

# Gender equality and family violence

## SIGNIFICANT INITIATIVES

### Family violence response

- **Driving down family and sexual violence**  
\$10.4m in 2024-25 (\$41.6m/4 yrs) to continue delivery of the perpetrator case management program with individualised and timely interventions to reduce the risk associated with perpetrators' use of family violence. This includes responses for diverse cohorts, including Aboriginal communities, as well as the specialised intervention programs for diverse cohorts. The Budget also continues support for research that can inform evidence-based policy and program development for prevention of family violence.
- **Family violence victim survivors supports**  
\$35.8m in 2024-25 (\$72m/2 yrs) to support family violence victim survivors, including:
  - Specialist supports including case management, therapeutic interventions for children and young people, crisis brokerage, and flexible support packages for victim survivors on temporary visas;
  - Safe and secure accommodation including operation of the core and cluster refuges, supported emergency accommodation for families with complex needs, the post-crisis Short-Term Accommodation Response program at Berry Street, and Personal Safety Initiative responses to ensure safety of victim survivors in their own homes;
  - Critical workforce supports including staffing at peak body Sexual Assault Services Victoria, workforce capability building to improve responses to multicultural communities, and training packages for professionals and organisations to better respond to children and young people using family violence or experiencing family violence.
- **Community sector legal support and early intervention services**  
\$8.7m in 2024-25 (\$28.8m/4 yrs) is provided to continue early intervention programs that provide legal assistance for people experiencing hardship. Part of this funding is earmarked for integrated service projects and early intervention Health Justice Partnerships delivered by community legal centres. The Budget papers specify that this will include assisting people experiencing family violence to put in place safety plans and apply for family violence intervention orders, avoiding homelessness; to re-establish plans to resolve financial matters; and to deal with other legal matters.
- **Safer families: Central Information Point service**  
\$12.0m in 2024-25 (\$24.3m/2 yrs) for the continued operation of the statewide Central Information Point, the multi-agency service that collates and shares relevant information about the risk of harm posed by perpetrators of family violence to inform family violence risk

assessment and management.

- **Family violence victim survivors supports**  
\$1.1m in 2024-25 (\$4m/4 yrs) to embed the child and young person-focused practice guidance and tools into the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management (MARAM) framework.
- **Financial counselling support for victim survivors of family violence**  
\$1.7m in 2024-25 (\$6.8m/4 yrs) to continue delivering financial counselling services to family violence victim survivors facing financial stress.

### Gender equality and primary prevention of gendered violence

- **Preventative health support for Victorian women**  
\$9.1m in 2024-25 (\$18.3m/2 yrs) to support 12 women's health organisations across Victoria to provide preventative health promotion and education to Victorian women, with a particular focus on sexual and reproductive health, cervical cancer screening, chronic illness, family violence and other gendered health promotion initiatives.
- **Women's leadership and recognition**  
\$1.8m in 2024-25 to continue programs that promote the participation, leadership and recognition of women. This includes targeted programs to support women from diverse backgrounds including First Nations women and women of colour to navigate barriers to advancement and leadership, paving the way for systemic and cultural change.
- **Respectful Relationships for children and youth**  
\$10.4m in 2024-25 (\$39.1m/4 yrs) to continue to deliver the Respectful Relationships program to support schools and early childhood educators to promote respectful and positive attitudes and behaviours. The initiative provides training and support to schools to implement respectful relationships education as a core component of the Victorian curriculum. It also includes professional development for early childhood educators to support teaching children how to build healthy relationships, resilience and confidence. Funding is also provided for partnerships with Safe and Equal, Jesuit Social Services and the Pat Cronin Foundation to support delivery.

### WHAT'S GOOD

- The Victorian Government continues to stay the course on tackling the scourge of gendered violence. Crucially – amongst the suite of initiatives – this Budget preserves investment in a raft of specialist family violence programs and services that were facing lapsing funding. However, we note this extended funding is just two years in duration. While we recognise the broader investment context – investments in the 2024-25 Budget bring the state's total investment in family violence since the Royal Commission to a nation-leading \$4bn – ending gendered violence involves long-term systemic and cultural change. It's challenging for the specialist family violence sector to deliver long-term reform with short-term funding.

- Five family violence initiatives in the 2024-25 Budget are located in the Early Intervention Investment Framework (EIIF). This is significant. The Victorian Government introduced the EIIF in the 2021-22 Budget, becoming the first Australian jurisdiction to embed early intervention into its budget process. The EIIF is intended to support the service system to help more Victorians get effective early help before problems escalate. The prominence of family violence in the EIIF sends a positive and welcome signal about the Government's genuine commitment to this issue. Another benefit is that the EIIF provides greater visibility of the projected avoided costs and economic benefits of early intervention in family violence. Cumulatively, the Budget papers project that a five-year investment in family violence initiatives of \$167.5m will yield between \$115m and \$140m in estimated avoided costs over 10 years, and estimate between \$60m and \$120m in economic benefits. However, one observation about the selected initiatives is that there are some (for example, Respectful Relationships funding) that are reasonably well-established, which we think should move into recurrent funding by departments, creating the space for the EIIF to test and prove *emerging* models of early intervention in family violence.
- Although the exact amount is unknown at this stage, funding has been allocated for research to inform evidence-based policy and program development for prevention of family violence. This new investment is welcome as we know that investing in primary prevention research and initiatives is key to helping stop violence before it begins and providing better support to families and communities.
- We are pleased to see an investment in community sector legal support and early intervention services, particularly in the integrated services fund program. There are great examples of how integrating legal and non-legal supports can address service gaps, silos and access issues for people with multiple and complex needs. A wealth of expertise has been building up in the community legal sector and this investment in community legal centres will deliver significant benefits for many Victorians.
- VCOSS is also pleased to see an investment of \$18.3m over two years to further support 12 women's health services across Victoria to provide preventative health promotion and education to Victorian women. Gender inequity produces unequal access to healthcare and poor health and wellbeing outcomes. These women's health services not only deliver tailored sexual and reproductive health advice, information and testing to their communities, but – crucially – increase awareness of gendered health needs and drive improvement across the broader health system, alongside LGBTIQ+ health services. Looking ahead, we urge the Victorian Government to lock in boost funding as the new baseline level for the women's health services and introduce long-term contracts to improve economic security for the women's health workforce.
- The Victorian Government has foreshadowed it will have more to say in coming weeks about further measures to prevent family violence, address toxic masculinity, and help make sure women are safe. A new funding package is critical if we are to drive down the high rates of family violence and gender-based violence in our communities.

## WHAT'S MISSING

- While VCOSS welcomes the \$72 million in lapsing funding uplifts for a further two years, we are concerned that this short-term funding does not provide the certainty that frontline specialist family violence services need, particularly as demand for services continues to rise.
- The \$42 million for perpetrator case management only represents an extension of funding. If we are to stop men's use of violence, we need to invest in frontline services working with men, including investing in evidence-informed practice and programs that support perpetrators to change their behaviour, directing funding to improve the evidence base underpinning perpetrator accountability programs, growing and developing the perpetrator intervention workforce, and investing in suitable housing options for perpetrators.
- There is no funding for the Sexual Violence Strategy, which was recommended by the Victorian Law Reform Commission, and we note that we are currently waiting on further detail as to whether there is new funding for sexual assault services.
- VCOSS is disappointed to see that there was no new investment in Seniors Rights Victoria, which is the only integrated legal and advocacy service specialising in elder abuse that covers the whole state. We highlighted in our [State Budget Submission](#) that Seniors Rights Victoria was struggling to meet increased demand, despite the injection of funding last year.
- While this Budget invests \$18.4 million in output initiatives in women's policy (including economic security, safety, leadership, health and wellbeing), alongside investment of \$1.8 million in 2024-25 to continue programs that promote the participation, leadership and recognition of women, VCOSS was hopeful that this Budget would contain significant new investment in gender equality initiatives following the release of Victoria's gender equality strategy, *Our equal state*, last August.
- A missing piece in the women's leadership space is investment in part-time and co-leadership in the community sector. The community sector is one of the state's most feminised industries. In our [State Budget Submission](#), we sought investment in a women's co-leadership pilot initiative, to get more women and gender diverse people into leadership roles in community services, resulting in improved economic security and better career progression.

### What have VCOSS members had to say?

- ["\[The Budget\] missed a crucial opportunity to address high rates of family violence."](#) **No To Violence**
- ["Staying the course on family violence, but more needed for long-term change."](#) **Safe and Equal**