

June 2021

Purpose

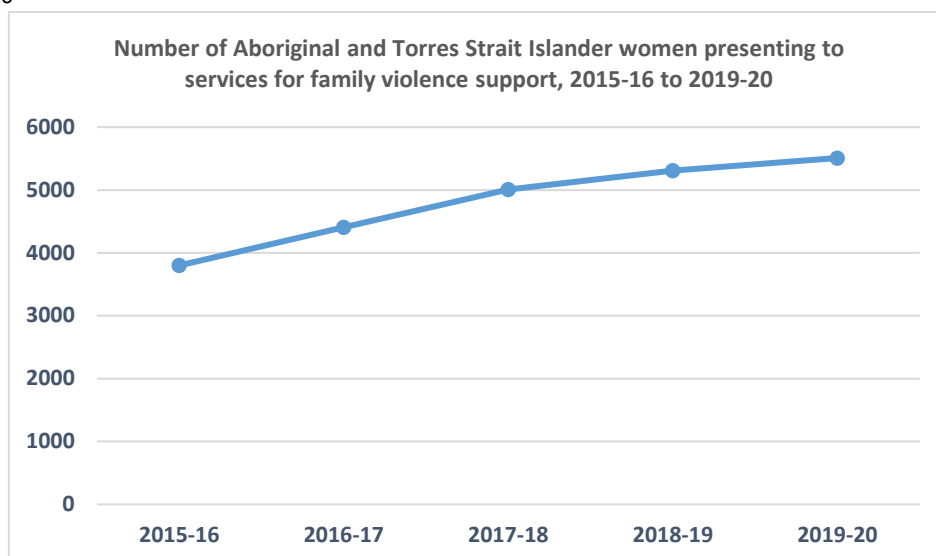
Five years on from the implementation of the Royal Commission into Family Violence, this paper argues that further reform in social housing and the service delivery sector is required to adequately respond to the continually higher exposure rates to family violence experienced by Victorian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.ⁱ

The Family Violence Challenge – 5 years on from Royal Commission

[The Commission’s 2016 report](#) calls out that, “A lack of housing options can exacerbate the trauma and dislocation of the violence, disrupting social and economic participation and education and adversely affect health and wellbeing. In some cases it forces women to choose to return to a violent partner.”ⁱⁱ

Aboriginal communities, and in particular Aboriginal women and children, continue to experience family violence at a higher rate than the non-Aboriginal community.ⁱⁱⁱ In Victoria, the number of Aboriginal women presenting to services for family violence support has increased by 31 percent in the 5 years since the Commission (see Figure 1).^{iv}

Figure 1: Number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women presenting to services for family violence support, 2015-16 to 2019-20



Family violence remains a key driver of Aboriginal women’s homelessness, commonly cited as one of the main reasons why Aboriginal women seek support from Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS). In Victoria in 2017-2018, 1 in 3 (33.6%) Aboriginal SHS clients required family violence support.



This ongoing exposure to family violence disrupts the housing security of too many Aboriginal families. The recommendations from the Royal Commission have failed to reach the most vulnerable families in our community by not adequately addressing the benefits that appropriate, stable and secure housing has in supporting families to recover.

'The current approach seen in the provision of crisis, transitional and longer term housing often creates further dislocation and uncertainty for victims who are already in a state of extreme stress.'

Royal Commission into Family Violence: Report and recommendations, 2016

Mana-na worn-tyeen ma-takort *Every Aboriginal Person has a Home*

The development of [Mana-na woorn-tyeen ma-takoort](#) – the Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework (the Framework), launched in February 2020 – was undertaken in the years after the Commission's recommendations were committed to. In consultation with the Victorian Aboriginal community, family violence and the resulting impacts is a key issue addressed in the Framework.

The Framework confirms that people experiencing homelessness and other significant life transitions, are routinely denied access to transitional or emergency accommodation options because there is simply not enough supply to meet the demand. In particular, there is a shortage of crisis accommodation that is culturally suitable for Aboriginal women and children and therefore the risk of becoming homeless becomes a dangerous deterrent for victim-survivors to leave violent relationships.

In addition to a lack of appropriate transitional accommodation, there is an unmet need for long-term housing options for those who need it. In 2019-20, fewer than six per cent of Aboriginal Victorians assessed as requiring long-term accommodation directly received it and less than one third either received or were referred to such housing.^v

Aboriginal women with children experiencing family violence are further impacted by the lack of culturally appropriate short and long-term housing options available. Family violence still remains the major driver leading to the involvement of child protection and entry into out of home care.^{vi} If Aboriginal women are unable to leave a violent relationship due to insufficient housing, their children have a greater chance of being removed.

Ultimately, the shortage of appropriate housing options and the high cost of housing is driving displacement of people from their community of support. This makes them more vulnerable to family violence, and escaping a violent relationship even more difficult, often leaving the only option to stay or return to the unsafe home. Therefore, greater investment in short and long-term housing options that are culturally appropriate is critical to keeping Aboriginal women and children safe and in their community.

Support Services and Secure Housing

The Commission recognised the need for an Aboriginal-led agreement for addressing family violence in Aboriginal communities. [Dhelk Dja: Safe Our Way – Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families](#), will deliver a service model providing a culturally safe support option for Aboriginal people experiencing family violence.

As a member of the working group delivering this model, AHV welcomes the development of support options that are culturally safe for community to access. However, Aboriginal families who experience family violence have complex needs and multiple disadvantages.^{vii} We know recovery from complex needs can only begin once housing is secure and long-term wraparound supports are provided. Therefore, stable housing options must be provided alongside sustained case management and intensive support.

For the community accessing these integrated services, secure housing will ensure that recovery from family violence is achievable.

Additionally, while access to family violence services has improved following the Royal Commission, these support services do not always reach the most vulnerable families in regional settings. The Framework found that the required solution is to integrate service provision within housing services, instead of merely increasing the number of services available.

Options to support those experiencing family violence should not solely focus on relocating the victim-survivors and children. Support and relocation options must be available for perpetrators as well.

Recommendations

While AHV welcomes the Victorian Government's recognition for greater social housing investment through the *Big Housing Build* (BHB), with 10 percent of the build being allocated to the Aboriginal community and a further 1,000 properties targeted to victim-survivors in Victoria, the BHB cannot include resources towards integrated social and emotional wellbeing support.

We recommend that the Victorian government expand funding for the More than a Landlord program to ensure the wrap around services required to sustain victim-survivor renters is available to match the growth in social housing.

The Royal Commission has not been able to address the serious growth in the number of Aboriginal women and children experiencing family violence in the five years preceding implementation of the *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort* -Every Aboriginal Person Has A Home (Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework).

The recommendations from the Framework call for greater investment in social housing options and delivery of specialised wraparound support services to reduce the number of Victorian Aboriginal families experiencing and perpetrating family violence. Recommendations include:

1.2.2 Intensive, culturally appropriate structured case managed approaches drawing in relevant and specialist service support are sustained and based on need. Those at high risk receive specialist and intensive housing, community support and pathways, including those experiencing family violence – victim-survivors and perpetrators

1.3.1 Use the secure platform provided by AHV and social housing to deliver social and economic programs to Aboriginal Victorians (via the More than a Landlord program)

4.2.3 Secure funding for transitional and long-term housing options for Aboriginal people who experience and/or use family violence that address their needs and promote and prioritise the safety of victim-survivors at a local and state-wide level.

- Ensure that 10% of BHB 1,000 properties targeted to victim-survivors of family violence are allocated to Aboriginal women and children.

4.3.2 New transitional and emergency housing options are established to respond to the needs of high need cohorts, including family violence victim-survivors and perpetrators.

¹ Throughout this document the term 'Aboriginal' is used to refer to both Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Peoples. Unless noted otherwise, the term should be considered inclusive of both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

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- ⁱⁱ State of Victoria, 2016, *Royal Commission into Family Violence: Summary and recommendations*, Parl Paper No 132 (2014-2016), pg. 37
- ⁱⁱⁱ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Family, domestic and sexual violence in Australia: continuing the national story* (2019), pg. 106. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/b0037b2d-a651-4abf-9f7b-00a85e3de528/aihw-fdv3-FDSV-in-Australia-2019.pdf.aspx?inline=true>
- ^{iv} Victoria State Government, Crime Statistics Agency, *Specialist Homelessness Services*, Table 16
<https://www.crimestatistics.vic.gov.au/family-violence-data-portal/download-data-tables>
- ^v *Mana-na worn-tyeen ma-takort* The Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework, Annual Report Card, April 2021 pg. 16
- ^{vi} Djirra, *Monitoring the Family Violence Reforms: Djirra's Submission to the Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor*, (July 2020), pg.22 <https://djirra.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Djirras-Submission-to-the-Family-Violence-Reform-Implementation-Monitor-July-2020-FINAL.pdf>
- ^{vii} 8.6 per cent presented to SHS with issues of mental health and family violence and a further 4.6 per cent with issues of family violence and mental health and drugs/ alcohol. Productivity Commission, 2019 Report on Government Services