

ENDING FAMILY VIOLENCE

THE GREENS' PLAN TO PROTECT WOMEN AND CHILDREN



Everyone has a right to live safely and free from fear. But family violence is at crisis levels. One woman is killed every week in Australia by a current or former partner.ⁱ The Greens' plan will tackle the root cultural and systemic causes of family violence, and support survivors.

Everyone has a right to live free from harassment, fear, violence and abuse. Family violence is unacceptable. It has complex cultural and systemic causes which our community must urgently address, but we must first and foremost acknowledge that family violence is gendered.

Gender inequality and harmful attitudes towards women underlie the vast majority of incidents of family violence. Family violence is most commonly carried out by men against women in intimate partner relationships. Women made up 75% of the victims of intimate partner homicides between 2002 and 2012. A history of family violence was recorded in 44% of these homicides.ⁱⁱ There are also worrying trends regarding society's attitudes towards women; sexual offences have been on the rise over the last five years despite overall levels of crime falling.ⁱⁱⁱ Our response to family violence must also reflect this reality.

Family violence may include physical or sexual abuse, emotional or psychological abuse, economic abuse, threats, coercion, and controlling behaviours that cause a family member to fear for their or another's safety and wellbeing. It affects heterosexual and same-sex relationships, and is often perpetrated against children, disabled and elderly family members. Still, around 95% of all victims of all types of violence - irrespective of gender - experience violence from a male perpetrator.^{iv}

Of all the states and territories, Victoria is well-positioned to undertake ground-breaking reforms on family violence. The state government initiated the Royal Commission into Family Violence in 2015, with strong support from the Victorian Greens. The final report was delivered in March 2016.

The state government accepted all of the recommendations and committed \$1.9 billion in the 2017/18 state budget to implement these changes. There is still much more work to be done to fully implement these recommendations and address systemic violence against women. We also need to give people who work in family violence better security and stability.

There is also much more that can be done to prevent family violence. We need to start by addressing toxic masculinity in our culture and transforming the attitudes and behaviour of male perpetrators to all women. The Royal Commission made a number of recommendations that will address harmful attitudes towards women. Both the Liberals and Labor are pushing a 'tough on crime' agenda, but this agenda doesn't prevent family violence. More than one third of domestic violence perpetrators are repeat offenders.^v Our justice system needs to focus on prevention, and on rehabilitation to stop reoffending.

Survivors also need better access to support. Many survivors of family violence currently face little choice but to leave their home, sometimes taking children or other family members with them. As a result, one third of people accessing homelessness services are escaping family violence.^{vi} Many survivors are not able to access public housing when they need it. Children who are exposed to family violence also need to have safe and appropriate care to heal from trauma and lead healthy and productive lives. Finally, our mental health system is struggling, and many survivors of family violence may be unable to access the mental health care they need.

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OUR PLAN

The Greens plan will:

- Ensure that all 227 recommendations from the Royal Commission into Family Violence are properly implemented.
- Work with the family violence sector to secure longer contracts and grants to provide stability and security for people engaged in this vital work.
- Build 40,000 new and refurbished public housing homes to eradicate the public housing waiting list.
- Establish an Independent Centre for Justice Reinvestment and expand programs that prevent all forms of criminal offending and reoffending.
- Provide an additional \$132m for legal assistance, including long-term funding for Community Legal Centres to assist survivors of family violence.
- Restore funding to community mental health services, so that survivors can access the support they need.
- Ensure measures to reduce family violence address risks for migrant, refugee and newly-arrived women on precarious visa conditions.

IMPLEMENT THE RECOMMENDATIONS

The Royal Commission into Family Violence was undertaken to find solutions to prevent family violence, better support survivors, and make people who commit family violence accountable.

It found that the family violence system had failed to work with survivors to keep them safe, and that the entire system was 'overwhelmed' by the number of family violence incidents being reported.^{vii}

Key recommendations from the Royal Commission to assist the legal system have already been implemented. The Family Violence Protection Act 2017, and more recently the Justice Legislation Amendment (Family Violence Protection and Other Matters) Act 2018 passed Parliament, with support from the Greens.

The Justice Legislation Amendment Act addressed six recommendations from the Royal Commission, including recognising new statutory examples of family violence, and empowering courts to make interim family violence intervention orders during criminal proceedings. The Greens are keeping a close eye on some of our human rights concerns in relation to the roll out of these laws, in particular the use of body worn cameras by the Victorian Police.

The Prevention of Family Violence Act 2018 was also recently passed to establish Respect Victoria, an independent statutory authority which will lead Victoria's family violence prevention strategies, undertake research and provide advice. The Greens strongly supported the creation of Respect Victoria, and we anticipate that when the agency puts forward recommendations and innovative projects to prevent family violence, the Greens will be able to help champion this work.

During the next Parliament, the Greens plan to work with government to keep Victoria on track to deliver all 227 of the Royal Commission's recommendations. There are numerous program and funding details that will require close and careful scrutiny, to ensure that the changes have the greatest possible impact, and we want to make sure government is working closely with the sector.

The Greens are committed to delivering accessible and inclusive family violence prevention programs, reporting mechanisms and support services for people with diverse sexualities, gender identities and sex characteristics and their families. We also support more culturally-inclusive education and research on family violence and sexual assault response and prevention strategies.

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STABLE FUNDING FOR SERVICE PROVIDERS

Family violence services focus on keeping women and children safe, and help them recover from violence. These services are an integral part of responding to family violence, as they assist women and children to assess risk, plan for safety, access services, and in a variety of other ways. As reported by the Royal Commission into Family Violence, women “valued the support of specialist family violence services - especially when there was continuity of contact and flexibility to adapt to needs that change with time”.^{viii}

However, too many of these vital services, their providers and workers, are under stress. Organisations need the ability to plan for their programs over the medium to long-term, not just year by year. The excellent skills of workers in these services can be lost when they lack job security due to short-term government grants and contracts. When this occurs, survivors also lose the stability and familiarity that continuity of contact with service providers creates.

Job security and stronger staff retention rates is part and parcel of more effective reform in the family violence sector. The Greens are committed to working with the sector to secure longer contracts and government grants, that will not only give service providers and workers more security, but it will also enable them to provide better continuity of service to women and children in need.

Community Legal Centres (CLCs) are an essential part of the Victorian response to family violence, providing urgent legal support as well as facilitating non-legal support such as emergency housing when needed. Despite their importance, CLCs are also subject to insecure short-term funding from both the state and Commonwealth governments. The Greens' plan will provide a significant funding boost to CLCs, ensuring that in a time of crisis all Victorians will receive the help they need.

SECURE AND STABLE HOMES

Family violence has terrible impacts upon housing security. Important work is being done to enable survivors of family violence to stay at home (when it is their choice and it is safe to do so), such as by removing the perpetrator from the home. But a high proportion of family violence survivors are forced to relocate. Family violence is the biggest source of homelessness in Victoria. One third of people accessing homelessness services are escaping family violence.^{ix}

Without adequate alternatives, many women feel they have no option but to return to their previous home and relationship, which may put their safety at risk. For those that are able to access housing, it is often insecure, which can exacerbate the effects of violence, adversely affect health and wellbeing and social and economic engagement, and disrupt education opportunities. The Royal Commission stated that ‘the first pillar of recovery is housing... without the certainty of knowing where they will live, a victim cannot plan for the future.’^x

For many survivors, public housing is a good long-term option for secure, affordable housing. The Greens' believe the government has a responsibility to provide enough high quality public and community housing to meet current needs and projected demand. However, since the 1980s successive Liberal and Labor governments have lost sight of the value of public housing, and public housing has been neglected and allowed to fall into disrepair. The Greens believe housing must be a priority for government.

The Victorian Greens' welcome Labor's commitment to build 1,000 new public housing homes following sustained pressure from the Greens, the housing sector, and the community more broadly. However, this is nowhere near enough to ensure that any survivor of family violence is able to easily and quickly access public housing so that the disruption to their life can be minimised.

The Victorian Greens will provide the public housing system with its biggest investment in decades. To increase the supply of housing so that no survivor has to wait, we will build 40,000 new public housing dwellings, including

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necessary refurbishment over the next six years, from 1 January 2019.

We will also support Victoria's community housing sector with an investment of \$200m in the next two years. We know that our community housing sector plays a crucial role in providing high quality housing for people facing complex circumstances that can make the public and private rental markets difficult or unsuitable, including for survivors of family violence. As well as our \$200m investment in the sector, we will also create additional community housing dwellings through our inclusionary zoning policy.

Survivors of family violence will also benefit from a number of other measures the Greens will take to make housing more affordable, including a \$100m pilot of the Housing First homelessness program in Melbourne.

CHANGING TOXIC MASCULINITY

More needs to be done to intervene at the earliest opportunity and prevent family violence. Responses to family violence have largely focused on the provision of services, and this is critical in the context of the crisis that continues to unfold, but there is increasing recognition that in the medium to long-term we need to address the problem at its source: and recognise that the crisis of family violence is inseparable from a kind of toxic masculinity that celebrates and benefits from gender inequality. The Royal Commission made a number of recommendations aimed at building a culture of non-violence and gender equality, including respectful relationship programs in schools. Changing a culture of toxic masculinity is an important goal, and something that we must all work towards as a community.

The Greens' oppose politically motivated law and order campaigns that exploit and fuel public anxieties. The 'tough on crime' agenda seeks to impose mandatory sentencing on people who commit family violence. This agenda is harmful for a number of reasons. Mandatory sentencing does not act as a deterrent, and it does not assist men to change their toxic behaviour.

It does not address underlying issues that may be at play, including mental illness or problems with drug and alcohol abuse. Instead, it exposes men to periods of incarceration where they are likely to be exposed to a culture of violence, further entrenching and normalising toxic behaviours for these men.

More than one third of domestic violence perpetrators are repeat offenders,^{xi} and to end the crisis we must change this. As the Royal Commission has noted, 'some perpetrators may be able to change their behaviour with an appropriate level of support or as a result of a particular style of behaviour change program; others will need more tailored and intensive assistance, including those with a mental illness or problems with drug and alcohol use'.^{xii} To be effective in reducing family violence recidivism, our responses need to be targeted and evidence-based. We need a number of proven programs that take into account a perpetrator's life experiences, context and history to actually change attitudes and behaviour; incarceration should not be a blanket response.

The Greens' will redirect funding away from ineffective 'tough on crime' policies such as building more prisons and establish an Independent Centre for Justice Reinvestment instead. The Centre will help to take the focus away from politically motivated law and order campaigns towards evidence-based programs that are actually proven to reduce offending and reoffending.

The Greens' plan also includes a Justice Reinvestment Grant Program to support communities, organisations and representative bodies to initiate local justice reinvestment programs across Victoria. Grants will fund locally-owned initiatives such as family support, early childhood intervention, housing and employment support, and drug and alcohol services. Patterns of criminal behaviour are entrenched in communities over decades, not an election cycle. The grant program will ensure that programs are tailored to the specific needs of each community to deliver long-term benefits, including reducing family violence.

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SUPPORTING MENTAL HEALTH RECOVERY

Family violence not only impacts the survivors themselves, but entire families. Children exposed to family violence can experience long-term effects on their development and have increased risk of mental health issues, and behavioural and learning difficulties.

In the long run, family violence can result in poor mental health, including increased risk of clinically-significant depression and anxiety disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder, loss of self-confidence, isolation and, for some, it can lead to the misuse of alcohol and drugs. Support is crucial in addressing the impact of such trauma, and empowering survivors to rebuild their lives.

For women and children in need of mental health support, care must be easy to find and access. However, because of Liberal and Labor cuts to mental health services, Victoria has the lowest per capita expenditure on mental health in the country. In the current system, many people end up in our hospital emergency departments before they have proper care. Such obstacles to mental health care only compounds the trauma of family violence for survivors.

The Greens' plan will restore \$200 million to community mental health services. This will ensure that everyone who needs it has access to community mental health support. This will help survivors recover and rebuild after the trauma of family violence. We will also invest \$60 million in more youth clinical health care, and invest \$10 million into keeping women safe in mental health services through embedding safe cultures and practices, and ensuring women-only wards are maintained.

REDUCING RISKS FOR VISA HOLDERS

Temporary and newly-settled migrant and refugee women face many issues that impact on their experiences of violence and access to prevention programs, including greater social isolation, greater language barriers and fear of deportation. The Greens understand that attention needs to be placed on policies that address the acute risks of family violence for women in these situations. Greater focus must be placed on programs and professional initiatives that empower immigrant and refugee organisations and groups. These organisations should be empowered to lead cultural change and spearhead violence prevention efforts. Funding more of these organisations to assume responsibility for violence prevention is also about cultural empowerment and enhances the social fabric within these families and communities.

HOW MUCH WILL IT COST?

Ending family violence needs to be a priority for this government. The Greens' plan to end family violence is part of our fully costed election platform, and includes:

- \$30 billion over 12 years in building new homes, along with maintenance and administration so that all Victorians have access to a home when they need it, including survivors of family violence.
- \$200 million for Victoria's community housing sector, so that this sector can continue to expand its stock and supply of affordable homes for Victorians over the next two years until the Social Housing Growth Fund is in a better position to support community housing.
- \$100 million to fund a pilot of the Housing First model in Melbourne.

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- \$25 million over four years to establish and run a Crime Prevention Agency to coordinate Victoria's crime prevention strategy and ensure that prevention initiatives are targeted and effective.
- \$80 million over four-years to fund new whole of government initiatives to fund programs to address the underlying causes of crime in disadvantaged suburbs.
- Up to \$15 Million over four years to expand the Courts Integrated Services Program (CISP) to provide adequate services, such as addiction and mental health services, to people released on bail.
- \$132 million to fund Legal Aid and Community Legal Centres to provide better access to justice and support.
- \$200 million over four years to restore funding to Community Mental Health Services to provide care to people who are not NDIS eligible.
- \$10 million to embed sexual safety practices and reforms in our mental health services.
- \$12 million to construct new youth dedicated clinical prevention and recovery care facility.
- \$48 million over four years for dedicated youth clinical services.

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