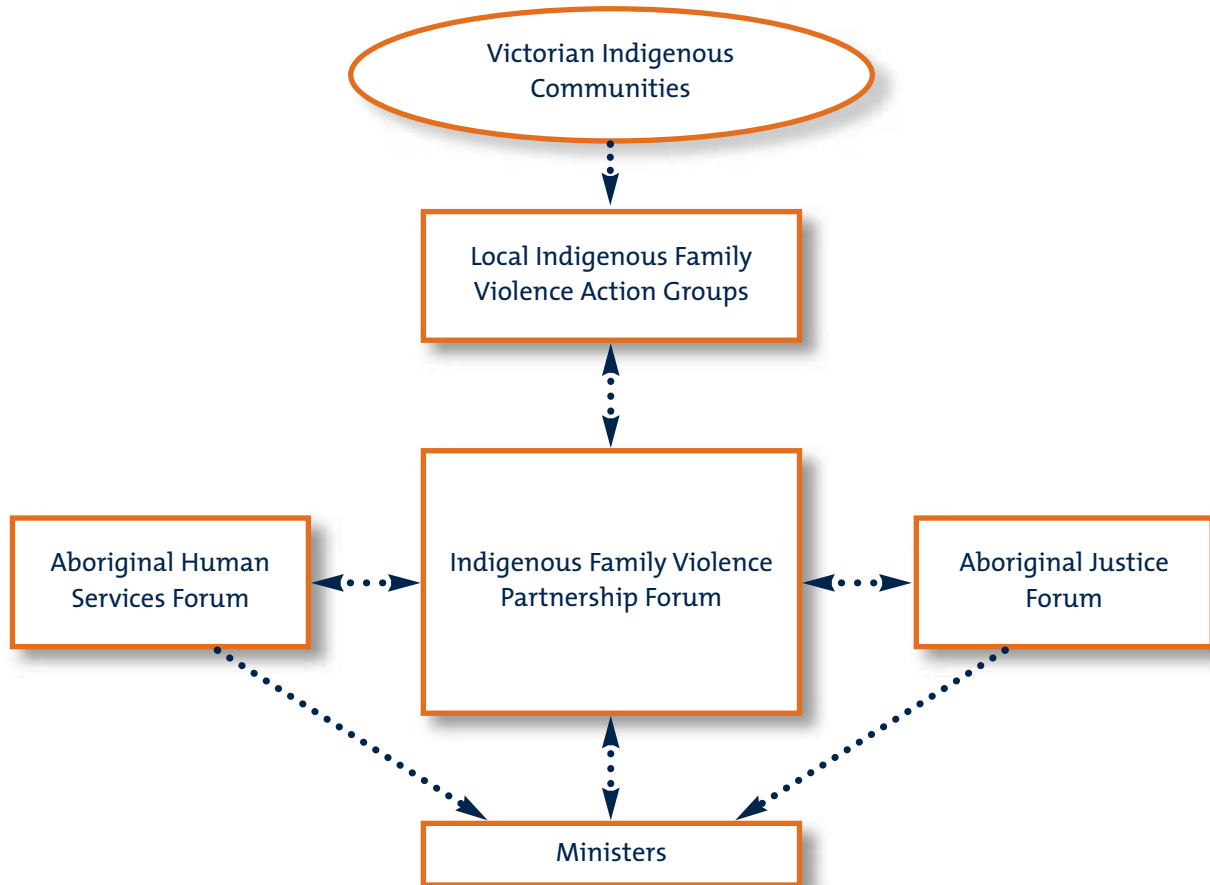
The Victorian Government proposes a two-part process to moving the Strategy forward. The first part will be the implementation of a Partnership Forum structure that utilises existing processes. This is discussed further below. The second part is that the Government will conduct a review of how it does business with Indigenous Communities, to reduce the burden that it places on Indigenous Communities. This review will aim to:

- > reduce the number of committees and processes that the Government uses to consult and negotiate with Indigenous Communities;
- > ensure that the Government works in genuine partnership with Indigenous Communities in policy development; and
- > simplify the funding and reporting arrangements between the Government and Indigenous Communities, to consolidate funding streams and reduce the amount of acquittals that Communities must provide to Government.

This review will be conducted this year (2004) and will be implemented during 2005.

Whilst this review is taking place, the Government proposes the following interim structure for the Partnership Forum, which will enable it to feed into existing Government processes:

PARTNERSHIP FORUM



Under this structure, the Indigenous family violence Partnership Forum will be linked to the Aboriginal Justice Forum and the Aboriginal Human Services Forum by having the meetings on the same day or next day in the same location to facilitate access where there are participants attending more than one forum.

The membership of the Partnership Forum will include senior representatives of:

Government

- > The Department for Victorian Communities
- > The Department of Premier and Cabinet
- > The Department of Justice
- > The Department of Human Services
- > The Department of Education and Training
- > Relevant Commonwealth Departments
- > Statewide Steering Committee to Reduce Family Violence
- > Victoria Police

Community

- > Local Indigenous Family Violence Action Groups³
- > Indigenous Family Violence Task Force
- > Indigenous Women’s Ministerial Advisory Committee
- > Aboriginal Justice Forum
- > Aboriginal Human Services Forum
- > Regional Koorie Education Committees

The Premier’s Aboriginal Advisory Council will nominate the Community Representatives.

By including representatives of each of the relevant Departments and Community organisations, the Partnership Forum will link to other relevant Government Strategies and policies, such as the Women’s Safety Strategy, the Aboriginal Services Plan, the Aboriginal Justice Agreement, and Yalca – a partnership in Education and Training for the new millennium.

The Partnership Forum will be responsible for overseeing the development and implementation of the Indigenous Family Violence Plan which will implement the Task Force Recommendations. The Partnership Forum will also be responsible for endorsing and monitoring the implementation of:

- > A communication strategy;
- > An implementation plan; and
- > An evaluation plan.

Aboriginal Affairs Victoria will provide secretariat support to the Partnership Forum.

The structure of the Partnership Forum may be modified, following feedback from its members and/or the review of how Government does business with Indigenous Communities.

The Indigenous Family Violence Plan will inform the work of the Statewide Steering Committee to Reduce Family Violence. This will ensure linkages with the broader whole-of-government *Women Safety Strategy*.

³Local Indigenous Family Violence Action Groups are located in:

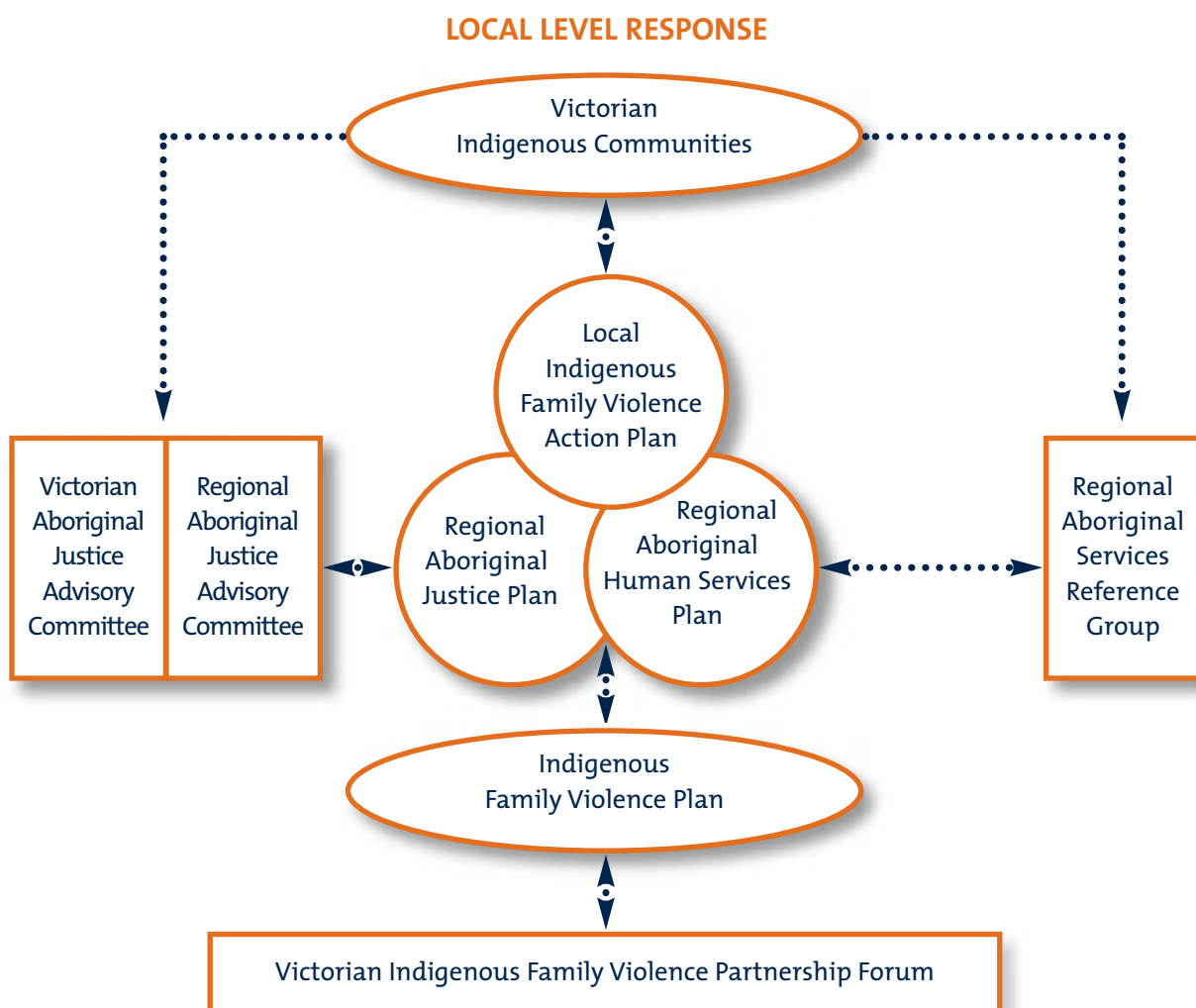
- > Barwon South West
- > Grampians
- > East Gippsland
- > Central Gippsland
- > Hume
- > Loddon Mallee North
- > Loddon Mallee South
- > North and West Metropolitan Region
- > Eastern Metropolitan Region
- > Southern Metropolitan Region

Whole of Government Response at the local level

The Government recognises that, in order to successfully prevent, reduce and respond to Indigenous family violence, it is necessary to have a whole-of-Government, whole-of-Community response at the local level.

There are already a number of Indigenous Community groups at the local level that have responsibility for developing plans and local initiatives to prevent, reduce and respond to Indigenous family violence. These groups are the Regional Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committees, the Regional Aboriginal Services Reference Groups, the Local Indigenous Family Violence Action Groups and, to a certain extent, the Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups.

The Local Indigenous Family Violence Action Groups will work with other local Indigenous groups to implement the Indigenous Family Violence Plan. The following diagram represents how this will work at the local level:



Under this structure, Local Indigenous Family Violence Action Plans developed by Local Indigenous Family Violence Action Groups, will feed up to the Partnership Forum to inform the broad priorities and directions of the Forum. These Local Indigenous Family Violence Action Plans will influence and be influenced by Regional Aboriginal Justice Plans and Regional Aboriginal Human Services Plans.

Local Indigenous Family Violence Action Group Plans will be tabled at the Partnership Forum. Government departments will then identify strategies to assist in the implementation of Action Plans.

Where to from here

The next steps from here are:

- > The establishment of the Partnership Forum;
- > The review of how Government does business with Indigenous Communities;
- > The development and implementation of the Indigenous Family Violence Plan;
- > The development of an evaluation plan;
- > The development of a communication plan; and
- > The implementation of the new initiatives that the Government has committed to in this document.

Each of these next steps will be developed using the underpinning principles as outlined in this document, the first of which is the commitment to work in respectful partnership with Indigenous Communities. Through our collective efforts, we can break the cycle of violence and begin the healing.

In the major grants category (up to \$100,000 per project)

Organisation / Person	Purpose	\$Amount
Yappera Children's Services (Northcote)	Children	35,000
Wathaurong Aboriginal Co-operative (Geelong)	All	71,785
Enmaraleek Association Incorporated (Broadmeadows)	All	100,000
Ballarat & District Aboriginal Corporation Ltd	Family	99,998
Aborigines Advancement League Inc (Northcote)	Women	100,000
Ngwala Willumbong Co-operative Ltd – Auspice. (St Kilda)	Men	100,000

In the minor grants category (up to \$15,000 per project)

Organisation / Person	Purpose	\$Amount
Victorian Aboriginal Health Service Co-operative Ltd	A role model project for men	12,000
Moogji Aboriginal Council East Gippsland Incorporated	Community controlled reference group to develop strategies to address family violence	15,000
(Auspice) Central Gippsland Aboriginal Health & Housing Co-operative Ltd	Provide a focal for women to strategically address the issue of family violence.	15,000
Portland-Mara Indigenous Women's Council	Develop a Women's Well Being House for women and children.	15,000
Lake Tyers Health & Children's Services Association	Development of camps and retreats for Women / Children	15,000
Kurnai Gunai Elders Aboriginal Corporation (Gippsland)	Develop a women's camp and retreat.	15,000
Kurnai Gunai Elders Aboriginal Corporation (Gippsland)	Develop recreational and cultural activities for men and boys	15,000
Kirrae Health Services Inc	Social programs for isolated Women	14,106
Ramahyuck Aboriginal Co-operative	Community support program to raise family violence issues in East Gippsland	15,000
OVERALL TOTAL		637,889

Grant Recipients 2003-04

In the major grants category (up to \$100,000 per project)

Organisation / Person	Purpose	\$Amount
Family Violence Prevention & Legal Service (Melbourne)	The development of a family violence training package for Aboriginal Communities.	99,984
Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association Ltd (Fitzroy)	Establishing a men's culturally supportive referral and advocacy centre.	100,000
Elizabeth Hoffman House	Establishing a specialist family violence counsellor for women and children.	100,000
Hume Region Indigenous Family Violence Project (Wodonga and Shepparton)	A service coordination and education package targeting mainstream family violence agencies.	100,000
Budja Budja Aboriginal Co-operative (Halls Gap)	Workshop program targeting young people aged 13-25 years.	74,000
East Gippsland Aboriginal ACDEP Co-op Ltd. (Bairnsdale)	Establish a Family Violence Regional Referral Service for Elders, youth, children, women and men.	99,100

Minor Grants

Organisation / Person	Purpose	\$Amount
Robinvale Network House	Establish a parents' support service.	8,550
Mildura Aboriginal Corporation	Establish a counselling service for victims of family violence.	15,000
Ballarat & District Aboriginal Co-op	Develop a men's program for those at risk of involvement in family violence.	15,000
Morwell Local Aboriginal Education Committee	Develop a Healthy Families Education Program for the Community.	15,000
Kerang Koori Community Caring for Kids Project	Designed to improve Koori children's social, emotional, physical and intellectual health.	14,404

