

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the 2024–25 Budget Estimates

Melbourne – Tuesday 21 May 2024

MEMBERS

Sarah Connolly – Chair

Nicholas McGowan – Deputy Chair

Michael Galea

Mathew Hilakari

Lauren Kathage

Bev McArthur

Danny O’Brien

Aiv Puglielli

Meng Heang Tak

WITNESSES

Vicki Ward MP, Minister for Prevention of Family Violence; and

Peta McCammon, Secretary, and

Melanie Heenan, Deputy Secretary, Family Safety Victoria, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing.

The CHAIR: I declare open this hearing of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee.

I ask that mobile telephones please be turned to silent.

On behalf of the Parliament, the committee is conducting this Inquiry into the 2024–25 Budget Estimates. The committee's aim is to scrutinise public administration and finance to improve outcomes for the Victorian community.

I advise that all evidence taken today is protected by parliamentary privilege. However, comments repeated outside this hearing may not be protected by this privilege.

As Chair I expect that committee members will be respectful towards witnesses, the Victorian community joining the hearing via the live stream today and other committee members.

Witnesses will be provided with a proof version of the transcript to check. Verified transcripts, presentations and handouts will be placed on the committee's website.

I welcome the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence the Honourable Vicki Ward as well as officials from DFFH. Minister, I am going to invite you to make an opening statement of no more than 5 minutes, after which time committee members will start asking questions. Your time starts now.

Vicki WARD: Thank you very much, Chair. And thank you to the committee for giving me the opportunity to present today and talk about the prevention of family violence portfolio.

I would like to begin by acknowledging the traditional custodians of the land on which we are meeting today, the Wurundjeri people, and I pay my respects to elders past and present. I acknowledge the over-representation in family violence of First Nations families, particularly women, often at the hands of non-First Nations men.

I recognise the lived experience and powerful advocacy of victim-survivors of family violence and sexual assault, including the members of the Victim Survivors' Advisory Council. I want to take a moment to say the names of the six Victorian women who have been killed this year, five of which allegedly at the hands of men. They are Rebecca Young, Samantha Murphy, Chaithanya 'Swetha' Madhagani, Hannah McGuire, Emma Bates and Joanne Perry, who lived in my community. I extend my sincere condolences to the families, friends and communities that have been so heavily hurt by this violence.

Visual presentation.

Vicki WARD: The prevention of family violence portfolio is focused on building a connective, responsive and inclusive system to prevent and respond to family and sexual violence in Victoria. We have done a lot already, investing \$4 billion in family violence prevention and response and in implementing every single one of the royal commission's 227 recommendations. We continue to partner with individuals and organisations across our state to deliver frontline services to support the safety and recovery of victim-survivors; to keep perpetrators in view, accountable and motivated to change their behaviour; to engage Victorians in preventing violence before it starts; and to consider lived experience, self-determination and diverse needs and perspectives and put them at the centre of this important work.

Next slide. Our key achievements for 2023–24 include the ongoing rollout of our family violence response services so victim-survivors in crisis can get the immediate support they need and access to emergency accommodation with 24-hour face-to-face support before being connected to a local family violence support service. We opened the first two Aboriginal access points in Barwon and Bayside Peninsula to ensure Aboriginal people affected by family violence can access culturally safe information and support. The self-

determined Dhelk Dja community initiatives fund supported a record 44 Aboriginal-led initiatives to prevent and respond to family violence. We have expanded the Caring Dads program for fathers who use violence to four new sites – outer Gippsland, Central Highlands, Wimmera South-West and Hume–Merri-bek – and we have expanded the Free from Violence local government program to an additional 12 councils, recognising the critical role local government plays in preventing family and gendered violence.

I particularly want to highlight the effect of the Orange Door network, and this year marks its first year as a statewide rollout. I am pleased to report that as of 13 May this year over half a million Victorians have been helped by this now statewide network since it opened in 2018. The Orange Door was designed to be publicly visible so that people would know where to get help, and it is really encouraging to see that there has been a 24 per cent increase in self-referrals over the last year to Orange Door; 48,000 connections to support services; 88 per cent of people have been satisfied with their experience at the Orange Door; 2500 counselling and therapy sessions have supported victim-survivors, both adults and children, in their recovery and in their healing; over 3000 men who use violence have participated in a behaviour change program; and over 900,000 Victorians have seen the Respect Starts with a Conversation campaign, with many more thousands participating in 107 prevention projects across the state.

In 2024–25 the Victorian government is continuing to invest in a system that works towards keeping victim-survivors and families safe and perpetrators accountable, with \$24.3 million to continue the central information point to provide family violence workers with access to the information they need to manage family violence risk and support the safety of victim-survivors; \$71 million to support victim-survivors of family and sexual violence, including children and young people, to access crisis accommodation and a suite of specialist service responses tailored to their individual needs and circumstances; \$41.6 million to work with people who use violence to change their behaviour, including tailored approaches for Aboriginal people and diverse cohorts; \$5.1 million to support best practice in working with children and young people as a part of Victoria's nation leading multi-agency risk assessment management framework; and \$4.2 million to build young Victorians' understanding of affirmative consent and support multicultural and faith organisations to deliver tailored prevention initiatives.

I want to finish by thanking the workers in the sector. We have increased this workforce fivefold since our reform work began and they do such critical work every day to support Victorians, and I thank them for it.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. The first 7 minutes is going to go to Mrs McArthur.

Bev McARTHUR: Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Minister. Minister, budget paper 3 shows a clear budget cut in family violence service delivery by \$29 million or 3.7 per cent. At the same time, child protection has been cut by \$141 million or 6.2 per cent. We know too often children end up in child protection because of violence at home and people cannot access services or priority housing and agencies in the prevention space, and now they are underfunded. What services will be cut by this \$29 million reduction in overall funding?

Vicki WARD: Thank you very much for your question, Mrs McArthur. Before we get to the money that you are talking about, I do want to pull out one thing that you have said which is absolutely accurate, which is that so many of the children who are in out-of-home care have experienced family violence themselves, and I think it is a really important statistic to always be mindful of. No frontline agencies have had their funding cut under the prevention of family violence portfolio nor have any programs lapsed under this budget. But I will get my Secretary to talk further to this.

Peta McCAMMON: Yes, happy to. When I look at the table that you are referring to, page 116, I think it is really important that we compare like with like. The 2023–24 budget should be compared to the 2024–25 budget. We go from \$622 million in 2023–24 to \$748 million in 2024–25. The revised budget reflects those financial transactions that we make as part of the 2022–23 year end, so when I look at that \$622 million, that was the budget that was set in May. We then have a year-end as part of 2022–23, and what happened there was there was some carryover of funding. So funding for important initiatives that we did not spend in 2022–23, we revised that to spend those in the 2023–24 year. It is not accurate to say the budget has been cut, but what that does reflect is as part of the year-end of 2022–23 there are some carryover elements in there, which is important so that we can deliver on those initiatives.

Danny O'BRIEN: That is a lot of carryover – \$155 million.

Peta McCAMMON: No, it is not \$155 million – well, that is not all carryover. Some of that would be other adjustments, but the major difference is a carryover amount in there.

Danny O'BRIEN: Why is that revised up by \$155 million on the budget?

Peta McCAMMON: Some of that would be carryover. I do not have all of the detailed breakdown, but a large component of that would be carryover.

Danny O'BRIEN: But it is unspent money. Is that the case?

Peta McCAMMON: No, it will be spent in the 2023–24 financial year.

Danny O'BRIEN: Carried over from 2022–23.

Peta McCAMMON: 2022–23.

Danny O'BRIEN: So it was unspent in 2022–23 then?

Peta McCAMMON: Yes. And that is not unusual. Big budgets – it is not unusual for –

Danny O'BRIEN: It is still a big chunk.

Peta McCAMMON: But it will be spent, and carryover is an important financial management tool for budgets of this size.

Bev McARTHUR: Well, it does not help the victims that need to access those programs.

Peta McCAMMON: But the programs have not been cut.

Bev McARTHUR: Or the money was not spent on them. But anyway, let us go on. The Prime Minister used the term 'national crisis' for gender-based violence. Aren't you only going to make the situation worse?

Vicki WARD: No, because there is no lapse in funding and because there is not a budget cut with this budget. We are continuing to invest. There is \$211 million being invested in this budget in response to family violence, and it is money that is being allocated across prevention, across response, as well as helping people rebuild their lives. This includes things like supporting our Orange Doors. It includes supporting the programs that are there to help people. It includes –

Bev McARTHUR: Well, on that, Minister, how much has been allocated to the Orange Door network?

Vicki WARD: Yes, I will get that for you. As I think we said in our presentation, there are 54 Orange Door locations across our state.

Nick McGOWAN: Does that include the satellites?

Vicki WARD: The satellites? The outposts? Yes, the locations include the outposts.

Bev McARTHUR: Maybe, Minister, while you are looking you might like to take this on notice that we would like to see the list outlining the funding levels for each of the 54 Orange Doors.

Vicki WARD: The funding that is for each of the 54 locations? There is \$448 million over four years that is being invested in the Orange Doors. Do you want me to through the locations?

Bev McARTHUR: Just give us that on notice; it will be fine.

Vicki WARD: Okay.

Bev McARTHUR: How much is expected to be allocated to partner agencies who deliver the services?

Vicki WARD: Okay. That is quite a bit to unpack because there are a number of different services across the Orange Doors that are embedded within the service itself but also those services that support or that are referred

to from the Orange Door. So there is a bit of a – I do not know – would you call it a scrambled egg to this? But again, the department will be able to give you a little bit more of that detail.

Bev McARTHUR: Great. Have you got it ready there?

Peta McCAMMON: I do not have it with me. We are happy to see what we can do.

Bev McARTHUR: You can send it to us; that will be fine. Budget paper 3, page 39 – we are still seeing an alarmingly high rate of violence against women. The most recent statistics show that between December 2022 and 2023 aggravated assault of females has almost doubled, and that is a tenfold increase since 2014. How do you explain the rise?

Vicki WARD: Yes, it is interesting. It is a really good question to raise because what we are seeing is that with the royal commission and the work that we have been doing and the conversation that we started having in 2015 with the community, we were really pushing for people to go to the police to make their report. You would well know, Mrs McArthur, that this is something that is always underreported, and we saw that especially before 2015. So to be able to have this environment where people are coming forward and are making reports sounds like an unusual way to measure success, but it means that we do have the framework that is there to help support people when they do come forward. We have had extensive training, for example, happen within our police force to help them better respond to the needs of victim-survivors when they come forward. But having the Orange Door and having those Orange Doors spread out across our state in those 54 locations has been a real game changer in the sense that people really feel that they are able to come forward.

The CHAIR: Apologies, Mrs McArthur. Your time is up. We are going to go straight to Mr Tak.

Meng Heang TAK: Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Minister, and officials. Referring to budget paper 3 on page 43, can you please explain how the multi-agency risk assessment and management framework is supporting the workforce to identify and manage risk of family violence?

Vicki WARD: Yes. Thank you very much for your question, Mr Tak. Because it is such a long name we will continue to call it the MARAM framework as we go forward through my response to you, because it is a much easier thing to say than the full title.

The MARAM framework was developed in response to recommendation 1 of the Royal Commission into Family Violence. The royal commission spoke a lot about silos, and particularly information silos. What we saw before the royal commission was that information often was not shared, but we also saw that a lot of victim-survivors would have to repeatedly tell their story, which actually just adds to people's trauma, the more you have to relive your experience and the frustration that you can also have with having to repeatedly tell your story. While we have put in place all 227 recommendations, MARAM is one of those that I think has been very satisfying and very productive and very helpful.

The recommendation is in response to the 2016 review of the previous common risk assessment framework, which found that the framework was not achieving its intended purpose. It was not helping people as much as it should have, and it was not helping agencies and workers understand risk as much as it needed to. The central aim of MARAM is to increase the safety and wellbeing of Victorians by ensuring that the relevant workforce can effectively identify, assess and manage family violence risk, and it does this by setting out the key principles and elements that prescribed organisations must embed into their policies, procedures, practices and tools. This has many benefits. For example, it ensures that all parts of the service system have a shared language and understanding of risk assessment and management. It also ensures that professionals have the skills and knowledge to guide appropriate risk management action. They are the same questions that you have in MARAM that every single person who is trained in MARAM is asking. Ideally it is part of a conversation with somebody who has come forward with their story, where they will sit down with a worker and go through what has happened with them, and embedded in that conversation are these questions guided by the MARAM principles that help you get consistent information that can be stored within the MARAM framework.

MARAM provides services with a clear understanding of how various parts of the system work together to coordinate and implement safety and accountability planning, and this brings us to the information-sharing scheme. The family violence information sharing scheme authorises services and organisations to share

information to assess or manage risk. This means that MARAM does not sit just with that one person who has had that first conversation as a caseworker. It means that it can be shared where it needs to be shared. This scheme is key to enabling systemwide coordination to manage family violence risk. The child information sharing scheme is a complementary scheme that authorises similar services and organisations to share information to promote the wellbeing and safety of children. When services are trained in MARAM they are also trained in FVISS and CISS. This supports professionals to coordinate services for children and families, considering their experience of family violence risk and the support they may need for their wellbeing so that they can recover and thrive and rebuild their lives.

Meng Heang TAK: Thank you, Minister. I understand that MARAM is being used at Orange Door. How widely is it utilised by the broader community service workforce, and where is the government up to in terms of training the wider workforce?

Vicki WARD: Thank you very much. It is a really good question, and it does talk to the importance of MARAM and why it is such a game changer. We have got over 6000 organisations who are required to be aligned to MARAM. Organisations prescribed under MARAM include government and non-government agencies involving practitioners working with victim-survivors and perpetrators of family violence. One of the interesting things about MARAM is that it talks to victim-survivors but it also talks to perpetrators and helps us keep that gaze on perpetrators that we need to. This includes specialist family violence services, but it also includes schools, health services, housing and homelessness services, justice services and mental health services among others. It includes Victoria Police, and we have had within Victoria Police 12,000 people trained in MARAM. Even Rotary volunteers have been trained in MARAM. I went down to Geelong to have a look at an art exhibition that was down there as a part of the 16 days of activism against gendered violence last year, and it was an exhibition that featured artwork by women who had experienced family violence telling their stories through art. It was managed by the local Rotary. They were there every day. People would come in, and they would monitor. Because you might have victim-survivors who might want to disclose their violence that they had experienced, what had happened to them, the Rotary people were trained in basic MARAM so that they could actually start that process of getting that information and helping share that information where it was needed.

In terms of implementation there has been a phased approach, as you would understand. Since implementation commenced in February 2018 more than 200,000 sessions of MARAM or MARAM-aligned training have been undertaken. These sessions vary from half a day to two full days of training depending on the level of MARAM responsibility. In the last year we have doubled the amount of workforce trained in MARAM. More than 100,000 sessions of MARAM or MARAM-aligned training were delivered in the 2022–23 reporting period. The government has developed three training packages for responding to adults using family violence MARAM practice guides. Training rollout on this commenced in November 2023.

To give you a sense of scale, the implementation of MARAM has allowed a quarter of a million assessments and safety plans to be undertaken. There was a 29 per cent increase in risk assessment and safety plans completed in 2022–23, with over 97,000 completed during this period. And this is one of the really important ways that MARAM really delivers, which is that as you go through MARAM you are able to do a risk assessment and you are able to, if you need to, start that work around a safety plan. So it is a really important tool to help keep people safe but, as I said, also keep perpetrators in view.

Meng Heang TAK: Thank you, Minister. Thank you, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. We will go to Mrs McArthur.

Bev McARTHUR: Thank you, Chair. Minister, I just want to confirm with the Secretary that you are going to get us the information about the details on the 54 Orange Door funding areas and also what is expected to be allocated to partner agencies who deliver the services.

Peta McCAMMON: I am happy to take that on notice, particularly what is appropriate given they are actually contracts with providers. But I am happy to take that on notice.

Bev McARTHUR: Thank you very much. Minister, can we go to budget paper 3, page 116. The Minister was also last year unable to tell us how many perpetrators who completed the prevention of family violence programs have since reoffended or been jailed. Can you provide us with this information now?

Vicki WARD: Yes, it is a really good question. It feels like it should be quite a linear and easy question to answer, but it is not. We know that we do have programs that we have put in place where we are not seeing reoffending, but in terms of giving actual data I am not able to. But Ms Heenan may be able to give you some more information on that.

Melanie HEENAN: Thanks, Minister. It is not a linear answer, I am afraid, Mrs McArthur. It is because it is such a complex suite of interventions that are provided to perpetrators. I think the community absolutely wants to know to what extent programs are resulting in an absence of recidivism –

Bev McARTHUR: Correct.

Melanie HEENAN: but it is just not how programs work, I guess, in that very straightforward way. There are programs, for example, that are focused on high-risk offenders, and there has been some funding of three pilots in a project called Changing Ways, which is going to be a two-year pilot. That does have as one of its very strong objectives not reoffending and certainly reducing what is usually the woman's – the partner's – and the children's risk and improving their safety. So recidivism and breaching orders or committing further family violence will be very much part of the equation for that program. But in relation to, for example, other men's behaviour change programs, if you look at the voluntary programs, sometimes the measures cannot be about an absolute 'No further violence is committed.' It might be about reducing his risk of committing family violence, making sure that he is visible to the system and making sure that she and the kids are safe. Those measures can be achieved over the course of –

Bev McARTHUR: And can be measured?

Melanie HEENAN: In relation to very particular men's behaviour change programs, they can in terms of what is happening with that particular family unit, but it will not be as straightforward as looking at a recidivism rate.

Vicki WARD: Because you are also relying on people reporting, and as we were discussing earlier, there is under-reporting. So it is difficult, but it goes to a really important point around data and research. We know that in working with men who need to change their behaviours, who need to find ways of making better choices –

Bev McARTHUR: I want to go right to that point, Minister, because there was a program that the courts ran that allowed for men who were violent perpetrators to receive counselling, but it has ended. For instance, there were 100 people on this program in Ballarat and 750 statewide. It was stated on 30 June that because the Magistrates' Court of Victoria decided it had not been specially designed for LGBTIQ groups or Indigenous groups, it had to be cut and it has all got to be redesigned. So the funding was pulled and some providers of that service are saying, 'Well, why couldn't we modify it?' That was a program trying to ensure that men did not recommit domestic violence against their families and so on, and it has gone because it does not suit the Indigenous or the LGBTIQ communities.

Vicki WARD: I am not sure that that is the full scope of why it may not be continuing, but I will talk to you about what we are doing under our department.

Bev McARTHUR: But that particular program has gone because it does not fit in with the model that you would like.

Vicki WARD: If you want talk specifically to that Magistrates' Court program, which is a mandated men's behaviour change, it is really something to raise with the Attorney-General.

Bev McARTHUR: We will.

Vicki WARD: I am more than happy to talk to you about the voluntary programs that we support under our portfolio.

Bev McARTHUR: I am particularly interested in that program, but I thought you may be concerned about it because it does affect domestic violence against women. I think Mr McGowan is going to press on.

Nick McGOWAN: Thank you. Secretary, of the – the figure I have is 3000, but I think it is – 2906 who participated in the men’s behaviour change program, can you tell me how many were court referrals or requirements?

Melanie HEENAN: I cannot, Mr McGowan, because the court-mandated programs are not programs that Family Safety Victoria funds. We are funding those programs that are voluntary programs and a whole suite of other programs that are not about the court-mandated programs.

Nick McGOWAN: So, the answer is zero?

Melanie HEENAN: Sorry, the answer would not be zero if I had the information at hand in relation to the court-mandated programs, but they are not programs that we fund. That comes out of the Attorney-General’s funding.

Bev McARTHUR: But it is a family violence prevention program.

Melanie HEENAN: Sorry, can you repeat the question if it is a prevention program? I thought you said it was a court-mandated program.

Nick McGOWAN: Minister, we are running out of time. The Victorian Law Reform Commission report into stalking was completed two years ago. I know prior to the last election in fact the sector were promised it would be released prior to that. They are obviously very anxious around that, and they are looking forward to receiving a response. Can you give us any timeline in terms of when we might be able to receive a response from government?

Vicki WARD: Yes, of course. And I can understand why it is something that people are concerned about. Any behaviour which leads to people being unsafe is something that any person would be concerned about. It is a question again for the Attorney-General.

Nick McGOWAN: Okay. Respect Victoria – is there still an acting CEO, and is that position being filled at some point?

Vicki WARD: As I understand it – they are an independent statutory body, so I am at arms length as to where their recruitment process is up to – they have been recruiting for a new CEO. The acting CEO is still there, but there is a recruitment process underway. That is what I understand.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr McGowan. We will now go to Ms Kathage.

Lauren KATHAGE: Thank you, Chair, Minister and officials. Minister, I cite page 40 of BP3. There is information there about core-and-cluster refuges. It has been probably more than 15 years since I worked in a women’s shelter, and I am not aware of what this type of refuge model is or how it is different from other types of refuge accommodation. Are you able to explain that?

Vicki WARD: Yes. Thank you very much for your question. They are pretty good. They are incredible – what they can actually offer. I think that you would be completely – I would not say surprised, but it would make you feel really good, not so much that we have the refuges or that we need to have the refuges but what they actually do deliver and how they support people, because it is quite transformational away from that communal style of refuge housing.

Recommendation 15 of the Royal Commission into Family Violence was to support service providers to phase out the communal refuge model, and there are a number of reasons for doing that. The core-and-cluster model seeks to address a number of the barriers that women and children were facing when seeking crisis accommodation. For example, the communal refuge model involves women sharing kitchen and bathroom facilities, as you would be well aware, as well as sharing bedrooms with their children. This is a challenge in many ways: one, it limits who can go to the refuge; but it also poses a number of challenges for people who are in refuges.

One of the things that I have heard really clearly from victim-survivors has been that when you have had that very fraught experience and you are in that immediate trauma mode, once you are in a refuge you actually really need to have some time just to be quiet and process what has happened to you and really think about

what your next steps are. By having a core-and-cluster model you have got the core, and that is where all the services and everything is on offer, and you have got the cluster, which is these individual spaces for people to be – and within these bedrooms that are units you have got a room but you have also got a kitchen and you have got a bathroom – so that means that you have got the privacy that you need when you need it. But it also means that you are not necessarily reliving other people's trauma vicariously. It means that if you do want to go into a communal space, you can leave that communal space whenever you want to. There are communal spaces that are set up. There are lounges, communal kitchens, spaces for children and so on. But if you are in a space where someone is telling you a story that is very difficult, you are able to excuse yourself and go and have time by yourself and still make yourself a cup of tea, grab a toastie, go to the loo, do whatever you need to do without engaging with other people if you do not want to. It aims to provide women and children with greater privacy and independence, both of which are critical to supporting victim-survivors who are recovering from family violence.

The new model also provides 24/7 onsite support services delivered by the refuge provider, and this is known, as I said, as the core of the refuge, while the independent living areas are the clusters. The model also allows for visiting services to provide outreach to clients during their refuge stay, and this includes access to things like health services, Centrelink, financial services and legal assistance. As you can imagine, for a lot of women when they are in a refuge transport can be difficult, because you might not have a car on you but you also may not want to go out into the world because you do not know where your perpetrator could be. Having services come in and help you and give you that advice, particularly when you are in that immediate trauma phase of just getting somewhere secure and safe is really helpful. So it ensures that the needs of women and children are met while also prioritising safety and security.

That is why we have committed to overhaul the communal refuge model and are undertaking the refuge development program. We are replacing 17 communal refuges across the state with the core-and-cluster model. Funding to date has also supported the construction of three new Aboriginal-operated refuges, two additional core-and-cluster refuges in areas of high demand in southern Melbourne and in western Melbourne and the purchase of six crisis accommodation properties. These 15 refuges have the capacity to support approximately 469 victim-survivor households a year, and that adds an additional 44 units of accommodation for families compared to before the redevelopment program. This is a significant increase in capacity and underlines exactly how important this program is.

In this state budget, the 2024–25 state budget outcomes continue operational funding to support 15 of the new core-and-cluster refuges to operate these 24-hour services at the increased capacity provided by the refuge redevelopment model.

Lauren KATHAGE: Thank you, Minister. I guess that demand reflects that it is often women and children that are required to leave the family home in a context of family violence risk. Is the government doing anything to support people who use violence to be the ones to leave the home and is that realistic?

Vicki WARD: Thank you for that question. It really comes to the core issue, which is: why are we providing accommodation for so many people who are leaving their homes because they are not violent but the perpetrator is remaining at home? Sometimes it is not safe for women to be at an address where the perpetrator knows how to find them, but to be able to create a series of programs, as pilots, to understand how we can support women and children to stay in their home and have the perpetrator leave is very important.

We are looking at ways to shift this burden, to shift it away from women and children, because it is very dislocating when you have had to leave your community. You need those supports of your community. You want your kids to stay in the schools that they are in. You want to have those social networks around you to help support you. We are looking at ways to shift the burden to allow women and children to remain safe in their homes while removing the perpetrator from the home and supporting them to change their violent behaviours. One of the things that we are doing is the men's accommodation and counselling service. It is a statewide crisis accommodation service for men who have been excluded from the home due to their use of family violence. The MACS program is provided by the Men's Referral Service in partnership with St Kilda Crisis Centre and provides men with short-term accommodation for up to 30 days. Men can access the accommodation on the provision that they also attend counselling sessions that are designed to interrupt their violent attitudes and work towards changing their behaviours. We have also got the Place for Change program.

The Place for Change program is another model we are piloting across five locations: Central Highlands, Hume Merri-bek, north-east Melbourne, inner Gippsland and Loddon. Thank you.

Lauren KATHAGE: Thank you, Minister.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. I am going back to the Deputy Chair.

Nick McGOWAN: Just to pick up on that last question about the acting CEO, because it has been quite a period of time, do we have an update in terms of when that might conclude, the recruitment process? The Secretary, I am looking at.

Vicki WARD: Sorry, what was the question?

Nick McGOWAN: The recruitment process for Respect Victoria.

Vicki WARD: Oh, for the CEO, sorry.

Peta McCAMMON: I do not know, I am sorry.

Nick McGOWAN: You do not know?

Peta McCAMMON: No, I do not have an update.

Nick McGOWAN: Okay. Do you know what the budget is for Respect Victoria?

Peta McCAMMON: Let me see if I have that.

Nick McGOWAN: Perhaps, if you do not mind, while you are looking at that, Minister, last year we were unable to get a figure in respect to how many women and families – it may not just be women – were forced to stay in a hotel for more than one week because appropriate or other accommodation, more permanent accommodation, could not be found. Are you able to provide that figure at all?

Vicki WARD: Yes, thank you, Mr McGowan. Ideally we would love all women and children to be able to stay safely in their homes, because that is exactly where they should be. It is the hard reality that sometimes women and children do have to leave their homes because of the violence that, usually, a man has chosen to use in that household. In the state budget we have allocated \$72.1 million over two years to continue a range of responses that support victim-survivors of family violence to return safely to their homes. We have got \$19.5 million for specialist case management support; \$1.2 million to continue essential personal safety initiative coordination roles across Victoria to deliver around safety and security; \$700,000 to continue delivery of Berry Street's short-term accommodation response, the STAR program; and \$700,000 to continue delivering around 90 additional flexible support packages for those who are on temporary visas through InTouch. So what we are trying to do is create a framework where people have to rely on urgent accommodation as little as possible. We have got our 15 core-and-cluster refuges, as I said in my response to Ms Kathage, but we also do have to on occasion, when we really do not want to, locate people in motels because that is the safest place for them. I think that is reflective of the number of men who are choosing to use violence in homes.

Now, in terms of those people who are required to or do have to go to motels – have you got that number on you? I just cannot find it on me, sorry. I know I have got something.

Melanie HEENAN: No. Thanks, Minister. I think you were asking about a particular period of time, were you, Mr McGowan?

Nick McGOWAN: If they are the figures you have got, I will take them, but certainly if you have –

Melanie HEENAN: So, and I recall this from PAEC last year in fact as well, the rates are difficult to be able to provide, because it could be that households are coming into motels on more than one occasion throughout the year. We have data systems that at the moment are still not talking to each other because they are across –

Bev McARTHUR: What?

Melanie HEENAN: We have a number of different systems that we have to rely on in a statewide sense for motel use, so that comes from things like the Orange Door of course that has a good client record management system. We also rely on what is a very broad specialist family violence service system, who are very quickly trying to establish a motel night for the person that they might be working with. They may or may not be able to put that data into the centralised system. They may be using a flexible support package or crisis brokerage to be able to support motel accommodation. All of those things have different systems. I know there is real interest in this equation; it is a very important issue for us too. We are making gains on those data systems, so we are trying to find ways in which they can better harmonise so that we can provide a figure with veracity.

Nick McGOWAN: So do you know how many hotel nights across the system?

Melanie HEENAN: We do. That is around – I will just have a quick look at my figures, but we know that that –

Vicki WARD: While Ms Heenan looks for that, I can talk to the Respect Victoria question that you had.

Nick McGOWAN: Yes, please. Thank you.

Vicki WARD: The 2022–23 state budget provided \$19 million over three years from 2022 to 2025 to support Respect Victoria to deliver its awareness-raising campaigns, critical research projects and key legislative functions. In 2023, last year, they delivered their strategic plan, which sets out the five key strategic focus areas: driving a coordinated primary prevention system, building knowledge and evidence, keeping primary prevention on the public agenda, guiding impactful work and influencing social change in the community. There are a lot of activities that they undertake, Mr McGowan. I hope that was helpful for you.

Nick McGOWAN: Thank you very much.

Melanie HEENAN: 54,000 nights of refuge accommodation provided to victim-survivors of family violence in 2022–23.

Bev McARTHUR: 54,000?

Vicki WARD: So that is refuge accommodation.

Nick McGOWAN: No, it is hotel nights.

Melanie HEENAN: That is refuge accommodation. Sorry.

Nick McGOWAN: And what is the monetary value placed on that, do we know?

Melanie HEENAN: The monetary value I guess aligns with the operational funding that is provided to the core-and-cluster refuges that the minister has been referring to as well as the other refuges that are offering services. There is the refuge opportunity for emergency accommodation where risk is very, very high, because it will be those women and children and victim-survivors who have the highest risk that will be going to refuge, and then motel or other crisis response accommodation or emergency response accommodation is then offered, such as a motel.

Vicki WARD: It goes to a point around we know that family violence every year, for example, costs Victoria – so beyond government it costs households, costs community and costs businesses over \$8 billion a year.

Bev McARTHUR: So just going to the refuges, Minister, we now know also that there are men identifying as women who are accessing the refuges and potentially being violent. We know that has occurred in prisons. So refuges are not necessarily a safe place either, are they? How are you making sure that you do not have violent offenders going into refuges?

Vicki WARD: Thank you for your question, and thank you for the consideration and care that you are giving to people who are in refuge accommodation, who as we know are very traumatised. If you have got an example where this has occurred, I would be more than happy to look into it for you.

The CHAIR: There is only one clock here, Mrs McArthur, and that is mine.

Nick McGOWAN: Oh, still going?

The CHAIR: That is not time.

Bev McARTHUR: Are we still going?

The CHAIR: You have got 5 seconds now.

Nick McGOWAN: Any chance, Minister, of you adding sexual health to your title? Because it is a serious issue for the sector, and they have talked to me about that.

Vicki WARD: That is not a decision for me, Mr McGowan.

Nick McGOWAN: Okay. But you are aware of that issue within the sector, that they are keen to obviously

Vicki WARD: Look, I have had really great conversations with SASVic. They conducted a terrific round table for me with the sector less than a month ago, which was a really good conversation, and they are a terrific advocate.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. We are going to go to Mr Hilakari, Mrs McArthur.

Bev McARTHUR: Just to clarify, did that figure on the motel nights include refuge nights?

Melanie HEENAN: No.

Bev McARTHUR: Just motels?

Vicki WARD: No, it was refuge nights.

Melanie HEENAN: Refuge nights only was the figure I gave you, not motels.

Bev McARTHUR: Okay. You cannot give us motel nights?

The CHAIR: We are going to go to Mr Hilakari.

Mathew HILAKARI: It is great we went from zero to suddenly 100 there, looking at different questions, but that is all right. I might take you to the Orange Door network and some of the supports that we provide in that space, particularly with reference to budget paper 3, page 119, and the almost three-quarters of a billion dollars that is being invested in the Orange Door network, and I particularly raise this because the Orange Door in Werribee is one the community that I represent generally uses. I am just hoping you can talk through some of those services and supports that people can expect when they go to an Orange Door.

Vicki WARD: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr Hilakari, for your question, and I really do hope that everybody here encourages anybody who comes to their electorate office or who sees them in conversation and refers them to an Orange Door or, if they are in immediate danger, Safe Steps, because it is a really important service that we do provide across these 54 locations. Really, it is a game changer. It is an absolute game changer that has come out of the royal commission. The support that Orange Doors are able to provide is unique. I know the word 'nation-leading' gets thrown around a lot, but in terms of Orange Doors it is absolutely accurate, and you will have heard me talk before about the fact that I have had people come from interstate and overseas to come and look at our Orange Doors because they are so unique and they are so beneficial to particularly helping victim-survivors work out their next pathways and how they can be best supported.

It was one of the landmark reforms arising from the Royal Commission into Family Violence, which recommended a strong integrated service response between family violence and family services. The Orange Door network is free, it is accessible and it is an assessment and brief intervention service for children, young people and adults who are experiencing family violence, for families who need support with the care and wellbeing of children and young people but also for people who use violence, and I think that that is something when we talk about the Orange Door we sometimes forget to include – that if you are at risk of using violence

or you are using violence at home, you can also go to an Orange Door. But it is also useful in terms of the sector being able to hold perpetrators in view while they are also working with somebody who has experienced family violence. Orange Doors provide access to risk assessment and safety plans – this goes to the conversation we had earlier about MARAM and the benefits of that – crisis brokerage and flexible support packages, access to therapeutic support to provide recovery and healing, specialist case management and tailored referrals to specialist services. In 2022–23 the Orange Door network provided almost 29,000 crisis responses and short-term interventions and over 48,000 connections to relevant services, so they are doing a considerable amount of work.

Mathew HILAKARI: I know from my own community, a very highly multicultural community, that making sure that people are aware of those services has been really important, particularly in some times of crisis recently, and I thank you for your personal support on those matters. Flexible support packages, however, are something that I would like to run through now as well, which is in relation to budget paper 3, page 40. I am just checking: are those packages provided by Orange Doors directly, and can you speak to how people utilise these supports?

Vicki WARD: Thank you. The flexible support packages are really useful, really helpful in helping victim-survivors feel secure but also work out what they need to start to re-establish and rebuild themselves. They aim to deliver personalised and holistic responses to assist adult and children victim-survivors who have experienced family violence. Flexible support is critical for victim-survivors, who often have multiple complex and intersecting identities or life circumstances which case management responses need to tailor to. Flexible funding provides tailored support to people in crisis to help address the immediate cost impact of family violence. This includes accommodation, it includes safety infrastructure, it includes counselling and it includes transport and other practical or material needs. For example, you might have someone who has presented at an Orange Door and the perpetrator has broken their screen door or they are afraid to go back but they would like to have alarms put in or they might want to have the screen door repaired. Or they might be trying to work out how to get their perpetrator off bills and how to detangle themselves from their financial involvement with the perpetrator. The flexible support packages allow a bit of a bespoke approach to people, because we know that each circumstance is different, each individual is different and they need to have that support that really responds to what their needs are. In the state budget we have allocated \$71 million to output funding to continue specialist support for adult and child victim-survivors of family violence. This maintains service delivery levels for specialist family violence case management, flexible funding packages for women on temporary visas and crisis brokerage.

Mathew HILAKARI: In terms of a follow-up on your presentation as well, in the time that we have got remaining, two Aboriginal-specific access points for the Orange Door – I am just hoping you can talk through, firstly, how they differ, other than the obvious point, but also is there scope for further ones in the future?

Vicki WARD: Thank you, Mr Hilakari. It is really important that we have culturally safe spaces for Aboriginal community members who go to your Orange Doors. I know that Orange Door workers do work quite hard to make sure that their area is, and I have seen some beautiful Orange Doors that have got some really lovely spaces that they have created to make sure that that sense of safety and inclusion is there. But we still need to create individual access points to address those challenges. What we have got is *Dhelk Dja: Safe Our Way – Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families*. It is our Dhelk Dja partnership agreement. It is an Aboriginal-led agreement to address family violence in Aboriginal communities, and we need to do this in a partnership. We need to work with a community who knows what it needs, who knows how to communicate with each other, but really importantly has that relationship of trust, and that is something that we really want to build on. As a part of the Dhelk Dja Aboriginal 10-year family violence plan the government has funded three Aboriginal access points. The first was established by VACCA, and it commenced operation in the Bayside peninsula in June 2023. The second was established by the Wathaurong Aboriginal corporation in Barwon in November 2023, and currently we are working on the third access point, which will be in the Mallee.

Mathew HILAKARI: Thank you, Minister.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Hilakari. We will go to Mr Puglielli.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you, Chair. Good afternoon. We know that culturally and linguistically diverse women are more likely to experience domestic violence, and yet too often our family violence system

consistently fails them. Migrant refugee women are frequently misunderstood, they are discriminated against, and specialist services which provide culturally responsive services for them are often severely underfunded. Could you just point to any specific funding allocations for these specialist family violence services for women from our multicultural communities in this budget?

Vicki WARD: Yes, I will, and thank you for the question. It is an important one, and it is one that we have to keep talking about. I appreciate the point that you are making around the individual challenges that some of our migrant communities can have when it comes to gender-based violence, but I really do want to make the point and make it really clear that family violence happens everywhere. It happens across communities. It does not matter what your background is, it does not matter what your income is and it does not matter where you live: family violence will be occurring in your neighbourhood.

In the 2024–25 state budget there is \$41.6 million over four years which is to drive down family and sexual violence, and it is there to support people who use violence through changing their harmful behaviours. This includes addressing helping CALD communities and the work that we are doing with them to change the behaviours of CALD men and their use of violence. There is also \$35.8 million over two years to continue specialist support for victim-survivors of family violence, which includes the flexible support packages for victims-survivors who are on temporary visas. We have also got a refuge that we are building at the moment for the same cohort.

The budget also provides \$13.72 million over four years to maintain current perpetrator programs tailored to diverse cohorts using family violence, including multicultural communities. The budget also continues our partnership with multicultural and faith community organisations, with funding on prevention treatment for another 12 months as we work on the evidence base and listen to communities about what they need.

There are a number of other success stories. One of the ones around prevention that I would really like to highlight is the Latin Stories project, which developed a series of board games in language to support respectful relationship workshops being delivered to young people. Ms Heenan might have some more to talk to around how we are supporting multicultural women.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: If you could, that would be great, thank you.

Melanie HEENAN: Yes, certainly. So just to build on the funding allocations that the minister has referred to, there is also some really important strengthening of the capability across multicultural workforces, and InTouch is obviously a really important provider on that front. They are able to assist the workforce capacity in the family violence sector, focusing in on multicultural workers. I think there were up to 700 workers that were supported in having their workforce capacity really strengthened in the area of delivering family violence services. That is often for workers that may be bilingual or multilingual and really able to inreach to communities to be able to speak with victim-survivors and families, perhaps about all manner of things, but to really build confidence and trust in ensuring those disclosures are made.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Sure. Thank you.

Vicki WARD: MARAM has also got in-built within it recognising that people are diverse and that there are multicultural communities who will be coming into Orange Doors or any of the 6000 services that are mandated and required to use MARAM. We have also got strengthening family and sexual violence support with multicultural communities. There was a \$2.4 million investment that was allocated through the national partnership on family, domestic and sexual violence to deliver the Working Together: Strengthening Family Violence Support with Multicultural Communities program. That continues to strengthen partnerships between multicultural community organisations and family violence services.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you.

Vicki WARD: I also had a really great round table with the multicultural sector – I do not know, six weeks ago – which was organised by Safe and Equal, who did a fantastic job. It was a really, really useful round table – really good, robust conversations.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you. It is great to hear that, and I appreciate you going into full detail of all these different things that are being put forward in this budget. As we I think collectively acknowledge, there is a lot

still to do. In the ‘Department Performance Statement’, page 40, there is a new performance measure. It says ‘The proportion of victim survivors seeking a refuge response that receive this support’, and the 2024–25 target says 60 per cent. It then says at the bottom in a footnote it is a:

New performance measure for 2024–25 to reflect Government priorities regarding family violence victim survivors’ access to refuge accommodation.

Why isn’t the performance measure 100 per cent? Shouldn’t everyone who needs a refuge be able to access one?

Vicki WARD: Yes, absolutely, and there are some reasons for that measure, which Ms Heenan is more than able to talk to.

Melanie HEENAN: Thanks, Minister. The proportion has been set around previous performance as well, and it is not a straightforward performance measure to set, in fact. It comes back to some of the earlier issues we were discussing, in that Safe Steps plays a central role in trying to capture the data. I can say that of the total applications that are made for refuge placements – so this will be on any one day or night, a family violence service trying to get access to a refuge or understand where the places may sit for refuge – almost everyone who puts in an application is eligible. But there obviously are eligibility criteria, and that relates principally to risk, so it is the highest risk women or the highest risk victim-survivors and families that will go into refuge on any one night.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: To clarify, sorry, are you saying that 100 per cent is not achievable right now? Is that why it is not the target?

Vicki WARD: No. What she is talking to is the risk assessment and who you prioritise within that application process. But it is also how you work through what someone’s needs are and how you can address them. It may be giving them a brokerage package that helps them create a safe environment around them. It may be that there is a refuge that is available to them but it is not suitable for them or their needs. I understand that having accurate, linear messages can be really helpful, but unfortunately when you are dealing within social aspects like this it is actually quite difficult because there are so many different layers to go into the consideration of what it is that you are trying to do. As you would understand, every day also looks different.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Sure. Just to check in on that 40 per cent that are not covered by the performance measure, are they not being offered the refuge because they need to be offered something else?

The CHAIR: Apologies, Mr Puglielli.

Vicki WARD: It is part of a conversation to work out what they do need and what best suits them.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. We will go to Mr Galea.

Michael GALEA: Thank you, Chair. Thanks for joining us, Minister, Secretary and Ms Heenan. Minister, to begin with I would like to start to talk about perpetrators, specifically referring to budget paper 3, page 36, the output initiatives under DFFH, specifically the \$41.6 million which is provided in funding over the four years to drive down family and sexual violence. Can you please talk to me about this funding and what this funding will do to make the Victorian community safer?

Vicki WARD: Yes, absolutely. Thank you very much for your question, because it is something that we need to keep talking about and that we do need to keep having a focus on, because we know that the root of this problem is those men who are choosing to use violence in their homes. It is by continuing to talk about those – and I really welcome the shift in conversation, which we have seen grow since the royal commission, which is giving us the opportunity to really talk about that perpetrator behaviour, those men who are choosing to use violence, and how we manage that and how we respond to that.

One of the key mechanisms available to us in driving down family violence is how we work with these people choosing to use violence, how we stop them, how we help them reframe themselves and make better choices and make safe choices. So we are investing in a range of perpetrator responses, including collaborative risk assessment and management programs aimed at changing attitudes and behaviours and holding people to

account. Ultimately, the goal of the response is to support people using violence to change their harmful behaviour and keep women and children safe.

The funding will enable people who use violence to participate in the voluntary men's behaviour change programs, case management support, counselling, perpetrator brokerage and access to accommodation-based interventions. Funding will also support the continued provision of culturally safe responses to family violence, including Aboriginal communities, with specialised intervention programs for diverse cohorts. There will be 4400 places available for participants in men's behaviour change programs across Victoria in the 2024–25 financial year. \$13.73 million over four years and \$3.91 ongoing has been allocated in our budget to maintain current tailored programs for people from diverse cohorts who use family violence, including for linguistically diverse communities and women who use force, men with cognitive impairment and people from the LGBTIQ+ community.

I will give you two examples of the diverse approach that we have got. One of the programs established with the funding is the Motivation for Change program, which is managed by InTouch multicultural centre against family violence. This program provides in language and culturally informed behaviour change support to newly arrived migrants and refugees from Afghan and South Asian communities. The program is to diverse cohorts – and there is also another one delivered by Meli in Barwon – and works directly with people with cognitive impairment who have used family violence. This modified men's behaviour change program has been informed by expert disability practitioners. So there are different cohorts that really do need tailored approaches, and what we are trying to do is get the evidence base for what is working and what works for individual cohorts.

Michael GALEA: Thank you, Minister. And it was good for you to mention Meli as well – we actually visited them for a separate PAEC inquiry into gambling last year as well – and the amazing work that they do in the Geelong region.

Vicki WARD: Doing amazing work, absolutely.

Michael GALEA: It was good to hear that as well. All of those wonderful programs aside though, we know that these programs will not be appropriate for every man. So for those who are also at risk but perhaps those programs are not suitable for – for those at risk of committing family violence – what other interventions do we have in place?

Vicki WARD: Thank you for your question. The evidence of what works to change harmful behaviours is still emerging. It is so interesting to be at a point in time where there has been a problem that has been around for so long – it is such an old problem – but it is only a modern response that we getting now. Really for us as a government we are less than 10 years or eight years in to actually starting to respond to this, but worldwide it is a similar kind of thing. There is this growing evidence base, but it really has a long way to go. In Victoria, as you would know, we are quite happy to go and try things to see what works and to see what we can learn from it, and that is exactly what we are doing.

We are committed to building a suite of intervention programs that meet the diverse needs of men in order to manage risk. This includes Changing Ways, which Ms Heenan referred to earlier, which is a two-year trial program designed to ensure victim-survivors, including children and young people, are kept safer by increasing the focus on the person using violence through intensive interventions and individual behaviour change work. The pilot sites for the Changing Ways program have been established in the regions of Barwon and Bayside Peninsula. Dardi Munwurro are also providing supports specifically for Aboriginal communities in north-eastern and southern metropolitan Melbourne. The Changing Ways pilot will be independently evaluated to contribute to the evidence base. The findings of this evaluation will inform improvements to other programs and responses. As I said, we are going to continue to learn because there is so little else out there for us to learn from that we have got to do a lot of this work ourselves. This initiative addresses critical gaps identified by experts in this space.

We have also got MARAM with perpetrators, and it is important with working with perpetrators within our systems that we assess risk properly. An assessment of a perpetrator's level of risk is supported by the MARAM practice guidelines for professionals working with adults who are using violence. The tool provides, among other things, information for indicators of risk and patterns of behaviour. Because MARAM keeps this

data, we are able to start to establish patterns of behaviour. We are able to understand perpetrators better – what they do, who they are interacting with and who they are using violence against. This also includes guidance around assessing a history of trauma, violence history, housing stability, alcohol, drugs and mental illness. It also has a specific focus on assessing the risk of homicide, self-harm as well as suicide. Since the new tool was added to the Orange Door's client record management systems in July 2003, over 9000 perpetrator risk assessments have been undertaken by practitioners in the Orange Door, which is really tremendous work.

Michael GALEA: Thank you, Minister. It is really good to see that data coming though as well, which is going to obviously help to inform.

Vicki WARD: Yes, it really is. And it will help to continue to inform us because this is the phase that we are in. We have built these really strong foundations where we are helping people rebuild their lives, but now there is more work to do when it comes to perpetrators and prevention.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister.

Michael GALEA: Thank you.

The CHAIR: We can see you are very passionate about this portfolio. Minister and department officials, thank you very much for taking the time to appear before the committee today. The committee will follow up on any questions taken on notice in writing, and responses are required within five working days of the committee's request. I do want to let anyone listening to or watching this hearing this afternoon know that if you are experiencing family violence, help is available. You can phone 1800 RESPECT. Their helpline is 24/7 and can be reached on 1800 737 732. If it is unsafe to call, you can send a text 24/7 to 0458 737 732. Just a reminder if you are in immediate danger, please call 000.

Mrs McArthur, just on a point of order.

Bev McARTHUR: Thank you, Chair. There is a fair degree of confusion over the number of nights in motels or refuges or both. On notice, you could give it to us in writing.

The CHAIR: Mrs McArthur!

Michael GALEA: The session is over.

Bev McARTHUR: We do not want to get the information inaccurately.

The CHAIR: The department officials and Minister will not be taking that on notice.

Danny O'BRIEN: Sorry, Chair. That is up to them. That is not your call.

The CHAIR: You have had enough time to answer that. You have just said you want to raise a point of order. Your time is up. You have had ample opportunity to ask that.

Bev McARTHUR: All we want is the clarification; that is all. No answer now. You can do it in writing.

The CHAIR: The committee will now take a very short break before beginning its consideration of the regional development portfolio at 4:45 pm.

I declare this hearing adjourned.

Witnesses withdrew.