



**Department of Planning and Community Development,
Department of Human Services, Department of Justice
and Victoria Police**

Victorian Family Violence Reforms

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Department of Premier and Cabinet would like to thank officers from the Family Violence Interdepartmental Committee for sharing their learnings and insights and congratulate them on winning their innovation award.

Authorised by the Victorian Government, Melbourne

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collaborate

The Victorian Family Violence Reforms (FVR) are unique in Australia and represent a sustained effort to build an integrated response by departments, agencies and service providers working across and outside of government. Broader cultural change, to reduce violence against women before it occurs, is the next frontier for policy and practice in Victoria. The Family Violence Reforms are an exemplar of innovation in the public sector in dealing with a complex, intractable and multi-sectoral problem.

The Department of Planning and Community Development (DPCD), Department of Human Services (DHS), Department of Justice (DJJ) and Victoria Police (VicPol) were recognized for this achievement as the winner of the Institute for Public Administration Australia (IPAA) Victoria Leadership in the Public Sector Award 2010 for Innovation in Service Delivery.

This case study examines the hallmarks of public sector innovation that characterized the success of the FVR. It shares learnings and insights across the Victorian Public Service (VPS).

1. The policy context

The Victorian policy context for the FVR is complex because it involves different departments and portfolio areas across government, multiple settings across the community and a suite of different policies and programs to address family violence.

Prior to the FVR there was fragmented service provision and no clearly defined "family violence service system" or unifying cohesive policy framework. Yet, integrated system models operating internationally have proven to be effective in addressing family violence.

Building on sustained effort and prior research and policy

The FVR was developed over a sustained period building on extensive research and policy development which included:

- > The *Women's Safety Strategy 2002-2007*, a five-year plan to guide coordinated action across government to reduce violence against women.
- > The establishment in 2002 of the Family Violence Statewide Advisory Committee (FVSAC) (formerly the Statewide Steering Committee to Reduce Family Violence) as a government and non-government partnership to advise on building an effective, integrated multi-agency response to family violence in Victoria. The FVSACs early work focused on building a shared understanding of family violence, the need for standardised responses and management of risk to women and their children by the system and the need to provide advice about service models that would support police, courts and specialist services to operate together as an effective and integrated system.
- > The release of Victoria Police's *Violence against Women Strategy 2002-2008* by the former Chief Commissioner Christine Nixon identified violence against women as a strategic priority for police and provided strong impetus for integration throughout the emerging family violence system. This strategy was also the basis for the development of the Victoria Police Code of Practice for the Investigation of Family Violence (2004), which provides the framework for police when responding to family violence. The Code of Practice has had a dramatic effect on significantly improving response for victims of family violence. Building on these reforms, *Living Free from Violence — Upholding the Rights*, the next iteration of the Victoria Police *Violence against Women Strategy* for 2009-2014, was also recently released.

- > The development of the *Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Strategy* in 2002 was a community-led partnership approach between Indigenous communities and the Government. After the Indigenous Family Violence Taskforce delivered its report to the Government, the Indigenous Family Violence Partnership Forum (IFVPF) was established in 2005. It is chaired by the Parliamentary Secretary for Community Development and includes Indigenous community leaders and senior Victorian and Australian Government representatives. This unique partnership approach is the first of its kind on Indigenous family violence in Australia. It is a living document which will guide joint government and community efforts to prevent and respond to family violence in Indigenous communities over the next ten years. The Indigenous Family Violence 10 Year Plan, *Strong Culture, Strong Peoples; Strong Families: towards a safer future for Indigenous families and communities*, was launched in June 2008.
- > The release of the *Reforming the Family Violence System in Victoria* report (2005), developed by the FVSAC, providing advice to Government on directions for family violence reform. Key elements included: a guiding set of principles, a focus on integration across the three main systems — police, justice and the family violence service system — and developing common practices and processes to ensure consistent responses by individual agencies.
- > The allocation of \$35.1 million in 2005 as part of the Government's *A Fairer Victoria* initiative to build a strong and cohesive response to family violence. Since then, the Government has invested over \$100 million in family violence reform.

The reforms are also built on a strong commitment to a research and evidence base. In 2004 the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth) identified the prevention of violence against women as a priority for action in *The Health Costs of Violence — Measuring the burden of disease of intimate partner violence*. This research showed that intimate partner violence is the highest contributor to the disease burden in Victorian women aged 15-44 years.

Preventing violence before it occurs — the next area of whole-of-government effort

In 2007 the Government commissioned VicHealth to develop a research and evidence base to provide a sound theoretical basis and guide policy-making in the development of a statewide, whole-of-government primary prevention plan. The result was *Preventing Violence Before It Occurs — A Framework and Background Paper to Guide the Primary Prevention of Violence against Women in Victoria*. The framework was endorsed by Government and an Interdepartmental Committee focused on primary prevention was established to oversee the development of a plan to prevent violence against women in 2008.

This sustained effort culminated in the 2009 launch of *A Right to Respect: Victoria's Plan to Prevent Violence against Women 2010-2020*.

vps
case
study

Innovation in the public sector

Innovation in the public sector is important for improving the quality and efficiency of public services and responding to changing social and economic conditions and long-term public policy challenges.

While there is no well-accepted definition, Mulgan and Albury (2003) define innovation as "new ideas that work". Specifically, they say:

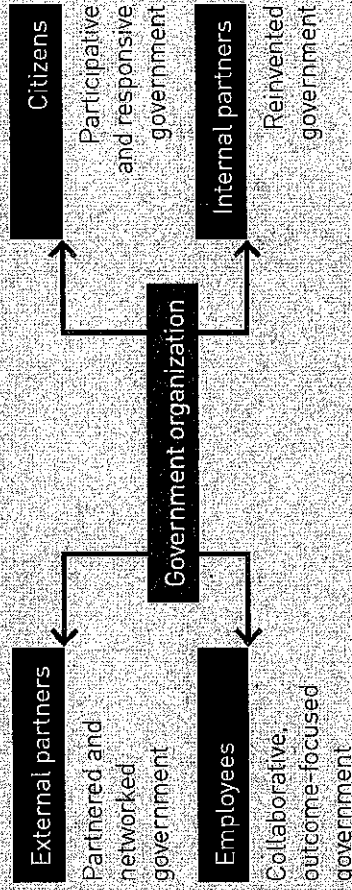
"Successful innovation is the creation and implementation of new processes, products, services and methods of delivery which result in significant improvements in outcomes, efficiency, effectiveness or quality."

While there is no universal formula for innovation in the public sector, there are recurring themes offered in the literature*

- > Innovation is driven by a **catalyst or purpose**, whether an urgency or unusual event or an intractable, complex, multi-sectoral problem (a so-called "wicked problem") that requires a new approach.
- > There are **degrees of innovation** ranging from:

INCREMENTAL	PROGRESSIVE	TRANSFORMATIONAL
Continuous improvement	Cumulative innovation	Game changing, systemic, structural

- > Sources of innovation reside both within and outside of government, typically arising from **partnering, networking and collaborating with others**.
- > Innovation is a **discipline** just like strategy, planning and budgeting. It needs to link to the organisation's mission and values, structure, processes, people and reward systems.



- > Innovation is a **capability** typically requiring:
 - > **putting people at the centre:**
 - > working together across agencies and sectors in an **integrated** way;
 - > **learning and adapting** quickly from pilots, trials and feedback;
 - > **teams with diverse skills**, focused and resilient;
 - > involving **front line staff**;
 - > **political and bureaucratic top down support;**
 - > **leadership and guiding principles** to provide the supporting framework;
 - > **overcoming barriers:**
 - > a greater tolerance for **risk taking** and "honourable" failure;
 - > **persistent funding** to last long enough to make a difference; and
 - > **evaluating** the difference innovation makes on the ground.
- * Many useful examples of the literature are available on VPS Hub.

2. What was innovative about the FVR?

The FVR demonstrated many hallmarks of public sector innovation in service delivery, particularly in three respects:

- › Putting women and children at the centre: The FVR placed the safety of women and children as paramount providing a different lens with which to view the problem and deliver services. Providing better, more integrated responses to women and children experiencing family violence became the priority due to the overwhelmingly gendered nature of this human rights violation.
- › Achievement of system-wide integration: An integrated, multi-faceted, whole-of-system approach was designed that sought to embed systemic change that would be sustained over the long term.
- › Pioneering models of leadership and governance: Broad-based leadership across the ministerial and executive levels of Government and integrated governance arrangements are critical in delivering the reforms.

3. Putting women and children at the centre

A basic human right

Public sector innovation is driven by putting people at the centre of policy development. Central to the FVR was the context of a rights framework, an acceptance of a basic human right to safety in the home and to live free from violence. It placed the rights of women and children as paramount. The FVR involved moving from a service system that put the responsibility on the person exposed to violence to take action, to a responsive and integrated system that emphasized the safety of women and their children and the accountability of perpetrators of violence.

Victoria was also the first state in Australia to adopt specific legislation for the protection and promotion of human rights, with the *Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*. This commitment to human rights has helped drive reforms in the criminal justice and service systems responding to family violence and sexual assault.

Tackling such a complex, intractable problem as family violence took courage and clarity of purpose that all violence against women and children was unacceptable and must stop. This provided a strong vision of what the new system needed to be.

Building partnerships

The involvement of the non-government sector in partnership with Government was crucial in coalescing support for and developing the reforms. This included setting up the FVSAC in 2002 as a community and Government partnership to advise on building an effective, integrated response to family violence in Victoria. This partnership continues to play an important role advising on policy and program development.

A fragmented service response to addressing family violence meant that developing partnerships across all levels of service provision was important. Creating the broad-based foundations for a systemic approach to reform took considerable time and real investment in building and valuing these partnerships.

4. Achieving system wide integration

Unifying a package of policies under a primary organising principle

Preventing violence against women and children is a complex task involving interventions at several levels of government and community, intersecting policies and overlapping interventions in numerous settings. Therefore the reforms comprise a number of integrated components that approach the prevention of family violence from different facets and in different ways that are mutually-supporting.

The reforms have involved a range of new policies, programs, legislation and operational codes including:

- > The new *Family Violence Protection Act 2008* that provides a clear legislative framework to better protect victims of family violence and hold perpetrators accountable. Key elements of the new legislation include:
 - > A consistent and comprehensive definition of family violence that includes economic and emotional abuse as well as other types of threatening or controlling behaviour.
 - > A new system of police-issued family violence safety notices which provide police with an additional tool to respond quickly and effectively to family violence after hours.
 - > Making it easier for victims to remain in the family home and for perpetrators of violence to be required to leave.

- > The Victoria Police *Code of Practice for the Investigation of Family Violence (2004)* with key aims being the safety and support for victims, early intervention, investigation and prosecution of criminal offences, and minimisation of family violence in the community.
 - > Providing new housing and crisis support options for women and children, as well as new crisis accommodation for men and increased funding for men's voluntary behaviour change programs.
 - > Providing new specialist family violence services at Magistrates' Courts, establishing the Family Violence Court Division, supporting family violence counselling programs and new specialist family violence lawyers and establishing court-directed men's behaviour change programs.
 - > A Family Violence Risk Assessment and Risk Management Framework with substantial state-wide, cross-sector workforce development.
 - > The development of the Indigenous Family Violence 10 Year Plan, *Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families: Towards a safer future for Indigenous families and communities*, reinforcing the need for a specialised but mutually supportive family violence response for Indigenous communities.
 - > A new, systemic review of family violence deaths in Victoria undertaken by the State Coroner's Office (2008).
 - > Increased capacity of mainstream services providers (such as Maternal and Child Health Nurses) to identify and respond effectively to family violence.
- These policy changes are supported by overarching Victorian legislation in the *Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* that provides a context for the prevention of violence as a human right.

Linking a whole-of-system approach

Many policy problems are so complex that no single agency can solve them. This was the case in responding to family violence. There was a need to look at the system as a whole to provide an integrated response and improve linkages between different agencies and different parts of the service delivery.

The reforms started at the crisis or response end and located the safety of women and their children as a central objective. There was a need to strengthen the police and justice system response to family violence through new operational and legislative changes. There was a need for an integrated response incorporating specific services providing victim support and counselling and mainstream social services such as housing.

Developing common practices and processes

Developing consistent approaches across agencies was vital for two reasons:

- (1) for horizontal integration of the system, particularly at critical intersections between agencies; and
- (2) ensuring that the reforms were consistently implemented on the ground through changed practice.

Frontline staff from police to case managers needed to have a shared understanding about family violence and the practices to prevent it. These included developing a consistent definition of family violence, common risk assessment and risk management frameworks and complementary codes of practice.

The development of a multi-sector risk assessment framework for family violence was one of the most critical elements of this system's reform and service delivery. The project looked at evidence internationally and, alongside a comprehensive consultation process, developed an innovative risk management framework for Victoria.

The Family Violence Risk Assessment and Risk Management Framework was launched in 2007. This initiative will continue to strengthen and build the workforce capacity across the integrated service system and the health and education sectors, embedding and extending the risk assessment and risk management training. The Framework provides:

- > a clear and transparent approach to the assessment of safety and risk in each family coming into contact with family violence services;
- > a standardised approach to risk assessment and risk management across service providers; and
- > an approach consistent with the whole-of-government reform objectives and initiatives already in place.

Training in the framework has been successfully delivered to over 2500 specialist family violence workers and mainstream services. Training for the broader community in identifying family violence as an ongoing process. An excellent training package, supporting materials and website have been developed.

5. Pioneering leadership and governance models

Without clear support from the top, innovation gets stifled. Ministers and senior levels of the bureaucracy are vital in setting aspirational outcomes and supporting their achievement.

Consistent ministerial and executive leadership within departments and agencies has been a critical enabler of the FVR. The complexity of family violence required a groundbreaking holistic approach that, in turn, necessitated innovative leadership and governance arrangements to ensure a multi-sectoral response.

Strong leadership

The political will to drive reform was fundamental to achieving the FVR. The problem was seen as a whole-of-government priority and was led by the Family Violence Ministers:

- > Maxine Morand, the Minister for Women's Affairs and Early Childhood Development (lead minister);
- > Rob Hulls, Attorney-General;
- > Lisa Neville, Minister for Community Services;
- > Bob Cameron, Minister for Police and Emergency Services; and
- > Richard Wynne, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Housing and Local Government.

The Chief Commissioners of Victoria Police — current and former — have provided critical leadership in driving and enabling Victorian reform.

Structuring governance arrangements to support integration

This political leadership was supported by governance structures that enabled system integration. These governance structures are supported by a Family Violence Reform Co-ordination Unit in DPCD.

FAMILY VIOLENCE INTERDEPARTMENTAL COMMITTEE (FVIDC)

The FVIDC was critical in development of the reforms and continues to play an ongoing role in their implementation. The FVIDC overcame a common barrier to public sector innovation — the difficulty in working across departmental and agency silos. Over time, multi-lateral relationships developed across organisational boundaries. The reform implementation has been strengthened by the longevity of the whole-of-government executive membership of the Interdepartmental Committee and it has consistently presented the Government with a coherent and accessible narrative around this complex issue.

Similarly, a Prevention IDC was established to oversee the development and implementation of *A Right to Respect: Victoria's Plan to Prevent Violence against Women*.

FAMILY VIOLENCE STATEWIDE ADVISORY COMMITTEE (FVSAC)

The FVSAC was set up in 2002 as a community and Government partnership to advise on building an effective, integrated response to family violence in Victoria. This partnership continues to play a critical role in advising on policy and program development. The FVSAC is co-chaired by DPCD and Victoria Police.

FAMILY VIOLENCE REGIONAL ADVISORY COMMITTEES

The high-level strategic policy coordination at state level is complemented by the coordination of regional implementation through regional advisory committees. The FVIDC has formal linkages with the Family Violence Regional Partnerships. These regional partnerships have multi-sector representation and monitor and drive regional initiatives.

INDIGENOUS FAMILY VIOLENCE PARTNERSHIP FORUM

The Indigenous Family Violence Partnership Forum, established in 2005, is the key forum through which the Regional Action Groups and key representatives work in partnership with the Victorian Government and provide leadership to address family violence in Indigenous communities.

Indigenous Family Violence Regional Action Groups were established in 2003 and have a leadership role in implementing community-led responses that educate, prevent, reduce and respond to family violence in Indigenous communities. These groups are an inclusive mechanism for the Victorian Indigenous community to develop local responses to family violence matters, ensuring they are responsive and culturally relevant to Indigenous individuals, families and communities.

DEVELOPMENT OF A WHOLE-OF-GOVERNMENT BUDGET PROPOSAL TO SUPPORT THE REFORM

Other common barriers to innovation are that funding sources are distributed across different departmental budgets and planning horizons favour the short term.

The FVR broke the mould with a whole-of-government Expenditure Review Committee (ERC) proposal in 2005-06 with long-term time frames. Two years of working together on the FVIDC enabled capacity and trust to be built between departments to ensure this process was effective.

6. Evaluating effectiveness of FVR

Clear measures for assessing the effectiveness or otherwise of innovation are vital in analyzing and learning, so that innovation can be more widely disseminated throughout the public sector.

Early findings on the FVR show that a strengthened police and justice response since 2004 has seen a 212% increase in intervention orders sought by Victoria Police and a 178% increase in charges laid. Reporting of family violence has increased by 22% during this time, reflecting growing confidence in the system to respond effectively and compassionately. These services have assisted more than 1300 women with outreach and intensive case management support every year.

A key component of the reforms are performance monitoring, research and evaluation and ongoing review. An Australian Research Council Grant is also supporting a five-year project by Melbourne and Monash Universities to review key reform areas.

As highlighted above, effort to date has focused on reform and the response to family violence — that is, after the violence has occurred. The next stage is the implementation of a comprehensive, long-term plan to prevent the violence from happening in the first place.

A Right to Respect: Victoria's Plan to Prevent Violence against Women 2010-2020 was launched in late 2009. This new plan is about the "other side" of the problem — creating cultural and attitudinal change to stop it from happening in the first place. The title reflects not only the human right of women to live free from violence; but the fact that — to achieve this right — we need a culture that respects women in our streets, communities and homes.

SOME KEY CHALLENGES

- > Systemic reform involves significant cultural change, and requires intensive focus on change management and partnership development.
- > Increased support for the embedding of practice changes into action on the ground relies on capacity in frontline staff. Many of these are lone workers or working in small teams. Significant practice changes require building continuous workforce development and capability.
- > Improving data collection and information sharing is also a challenging and resource-intensive task. It also requires building the system capacity to track outcomes across the system.

7. Reflecting personally

Mulgan and Albury (2003) state that three conditions are necessary for innovation to flourish: opportunity, skills and motivation. Of these, motivation was particularly important with the FVR given the confronting nature of the problem to be solved.

In reflecting on these personal dimensions, IDC representatives offered these insights:

- > It was enormously rewarding to be able to make a difference by tackling a major social issue of importance to the community, and to see some of the key policy and practice changes that are being embedded to improve women's and children's safety.
- > Working effectively with people across government and non-government requires a shared commitment to placing the safety of women and children on the mainstream agenda.
- > A key aspect of the success of the FVR requires ensuring a shared understanding of reform outcomes and including these in specific departmental initiatives and programs.
- > Sustaining the effort over a period of several years takes tenacity and persistence.

References

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- Victorian Government (2009), *A Right to Respect: Victoria's Plan to Prevent Violence against Women 2010-2020*, Office of Women's Policy, Department of Planning and Community Development, available at www.women.vic.gov.au
- For other resources on family violence reform, go to the website: www.familyviolence.vic.gov.au