

Indigenous women more at risk

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Aboriginal women are 34 times more likely to suffer domestic violence than non-indigenous women, and almost 11 times more likely to die at the hands of their partners.

But they are far less likely to report their abuse to authorities for fear their children will be taken away, according to Aboriginal Housing Victoria.

"Many Aboriginal people still fear the power of police, courts and government over themselves and other Aboriginal people to such an extent that they will not co-operate with authorities, even where they are exposed to harm or fear of harm," chief executive Jenny Samms said.



"In part this reflects cultural values and obligations regarding caring for others and concern for not getting them in trouble."

The service has painted a grim picture of family violence in Aboriginal families in its submission to the Royal Commission into Family Violence, which begins hearings on Monday.

AHV provides housing to about 4000 low-income Aboriginal and Torres Strait Victorians, across 1522 properties in the city and

country. Of those, it says about 10 per cent will be involved in "severe" family violence at some point, and there is evidence of some form of violence in "many more" homes.

The housing service's director of executive co-ordination, Darren Smith, said the group had been hit with increasing demand for housing, with 1137 people now on the waiting list.

For many, family violence was a "significant factor" in demand for emergency housing.

"Clients on our waiting list and tenants seeking to relocate because of family violence in too many cases cannot because affordable housing is not available."

The agency has redoubled its

call for culturally-specific family violence responses from the state and federal governments.

It says family violence and housing insecurity are closely linked. With 22 per cent of Aboriginal Victorians in public or social housing, and the Aboriginal population growing at a higher rate than the non-indigenous population, that problem will only worsen.

"It is our belief that family violence is a significant cause of homelessness for Aboriginal people and of housing instability," Ms Samms wrote in the organisation's submission to the royal commission.

"Further, that family violence, often in concert with other factors, causes stress and trauma which undermines the ability for Abori-

ginal people to improve their circumstances."

The Royal Commission into Family Violence will be addressed in Melbourne on Monday by Commissioner Marcia Neave.

Good Shepherd chief executive Rhonda Cumberland, Victoria Police assistant commissioner Wendy Steendam, and a "lay witness" will also give evidence. The royal commission is expected to run for five weeks.

For help in a crisis call 000. For help or information call the Sexual Assault, Domestic Family Violence Counselling Service on 1800 737 732 or visit 1800respect.org.au. For the Men's Referral Service, call 1300 766 491

Stranded passengers wait for flights to resume at Bali's Ngurah Rai International Airport yesterday. Photos: Getty Images

