



Youth Affairs  
Council Victoria

## The Royal Commission into Family Violence – What will it mean for young people?

A response by the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria

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## About YACVic

The Youth Affairs Council of Victoria Inc. (YACVic) is the peak body and leading policy advocate on young people's issues in Victoria. Our vision is for a Victorian community that values and provides opportunity, participation, justice and equity for all young people. We are an independent, not-for-profit organisation.

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The Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACVic) welcomed the report of Victoria's Royal Commission into Family Violence on 29 March 2016. This landmark document charts the causes, occurrence and impacts of family violence across the Victorian community. It identifies key challenges and approaches across different sectors to prevent and respond to the issue effectively in the future, and makes 227 recommendations.

The Victorian Government has shown strong leadership in undertaking to implement all these recommendations, and has already committed an initial \$572 million funding package to address 65 of the recommendations.

Here, we outline the report's particular implications for young people and the services that support them. We have included the timeframes for reform nominated by the Commission, as well as current funding commitments by the Victorian Government, relevant notes from the Commission's report and additional observations by YACVic.

For wider analysis, we refer the reader to the responses by the [Victorian Council of Social Service](#), the [Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare](#), the [Council to Homeless Persons](#), and [Youthlaw](#), amongst others.

## Young people and family violence

In our submission to the Royal Commission, YACVic argued the needs of young people warrant particular attention. Young people can be disproportionately vulnerable to violence; they are also more likely than the rest of the community to hold attitudes supportive of violence. Furthermore, traditionally they have not been well supported by a family violence sector designed primarily for adult women. At the same time, the young, formative years of a person's life are a time of hope and potential, when expert support and attitudinal change can make a powerful difference.<sup>1</sup>

The Royal Commission's report shows strong understanding and support for these points. The Commission recognises young people as 'silent victims' of family violence – seriously affected by disruption and trauma, and not always adequately assisted by a struggling family violence service system. The report observes that young people are

often reluctant to approach support services, and that significant service gaps exist anyhow – an issue identified by VCOSS and YACVic in *Building the Scaffolding* (2013).<sup>2</sup>

The Royal Commission recognises the particular vulnerability of young people who are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, from CALD backgrounds, same-sex attracted or sex/gender diverse, or living in rural and regional areas. Also highlighted is the very high rate of violence towards young people with disabilities across multiple settings, and the need to support them to make meaningful decisions about their own lives. It was especially pleasing to see the Royal Commission's recognition of the expert advocacy of the Koorie Youth Council, who stressed the need for culturally appropriate approaches to prevent and address violence affecting Aboriginal young people, guided by these young people's own needs, experiences and ideas.<sup>3</sup>

YACVic welcomes this attention to diverse needs and multiple forms of discrimination, an issue raised in many submissions, including our own.

## **Guiding principles for working with young people**

When implementing the recommendations of their report, the Royal Commission concluded that the following principles should apply in relation to children and young people:

- Children and young people experiencing family violence should be recognised as victims in their own right and have their needs acknowledged.
- Children and young people have different needs – this should be recognised when planning and delivering responses to family violence.
- Many children and young people display great resilience in the face of family violence. Interventions should preserve and strengthen protective factors that might mitigate the effects of family violence, noting that the majority grow up to be neither perpetrators nor victims in their adult relationships.
- Interventions and support for children and young people who have experienced family violence should focus on:
  - keeping them safe.
  - supporting them in their recovery from the effects of family violence.

- providing the right level and type of support when it is needed and for as long as it is needed. Not all children and young people will require an intensive therapeutic approach but those that do should have timely access to this.
- Services should be accessible, inclusive and responsive to the needs of all children and young people.<sup>4</sup>

YACVic supports these principles.

We would sound a note of caution, though, in observing that the structure and focus of the Commission's report locates young people primarily within their immediate families, as victims, witnesses or perpetrators of violence involving their parents or siblings. These issues are indeed critical, and YACVic supports a strong response. However, we are concerned that interventions which focus wholly on 'the family' may risk overlooking gender-based violence and relationship violence in other contexts, including in young people's intimate and peer relationships. Discrimination and violence between young people can have significant impacts on their wellbeing, home lives and future expectations of partnership and parenting. We welcome the Royal Commission's recommendation that education and prevention measures should target young people to address discrimination and violence early in life,<sup>5</sup> but we hope this attention to youthful relationships will also figure in broader sector reforms.

## Big picture changes: service settings and governance

The Royal Commission has demonstrated the strong and growing demand for service support for people experiencing family violence, and the consequent pressure on family violence services. Substantial new resourcing is needed to meet the demand, and YACVic welcomes the Victorian Government's commitment of \$103.9 million additional investment in specialist family violence services.<sup>6</sup>

### Governance mechanisms

- **Recommendation 193:** Establish a governance structure for implementing the Commission's recommendations and overseeing systemic improvements in family violence policy. The structure should consist of:

- A bipartisan standing parliamentary committee on family violence
- A Cabinet standing sub-committee chaired by the Premier of Victoria
- A family violence unit located in the Department of Premier and Cabinet
- A Statewide Family Violence Advisory Committee
- Family Violence Integration Committees, supported by Regional Integration Coordinators
- An independent Family Violence Agency established by statute.

- **Timeframe recommended by the Commission:** Within 2 years.

**YACVic remarks:** YACVic welcomes this proposal, including the Commission's recommendation that people who have been the victims of violence be represented on the independent Family Violence Agency and on the Statewide Family Violence Advisory Committee. As the Commission notes, it is also vital that community organisations play a strong role in policy development, in recognition of their expertise. Genuine partnerships between government and the community services sector are needed here, and we trust the expertise of youth-specific services will be drawn upon. The Victorian Government has allocated \$15.4 million (2015-18) to establish an independent monitor to oversee their implementation of the Commission's recommendations, and is funding a new coordination agency, Victim Survivors Advisory Council, and Family Violence Steering Committee.<sup>7</sup>

## Support and Safety Hubs

- **Recommendation 37:** Introduce Support and Safety Hubs in each of the state's 17 DHHS regions. These hubs should be in accessible and safe locations that:
  - Receive police referrals (L17 forms) for victims and perpetrators, referrals from non-family violence services and self-referrals, including from family and friends.
  - Provide a single, area-based entry point into local specialist family violence services, perpetrator programs and Integrated Family Services and link people to other support services.
  - Perform risk and needs assessments and safety planning.
  - Provide direct assistance until the victim, perpetrators and any children are linked with services for longer term support.

- Book victims into emergency accommodation and facilitate their placement in crisis accommodation.
  - Provide secondary consultation services to universal or non-family violence services.
  - Offer a basis for co-location of other services likely to be required by victims and any children.
  - [For additional details, see report.]
- **Timeframe recommended by the Commission:** By 1 July 2018.
  - **Notes:** The Commission anticipates these hubs will be the local entry point to specialist family violence services and Integrated Family Services. The hubs should bring together Child FIRST and community based child protection practitioners with specialist family violence expertise. The Commission also expects that the hubs will have capacity to undertake risk and needs assessment in cases of adolescent violence in the home and link young people to Adolescent Violence in the Home programs and mental health, legal, disability and youth services where necessary.<sup>8</sup>

**YACVic remarks:** The Victorian Government has committed an initial \$5 million (2016-17) to begin rolling out this hub model,<sup>9</sup> and there is considerable potential for positive collaboration and improved service delivery here. These hubs must be supported to work effectively with local youth services, and be located and designed in such a way that young people can understand and access them easily and feel welcome and safe attending. Recommendation 38 notes the importance of co-design of hubs with local providers; we suggest key youth services have a valuable role to play there.

## Court settings

- **Recommendation 70:** Fund and complete works to ensure all Magistrates' Court of Victoria headquarter courts provide adequate facilities for children and ensure that courts are 'child-friendly'. [For additional details, see report.]
- **Timeframe recommended by the Commission:** Within 5 years.



- **Notes:** The Commission notes the observations of the CREATE Foundation that children and young people attending the Children's Court often describe it as scary, intimidating and hostile. The report discusses the value of a more dynamic security system where well-trained guards interact with everyone (rather than an airport-style checkpoint), and the need for bright, friendly play areas for children and places where young people can spend reflective time on their own or with family members.<sup>10</sup>

**YACVic remarks:** The Victorian Government has committed \$4 million to begin delivering Royal Commission recommendations on court reform, and \$58.1 million was pledged in the 2016-17 Victorian budget to improve the safety and security of courts in general, including separate waiting areas for victims and perpetrators, entrance modifications and increased court security officer presence.<sup>11</sup> As yet, however, we have not seen a reference to providing children's facilities and making courts child-friendly. (Indeed, factors like security screening and X-ray machines, while presumably necessary, have the potential to increase young people's sense of courts as frightening, hostile places.) We await details on how this recommendation of the Royal Commission will be pursued in the future.

## Aboriginal controlled service delivery

- **Recommendation 146:** Give priority to providing adequate funding to Aboriginal controlled organisations for culturally appropriate family violence services for Aboriginal women and children, therapeutic child centred programs, crisis accommodation and support options for Aboriginal women and children, and early intervention and prevention actions in Aboriginal communities – including whole-of-community activities and targeted programs. [For additional details, see report.]
- **Timeframe recommended by the Commission:** Within 12 months

**YACVic remarks:** It was very pleasing to see this area flagged as a priority in the Victorian Government's recently announced funding package in response to the Royal Commission. \$25.7 million of the package was allocated for Aboriginal community led programs. The bulk of this funding - \$16.5 million over 2016-18 - will focus on Aboriginal

children and young people. These interventions will involve strengthening support for Aboriginal children in child protection and out-of-home care (ensuring children have a cultural support plan, and expanding the Aboriginal Child Specialist Advice and Support Services), recruiting additional Aboriginal carers, and extending the Koori Youth Justice Program to support young people at risk of offending or on an order.<sup>12</sup>

## Support for young people experiencing violence

### Therapeutic support for young people

- **Recommendation 21:** Ensure that all refuge and crisis accommodation services catering to families have adequate resources to meet the particular needs of the children they are accommodating, including access to expert advice and secondary consultations in supporting children.
- **Timeframe recommended by the Commission:** Within 12 months.

**YACVic remarks:** This is very welcome. In our submission to the Royal Commission, YACVic pointed to a number of approaches for creating supportive environments for young people within family violence services, including those discussed in the 2011 literature review 'The Impact of Domestic Violence on Children' (Australian Domestic & Family Violence Clearinghouse and University of New South Wales). In particular, we called for all workers supporting young people to be familiar with the Code of Ethical Practice for the Victorian Youth Sector, which guides services in working with the young person as a client in their own right and prioritising issues such as the young person's dignity, identity and safety.

- **Recommendation 23:** Give priority to funding therapeutic interventions and counselling – including age-appropriate group work – for children and young people who are victims of family violence. In particular: the Homeless Children's Specialist Support Service (or a program with similar features) should be extended beyond four service areas to be available statewide and be available to specialist family violence services, and eligibility for the Take Two program and similar therapeutic programs should be introduced for children and young

people affected by trauma associated with family violence who are not in the statutory child protection system.

- **Notes:** The Homeless Children's Specialist Support Service operates in four service locations and provides direct assistance to people up to 18 years who have experienced homelessness. It treats the young person as the primary client via intensive one on one case management, therapeutic group work and psychological support.<sup>13</sup> Take Two is a statewide intensive therapeutic program coordinated by Berry Street in partnership with the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency, for children and young people in the child protection system who have suffered trauma, neglect and disrupted attachment. Take Two employs psychologists, social workers, nurses and other mental health workers as well as researchers and trainers to build and share knowledge.<sup>14</sup>
- **Timeframe recommended by the Commission:** within 2 years.

**YACVic remarks:** This is very welcome. In our submission to the Royal Commission, YACVic commented on the importance of ensuring young people can access therapeutic counselling to address trauma and long-term impacts of violence. We welcome the Victorian Government's commitment of \$8.5 million over 2016-18 for long-term therapeutic support and sexual assault counselling for children exposed to family violence, and await further details about the organisational settings in which this will take place.<sup>15</sup>

## Safe places for young people to live

- **Recommendation 24:** Support and fund youth homelessness and other youth service providers in developing and implementing a broader range of supported accommodation options for young people experiencing family violence.
- **Notes:** The Royal Commission recognises family violence as a major cause of youth homelessness, and observes that some families experiencing violence are put under even greater strain due to the inability of many family violence services to support teenage boys and young people with disabilities. YACVic supports these points, which were also made in our own submission.<sup>16</sup>

- **Timeframe recommended by the Commission:** Within 2 years.

**YACVic remarks:** This recommendation is very welcome, as is the Victorian Government's announcement of a \$152 million housing blitz to reduce homelessness caused by family violence. This funding will provide for new and upgraded crisis accommodation, support to access private rental housing, provision of an initial 130 new social housing properties and headleasing for up to 100 dwellings. We await further details about how young people will figure in these reforms, but we welcome the Victorian Government's initial commitment to two new youth homelessness accommodation facilities in Melbourne CBD and Melton, in partnership with Melbourne City Mission and Hope Street Youth and Family Services.<sup>17</sup> While welcoming the Victorian Government's new commitments, YACVic still maintains that Victoria needs a long-term affordable housing strategy. In particular, we reiterate our call for a housing guarantee for young people leaving out-of-home care. As the Commission itself recognises, these young people are highly vulnerable to past and future experiences of family violence and to homelessness.

## **Service delivery to women and children with disabilities**

- **Recommendation 176:** Department of Health and Human Services review the model for crisis supported accommodation to remove barriers for women and children with disabilities.
- **Timeframe recommended by the Commission:** Within 12 months.

**YACVic remarks:** These developments would be very welcome. The importance of a family violence sector that is truly accessible to all young Victorians was a key message of many submissions to the Commission, including YACVic's.

## **Addressing violence by young people in the home**

As the Royal Commission acknowledges, the vast majority of family violence is committed by adult men against women and children. At the same time, and as YACVic observed in our submission, there is rising demand for interventions to address

adolescent young people's own use of violence in the home, a problem which the justice, health and community sectors have traditionally struggled to deal with. Targeted, age-appropriate interventions are needed.

The Commission puts forward guiding principles for addressing adolescent violence in the home:

- There is a need to raise awareness about adolescent violence in the community, along with easy to find information about the options and services available to address adolescent violence.
- Adolescent violence in the home should be recognised by the family violence system as different from adult-perpetrated family violence.
- Involvement with the criminal justice system for adolescents who use violence in the home should be a last resort – therapeutic responses should be adopted. Priority should be given to specialist therapeutic responses that work with the young person and their families as early as possible. The underlying causes of the violence should be addressed to prevent any further violence and involvement in the criminal justice system.
- Responses should be flexible and tailored to the particular circumstances of each family. For example, the intensity of any intervention should be appropriate to the level of risk posed to family members.
- There is a need for an immediate response to adolescent violence in the home so that young people understand the consequences of their actions and family members can be protected.
- Removal of the young person from the family home should be avoided as much as possible. Where there is no other option but for the young person to leave the home, appropriate supported accommodation should be provided to them.
- Improvements need to be made to our justice system so that greater use can be made of diversionary and restorative options when the family wants this.<sup>18</sup>

In particular, the Commission observes that there is a strong need for culturally safe, whole-of-family interventions aimed at Aboriginal young people and their families and delivered by Aboriginal controlled community organisations. The report also argues for much earlier and more expert support for families where a young person with a

disability is using violence in the home. YACVic supports these calls, and the above principles, and hopes they will inform subsequent allocation of resources.<sup>19</sup>

- **Recommendation 33:** Ensure that the Sexually Abusive Behaviours Treatment Service and other suitable treatment programs are available for all age groups up to and including 17-year-olds and resource enhanced service delivery of the programs across Victoria.
- **Notes:** In recent years there has been a strong, rising demand for young people aged 15 to 17 years to access the Sexually Abusive Behaviours Treatment Services program (funded by DHHS). Providers of this program have been most commonly resourced to treat young people aged 10 to 15. While some offer services up to age 17, there is a significant unmet demand for this older age group. The Commission added that 15 to 17 year olds who are displaying sexually abusive behaviours may need a different program to 10 to 14 year olds; if so, one should be developed.<sup>20</sup>
- **Timeframe recommended by the Commission:** Within 2 years.

**YACVic remarks:** We welcome the Victorian Government's commitment in the 2016 budget to extend the Sexually Abusive Behaviours Treatment program to 15-17 year olds.<sup>21</sup>

- **Recommendation 34:** Amend the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* (Vic) to extend the therapeutic treatment order regime to young people aged 15 to 17 years, so that the Children's Court of Victoria can order attendance at appropriate programs.
- **Notes:** The Commission heard that most young people within the Children's Court who have been charged with sexual offences enter therapeutic treatment programs voluntarily. However, at times a therapeutic treatment order (TTO) may be seen as necessary to ensure a young person attends appropriate therapy – and at present such TTOs can only be issued for children aged 10 to 14. The Children's Court has created quasi-TTOs for 15 to 17 years olds for sexual offences considered 'low level', but there is no legislative basis for this yet.<sup>22</sup>
- **Timeframe recommended by the Commission:** Within 2 years.

- **Recommendation 123:** Subject to successful evaluation of the Adolescent Family Violence Program, extend the program across Victoria.
- **Notes:** The Victorian Government is currently trialling Adolescent Family Violence Programs in Geelong, Ballarat and Frankston. They each deliver interventions of 4 to 6 months' length to around 50 young people aged 12 to 17 every year. The program, based broadly on the United States Step Up model, uses cognitive behavioural and skill development strategies and involves adolescent group work, parent group work and multi-family group work. The program is voluntary, not linked to court processes.<sup>23</sup>
- **Timeframe recommended by the Commission:** Within 2 years.
- **Recommendation 124:** Develop additional crisis and longer term supported accommodation options for adolescents who use violence in the home. This should be combined with therapeutic support to end the young person's use of violence in the home.
- **Notes:** The Commission comments that out-of-home care and the youth refuge system are not appropriate housing options for many adolescent young people who have left their homes because they used violence. These sectors are already oversubscribed and might have to place these young people alongside others who are escaping family violence, a dangerous combination. Alternative options suggested by the Commission include rapid rehousing for older adolescents into transitional housing stock managed by housing associations, with support provided by youth specialist, lead-tenant schemes.<sup>24</sup>
- **Timeframe recommended by the Commission:** Within 2 years.
- **Recommendation 125:** Victoria Police determine its baseline model for family violence teams and consider appointing dedicated youth resource officers to provide support to young people and their families following police attendance at an incident in which an adolescent has used violence in the home.
- **Notes:** The Commission notes that Victoria Police have relatively few options when called to an incident of adolescent violence. Often the only protective

mechanism is an intervention order, which the family may not wish, and there are few options for removing the young person or housing them elsewhere. The Commission comments that they would be reluctant to extend police powers without sufficient services to address the young person's behaviour; as such, the Commission does not support extending holding powers and family violence safety notices to people aged under 18. Greater expertise within Victoria Police is the focus instead.<sup>25</sup>

- **Timeframe recommended by the Commission:** Within 12 months.
- **Recommendation 126:** The Melbourne Children's Court establish family violence applicant and respondent worker positions to assist young people and families in situations where adolescents are using violence in the home.
- **Notes:** The Commission believes that when a young person who has used violence in the home appears before the Children's Court in the civil or criminal jurisdiction, the young person and their family must be provided with appropriate information about legal, community and case management options, counselling and service referrals. Young people and their families need expert assistance to manage the court processes, understand the conditions of an order, and access appropriate supports. Currently there is no dedicated staff member within the Children's Court to facilitate this.<sup>26</sup>
- **Timeframe recommended by the Commission:** Within 12 months.
- **Recommendation 128:** Trial and evaluate a model of linking Youth Justice Group Conferencing with an Adolescent Family Violence Program to provide an individual and family therapeutic intervention for young people who are using violence in the home and are at risk of entering the youth justice system.
- **Notes:** Youth Justice Group Conferencing has a rehabilitative focus and accompanies court proceedings involving young offenders. If a young person is found guilty of an offence, they may be eligible to participate in a group conference before the magistrate imposes a sentence. Group conferencing involves the young person's lawyer, a police member and a convenor, as well as the young person's family, the victim of the offence and a supporter of the victim.



Participants discuss how the offence has affected them and how the young person might repair the harm they have caused and prevent further offending. This is then used to create a report and outcomes plan, which the magistrate takes into account when sentencing the young person. Youth Justice Group Conferencing was not developed specifically for family violence cases, and is not recommended in cases of adult violence. However, the Commission argues, for families who want a restorative outcome, group conferencing could prove valuable – provided it involved professional counselling and support for the victims, therapeutic work with the young person, ongoing engagement with family support services, and expert conferencing which challenges violent attitudes and models respectful behaviour. Preliminary work is underway to develop such a pilot to connect with existing Adolescent Family Violence Programs.<sup>27</sup>

- **Timeframe recommended by the Commission:** Within 2 years.

**YACVic remarks:** We welcome the Royal Commission's emphasis on expert, therapeutic interventions to address adolescent violence in the home. This reflects the key messages of a number of submissions to the Commission, including our own. A therapeutic approach makes sense in light of the offenders' young age and potential for rehabilitation, as well as the fact that most families do not wish to lose contact with their child who has used violence. Moreover, a number of young people who use violence in the home are responding to issues of trauma, adult violence, mental illness or poorly supported cognitive disabilities – expert assistance is needed here. We also welcome the Commission's recognition that adolescent family violence should be viewed through a gendered lens (it is most commonly inflicted by male children upon female relatives), and their emphasis on the need to combat the secrecy and shame that has traditionally surrounded this topic and which has held back many families from accessing appropriate support.<sup>28</sup>

- **Recommendation 127:** Subject to successful evaluation of the Youth Diversion Program Pilot, establish a statutory youth diversion scheme.
- **Notes:** Historically, Victoria has not had a legislated court-based youth diversion scheme, despite the evidence that well-run diversion programs can be very

effective in preventing criminalisation of young people. Diversion has tended to occur through police cautioning and referral (with magistrate's consent) to informal diversion programs such as ROPES. As a result, diversion is inconsistent across Victoria and relies heavily on police discretion. To address this gap, the Children's Court received funding to deliver a 12-month Youth Diversion Pilot Program, which commenced in June 2015 in seven locations across Victoria, delivered by Jesuit Social Services in partnership with the Youth Support and Advocacy Service. The program will be evaluated in May 2016. Although the program is not focused on family violence, it may have a positive impact on addressing and preventing violent behaviours.<sup>29</sup>

- **Timeframe recommended by the Commission:** Within 2 years.

**YACVic remarks:** We welcome the Victorian Government's commitment in the 2016 state budget of \$5.6 million over two years for a youth diversion program through the Children's Court, building on the successful work of the Jesuit Social Services' Youth Diversion Pilot Program. Over \$1 million over two years was also committed to expand the Youth Justice Bail Supervision program, which provides young people referred by the Children's Court to management and support within the community.<sup>30</sup>

## Connecting and supporting service sectors

The Royal Commission observes the important roles that can be played by services across the health, legal and education sectors in identifying and responding to family violence. Professionals such as family lawyers, community health staff, GPs, hospital staff, ambulance and paramedics, maternal and child health nurses, midwives and dentists all have a role to play. Meanwhile, specialist family violence services would benefit from better understanding of the practice of other service systems and the other issues which may be affecting the safety and wellbeing of their clients. However, while there has been good training of some sectors in relation to family violence, such professional support does not reach all sectors.<sup>31</sup>

## Workforce development – responding to family violence

- **Recommendation 1:** Review and begin implementing the revised Family Violence Risk Assessment and Risk Management Framework (known as the Common Risk Assessment Framework or CRAF) in order to deliver a comprehensive framework that sets minimum standards and roles and responsibilities for screening, risk assessment, risk management, information sharing and referral through Victorian agencies. Amongst other things, the revised framework should incorporate evidence-based risk indicators that are specific to children. The framework should also reflect the needs of the diverse range of family violence victims and perpetrators.
- **Notes:** The Commission notes that we need much understanding of the impacts of trauma on children and young people, and that a common, consistent, evidence-based approach is needed to identify and assess risks to children.<sup>32</sup>
- **Timeframe recommended by the Commission:** By December 2017.
- **Recommendation 3:** Implement the revised Family Violence Risk Assessment and Risk Management Framework and develop a sustained workforce development and training strategy as part of the recommended family violence industry plan. The framework should provide for whole-of-workforce training for priority sectors – including general practitioners and hospital, mental health, drug and alcohol, child protection, aged care and disability workers – that takes into account and aligns with their roles and standards of practice. [For full details, see report.]
- **Notes:** The Commission calls for new resourcing and a workforce development strategy to meet the substantial increase in demand for CRAF workforce development across multiple government departments, agencies and community service organisations. Many different services can play a role in identifying and responding to family violence, and they will need relevant support that relates to their competencies and skills. The Commission suggests that CRAF be moved from its current position as a DHHS responsibility and placed instead within the Family Violence Unit of the Department of Premier and

Cabinet. A community-based body like Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria might be resourced to provide further education and training for the sector.<sup>33</sup>

- **Timeframe recommended by the Commission:** From January 2018.

**YACVic remarks:** These steps would be very welcome, and will presumably be supported by the \$10.4 million committed by the Victorian Government to build the capacity of the family violence workforce and support other workers to best identify and respond to family violence.<sup>34</sup> In particular, we welcome the Commission's recognition of the need to make CRAF workforce development relevant to diverse communities and service sectors, a need stressed in our own submission in relation to youth services. We hope this process of workforce development will be fully inclusive of the youth sector, who have made clear their need for stronger, expert support to identify and respond to family violence. This is particularly important given that young people tend to seek support for related issues such as mental health and AOD in different service settings to older consumers. It would also be valuable to consider how such training could connect usefully to the Code of Ethical Practice for the Victorian Youth Sector.

- **Recommendation 208:** The Australian Association of Social Workers amend the Australian Social Work Education and Accreditation Standards to require that a “working with family violence” subject be required as a component of the core curriculum in all social work undergraduate degrees.
- **Notes:** The Commission observes that family violence is currently not a mandatory subject in many relevant degrees, including social work, psychology, nursing and AOD support, despite its obvious importance.
- **Timeframe recommended by the Commission:** Within 2 years.

**YACVic remarks:** This is welcome. YACVic's submission to the Royal Commission also highlighted the need to strengthen the role of youth workers in recognising and responding to family violence. While social workers may provide support for an entire family, youth workers recognise the young person as the primary client, acknowledging

their developing independence, and supporting them to make decisions about their own lives. This work is based on the belief that all young people should have access to someone who will uphold their interests, help them navigate challenges and build coping skills, and connect them to specialist supports if needed. Unfortunately, at present not all youth workers feel well equipped or supported to deal with disclosures of family and relationship violence or broader issues of violence prevention. Demand for CRAF training, for example, tends to outstrip supply and some workers in the youth sector are not familiar with CRAF at all. We submit this gap must be addressed. As the Commission itself notes ‘Youth services’ capacity to provide a soft entry point to assist young people experiencing family violence should be strengthened.’<sup>35</sup>

## **Workforce development – diversity and family violence**

- **Recommendation 167:** Require all funded family violence services to achieve a Rainbow Tick accreditation.
- **Timeframe recommended by the Commission:** By 31 December 2018.

**YACVic remarks:** This is welcome. In our submission to the Royal Commission, YACVic noted that young same sex attracted and sex/gender diverse young people are vulnerable to homelessness as a result of family conflict, and can struggle to access safe, appropriate housing support. As such (and in light of young people’s frequent lack of access to ‘family violence’ services), we would like to see all youth homelessness services also achieving a Rainbow Tick accreditation. We note that the Victorian Budget for 2016-17 includes a one-year allocation of \$2.5 million to support dedicated services that respond to violence within LGBTI families and improve service responses to LGBTI family violence through research – we await further details.<sup>36</sup>

- **Recommendation 172:** Fund training and education programs for disability workers – including residential workers, home and community care workers, interpreters and communication assistants and attendant carers – to encourage identification and reporting of family violence among people with disabilities.
- **Timeframe recommended by the Commission:** Within 2 years.

- **Recommendation 173:** Encourage the Commonwealth Government and the National Disability Insurance Agency to ensure that all disability services workers involved in assessing needs and delivering services have successfully completed certified training in identifying family violence and responding to it.
- **Timeframe recommended by the Commission:** Within 5 years.

**YACVic remarks:** While this is welcome, YACVic continues to hold strong concerns about abuses of young people *within* disability services, including residential settings which may be ‘home’ for that young person. As such, it is important young people with disabilities (and their care workers) are also well connected to adequately resourced, consumer-led external advocacy bodies, which have no funding interest in where the young person lives, and which can support the young person to report cases of violence, acting for them as the primary client.

- **Recommendation 139:** Fund Senior Rights Victoria, InTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence and Women with Disabilities Victoria develop partnerships with and provide relevant training to specialist family violence service providers and providers of universal services. [For full details, see report.]
- **Timeframe recommended by the Commission:** Within 12 months.
- **Recommendation 140:** Review and update standards for family service providers to specify their obligation to develop suitable services for diverse communities. [For full details see report]
- **Timeframe recommended by the Commission:** Within 2 years.
- **Recommendation 141:** Ensure the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission issue a guideline for service providers about meeting their obligation under the Equal Opportunity Act 2010 to act inclusively and avoid discrimination when delivering services to people affected by family violence. [For full details see report]
- **Timeframe recommended by the Commission:** Within 12 months.

**YACVic remarks:** We welcome the Commission's emphasis on better equipping family violence service providers to cope with the needs of diverse Victorian communities, and trust this will be one area supported by the Victorian Government's new funding commitments. The Victorian Government has commented 'Our investments ensure groups such as women and children in Aboriginal and multicultural communities, the elderly, the disabled, and gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex victims are also supported in starting a new life without family violence.'<sup>37</sup>

## Specialist family violence advisors

- **Recommendation 98:** Fund the establishment of specialist family violence advisor positions to be located in major mental health and drug and alcohol services. The advisors' expertise should be available to practitioners in these sectors across Victoria.
- **Notes:** The Commission argues that stronger collaboration is needed between the family violence, mental health and AOD sectors. To this end, we need better articulation of the various sectors' responsibilities in relation to family violence, removal of barriers to information sharing, and better in-service and pre-service training for all these sectors, with cross-sector learning, referral and consultation pathways between services. A specialist advisor position could be resourced in key services, in a mixture of metropolitan and rural locations and clinical and community settings. The Commission anticipates that mental health and AOD workers in every region should have access to this expertise. The evaluated results should then be used to inform future investment.<sup>38</sup>
- **Timeframe recommended by the Commission:** Within 12 months.

**YACVic remarks:** This is very welcome. YACVic urges that these specialist positions should also connect to youth mental health and AOD service sectors, as young people often receive help for these issues in different service settings to older adults.

## Strengthening child protection

The Royal Commission identifies key tensions between the aims, philosophy and approaches of child protection and family violence service systems. Child protection has not always taken into account the dilemmas faced by mothers experiencing violence and has placed unrealistic and unfair expectations on women to protect their children from men's abuse. Meanwhile, family violence services have often assumed that protecting and supporting women will result in safety for their children; this has not always been the case. Stronger links and shared expertise between child protection, Child FIRST, specialist family violence services and other service providers are needed.<sup>39</sup>

YACVic would welcome such a move. To this end, we note the Victorian Government's announcement of \$17 million over five years for a Child Protection Flexible Response initiative, which will co-locate family violence workers in child protection offices, as well as the broader changes to the child protection system as part of Roadmap for Reform.<sup>40</sup>

Also important is the Royal Commission's deep concern at the over-representation of Aboriginal children and young people in out-of-home care, a phenomenon strongly linked to family violence. (This issue was raised in many submissions to the Royal Commission, including those of the Koorie Youth Council and YACVic.) The Commission's report notes that the removal of Aboriginal children into care appears to worsen in areas which do not have strong Aboriginal controlled community organisations. Furthermore, the Commission found that there was a widespread failure of the care system to abide by its statutory obligations towards Aboriginal children in care, leading to further disconnection from culture and community. The Commission commented 'Deep concern was expressed by witnesses that without appropriate culturally sensitive and trauma-informed support for children in out-of-home care, the high rate of child removal will contribute to the next wave of family violence.'<sup>41</sup>

- **Recommendation 145:** Continue to work in partnership with Aboriginal communities to develop a statewide strategic response to improving the lives of vulnerable Aboriginal children and young people, and expand the Aboriginal



component of Child FIRST to reduce the high rates of removal of Aboriginal children. [For full details, see report.]

- **Timeframe recommended by the Commission:** Within 2 years.

**YACVic remarks:** YACVic welcomes this recommendation, and the subsequent commitments by the Victorian Government to enhancing preventative and early intervention responses to Aboriginal family violence. YACVic also welcomes the Commission's Recommendations 157 and 159 that the Code of Practice for the Investigation of Family Violence, as well as other relevant policies and procedures, be reviewed in relation to using interpretative services in family violence cases, to highlight the dangers of using children as interpreters.<sup>42</sup> This practice can pose a danger to a young person's safety, wellbeing, dignity and family life, and we would support its eradication.

## A well-informed community

The Commission acknowledges the importance of improving public understanding of family violence, as a component of prevention. The Victorian Government has committed \$61.6 million in family violence prevention funding, and while much of this is allocated for promoting respectful relationships in schools, there is also an undertaking of interventions in local communities 'where Victorians live, work and play'.

- **Recommendation 10:** Expand an existing website or create a new website to provide information for victims of all forms of family violence, and families, friends and community networks. This information should relate to both help during the crisis period and recovery in the longer term. [For full details, see report]
- **Notes:** The Commission comments 'It is important that any information about family violence is presented in ways that are accessible to everyone in the community, including young people and people from diverse communities'.<sup>43</sup>
- **Timeframe recommended by the Commission:** Within 2 years.

**YACVic remarks:** This is welcome. In our submission to the Royal Commission, YACVic suggested that online supports for young people experiencing family violence might be usefully informed by the evaluations of work already taking place to engage and support young people in online settings around mental health. (Examples include eheadspace's online and telephone counselling service, the apps and online forums developed by ReachOut.com, and the Online Wellbeing Centre being piloted by the Young and Well Cooperative Research Project, which links young people to tools about health, relationships, thoughts and emotions.)

- **Recommendation 142:** Ensure family violence community awareness and prevention programs and activities use language, imagery and messaging that reflect the diversity of the Victorian community. Prevention work should be developed in consultation with relevant communities and be evaluated in order to refine future practice.
- **Timeframe recommended by the Commission:** Within 2 years.

**YACVic remarks:** This is welcome, and we hope that young people and the youth sector will be fully engaged in this work.

- **Recommendation 166:** The Victorian LGBTI Taskforce, supported by relevant experts, provide advice on the following: research priorities relating to the nature and prevalence of and the most effective responses to family violence in LGBTI communities, effective prevention strategies, and intersections between family violence and health and wellbeing initiatives. [For full details, see report.]
- **Timeframe recommended by the Commission:** Within 2 years.

**YACVic remarks:** This is welcome. In light of the high vulnerability of same sex attracted and sex/gender diverse young people to various forms of violence from people they know, YACVic urges that any such research take into account violence and discrimination towards young people by parents, siblings and other relatives. Such research should also address same sex attracted and sex/gender diverse young people's experiences of violence, discrimination and exploitation within peer and intimate relationships. For example, a 2010 survey by the Australian Research Centre in

Sex, Health and Society of over 3,000 same sex attracted and sex/gender diverse young Australians found that these young people were more vulnerable than their peers to unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections; only half of them reported using a condom during their last experience of penetrative sex, and a fifth of the young women interviewed had sex only with men, despite their attraction to women. While the study attributed some of this to youthful experimentation, it was also clear that some of these young people were the victims of sexual violence in response to their sexuality or gender identity, and it appeared that others felt under pressure to prove themselves ‘normal’, even at the expense of their safety and dignity.<sup>44</sup>

## Respectful relationships and violence prevention

The Royal Commission’s report emphasises the importance of well evaluated, evidence-based prevention measures. In particular, it discusses the role of respectful relationships education in schools – a key issue discussed in many community submissions, including YACVic’s.

The report remarks ‘One of the most consistent messages the Commission heard was about the opportunity that the education of children and young people offers to prevent family violence in the future. In all of our community consultations with victims of family violence, specific communities and people who work in family violence related fields, across metropolitan Melbourne and regional Victoria, people emphasised the value of educating children and young people about respectful and healthy relationships.’<sup>45</sup>

The Victorian Government has endorsed this focus on education, and has already committed \$21.8 million over 2016-18 to support the delivery of respectful relationships education. These supports will include:

- Training and support for approximately 120 selected mentor ‘lighthouse’ schools to champion the program and drive positive change in their own and other schools.
- Professional learning for thousands of primary and secondary teachers to help them teach the respectful relationships program.

- Dedicated health officers in each of the Department of Education's local areas to support schools in responding to family violence and making connections with relevant services in the community.<sup>46</sup>

The Victorian Government has also announced continued funding for the Partners in Prevention program, led by Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria, which builds the capacity of school staff to support schools in delivering respectful relationships education – a welcome measure recommended in submissions including YACVic's.<sup>47</sup>

- **Recommendation 187:** Ensure that the Commission's recommended Statewide Family Violence Action Plan includes a primary prevention strategy that should guide and be guided by the Victorian Government's Gender Equality Strategy, refer to actions to be taken and be accompanied by performance measures, and be supported by dedicated funding for family violence primary prevention. [For full details, see report.]
- **Timeframe recommended by the Commission:** Within 12 months.

**YACVic remarks:** A well resourced and well evaluated prevention strategy would be very welcome. We await further details of how this will align with (or be contained within) the Victorian Government's upcoming Gender Equality Strategy, one of the initiatives to be supported by the \$61.6 million committed to family violence prevention. (YACVic's [submission](#) to the Gender Equality Strategy is available online).

- **Recommendation 189:** The Victorian Government mandate the introduction of respectful relationships education into every government school in Victoria from prep to Year 12. Implementation should be staged to ensure school readiness and allow for ongoing evaluation and adaptation. It should be delivered through a whole-of-school approach and be consistent with best practice, building on the evaluation of the model being tested with the Department of Education and Training through Our Watch.
- **Notes:** While supporting respectful relationships education, the Commission also emphasises how crucial it is to get this right. In particular, it is important to ensure a whole-of-school approach. Schools will require training for all teachers

(not just those delivering the immediate respectful relationships curriculum), as well as protocols with support agencies beyond Child Protection, and engagement with parents and the wider community. Unless these issues are addressed, a respectful relationships curriculum may risk triggering disclosures of violence which schools are ill-equipped to deal with. To meet these challenges, a staged approach with considerable planning and preparation will be needed.<sup>48</sup>

- **Timeframe recommended by the Commission:** Within 5 years.

**YACVic remarks:** YACVic welcomes the push for respectful relationships education and the Victorian Government's commitments in this space. We support the Commission's emphasis on evaluation, a whole-of-school approach, and building on the findings of the Our Watch initiative. We also welcome the Commission's recognition that in order for respectful relationships education to be successful, school staff must be prepared to deal with student disclosures of violence. Staff must be supported to recognise warning signs and have clear referral pathways and links to services.<sup>49</sup>

However, schools' capacity to deal with these issues can also depend on their access to expert staff such as psychologists, counsellors, school nurses and wellbeing staff. At present, many schools, especially in rural areas, have relatively scant wellbeing support and will need stronger resourcing to cope with increased demand.

Furthermore, it is not yet quite clear how the Catholic and independent school sectors will be supported (and required) to work in this space. The Victorian Government will support Catholic and independent schools to implement the new school curriculum in general, and the Commission calls for this to include respectful relationships education.<sup>50</sup> YACVic believes respectful relationships education should be accessible to students in all Victorian schools.

Questions also remain over how respectful relationships education will be implemented in specialist schools. YACVic would submit that given the high risks of violence to young people with disabilities, respectful relationships education within these settings is especially important.

Furthermore, questions remain about how such preventative work will engage young people who are out of the mainstream school system – a cohort who can be more likely than their peers to be experiencing violence and other problems at home. The Commission notes the potential of the upcoming Navigator and LOOKOUT models to enhance support for disengaged young people, and observes that some anti-violence work is occurring in TAFE settings<sup>51</sup>. But we believe much more could be done to strengthen community VCAL and flexible learning settings to support young people at risk of violence.

To this end, YACVic welcomes the Victorian Government's commitment in the 2016 budget of half a million dollars in 2016-17 for family violence prevention initiatives targeted at disengaged young people.<sup>52</sup> We eagerly await further details about where and how this will be delivered.

YACVic will continue to advocate on the importance of prevention, early intervention and intensive, therapeutic support for young people experiencing family violence. For more information, please contact Jessie Mitchell, Policy Manager, on [policy@yacvic.org.au](mailto:policy@yacvic.org.au) or 9267 3722.

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- <sup>1</sup> For more details, see Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, 'Young people and family violence: A submission to the Royal Commission into Family Violence, June 2015,' <http://www.yacvic.org.au/policy-publications/publications-listed-by-policy-area/44-safety-health-and-wellbeing/592-yacvic-s-submission-to-the-royal-commission-into-family-violence>
- <sup>2</sup> Royal Commission into Family Violence (RCFV), Melbourne, March 2016, Vol. II: Report and recommendations, pp.7, 17, 101, 109, 130, 139-40
- <sup>3</sup> RCFV, Vol. II, pp.113, 115
- <sup>4</sup> RCFV, Vol. II, p.142
- <sup>5</sup> For example, RCFV, Vol. VI, p.25
- <sup>6</sup> Victorian Government media release, 'Urgent family violence investment will keep women and children safe,' 27 April 2016
- <sup>7</sup> Victorian Government media release, 'Urgent family violence investment will keep women and children safe,' 27 April 2016
- <sup>8</sup> RCFV, Vol. II p.194; RCFV, Vol. IV, p.169
- <sup>9</sup> Victorian Government media release, 'Urgent family violence investment will keep women and children safe,' 27 April 2016
- <sup>10</sup> RCFV, Vol. III, p.138
- <sup>11</sup> Victorian Government, media releases, 'Stronger justice system to respond to family violence,' 13 April 2016, and 'Safer courts and more efficient justice for Victorians,' 27 April 2016
- <sup>12</sup> Victorian Government, *Victorian Budget 16/17*, Budget paper 3, Melbourne, p.12
- <sup>13</sup> RCFV, Vol. II, p.127
- <sup>14</sup> RCFV, Vol. II, pp.127-28
- <sup>15</sup> Victorian Government, *Victorian Budget 16/17*, Budget paper 3, pp.9, 15
- <sup>16</sup> RCFV, Vol. II, pp.38, 75
- <sup>17</sup> Hope Street, media release, 'Funding announcement gives rapid response to youth crisis,' 13 April 2016, <http://www.hopest.org/news/articles/114-media-release-funding-announcement-gives-rapid-response-to-youth-in-crisis>; Melbourne City Mission, media release, 'Melbourne's first CBD youth refuge gets the green light,' 14 April 2016, <http://www.melbournecitymission.org.au/news-media/media-releases/release/melbourne-s-first-cbd-youth-refuge-gets-the-green-light>; Victorian Government media release, 'Housing blitz for women and children begins,' 13 April 2016
- <sup>18</sup> RCFV, Vol. IV, p.166
- <sup>19</sup> RCFV, Vol. IV, pp.167-68
- <sup>20</sup> RCFV, Vol. II, pp.228, 232, 238
- <sup>21</sup> Victorian Government, *Victorian Budget 16/17*, Budget paper 3, p.13
- <sup>22</sup> RCFV, Vol. II, p.238
- <sup>23</sup> RCFV, Vol. IV, p.163
- <sup>24</sup> RCFV, Vol. IV, p.170
- <sup>25</sup> RCFV, Vol. IV, p.171
- <sup>26</sup> RCFV, Vol. IV, p.172
- <sup>27</sup> RCFV, Vol. IV, p.175
- <sup>28</sup> RCFV, Vol. IV, pp.150-57
- <sup>29</sup> RCFV, Vol. IV, p.173
- <sup>30</sup> Victorian Government, *Victorian Budget 16/17*, Budget paper 3, pp.9, 15; Victorian Government media release, 'Keeping our kids safe: more support for child protection,' 27 April 2016; Victorian Government media release, 'Reducing youth offending by intervening early,' 24 April 2016
- <sup>31</sup> RCFV, Vol. VI, p.206-7
- <sup>32</sup> RCFV, Vol. I, p.137
- <sup>33</sup> RCFV, Vol. I, p.140; RCFV, Vol. VI, p.207
- <sup>34</sup> Victorian Government media release, 'Urgent family violence investment will help keep women and children safe,' 27 April 2016
- <sup>35</sup> RCFV, Vol. II, p.148
- <sup>36</sup> Victorian Government, *Victorian Budget 16/17*, Budget paper 3, p.12
- <sup>37</sup> Victorian Government media release, 'Urgent Family Violence Investment Will Help Keep Women And Children Safe,' 13 April 2016
- <sup>38</sup> RCFV, Vol. IV, p.52
- <sup>39</sup> RCFV, Vol. II, pp.185, 200
- <sup>40</sup> Victorian Government media release, 'Family Violence Support For Vulnerable Children,' 8 April 2016
- <sup>41</sup> RCFV, Vol. V, pp.25, 27
- <sup>42</sup> RCFV, Summary and recommendations, pp.187-88; RCFV, Vol. V, pp.123-24

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<sup>43</sup> RCFV, Vol. II, p.26

<sup>44</sup> Lynne Hillier, Tiffany Jones, Marisa Monagle, Naomi Overton, Luke Gahan, Jennifer Blackman, Anne Mitchell, *Writing Themselves In 3: the third national study on the sexual health and wellbeing of same sex attracted and gender questioning young people*, Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University, Melbourne, 2010, pp.33-37

<sup>45</sup> RCFV, Vol.VI, p.60

<sup>46</sup> Victorian Government media release, 'Promoting Respectful Relationships In Our Schools And Kinders,' 13 April 2016

<sup>47</sup> RCFV, Vol.VI, pp.29-30

<sup>48</sup> RCFV, Vol.VI, p.60

<sup>49</sup> RCFV, Vol. II, p.145

<sup>50</sup> RCFV, Vol.VI, p.61

<sup>51</sup> RCFV, Vol.VI, p.33-35

<sup>52</sup> Victorian Government, *Victorian Budget 16/17*, Budget paper 3, p.16