

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Budget estimates 2020–21 (Williams)

Melbourne—Friday, 27 November 2020

MEMBERS

Ms Lizzie Blandthorn—Chair

Mr Richard Riordan—Deputy Chair

Mr Sam Hibbins

Mr David Limbrick

Mr Gary Maas

Mr Danny O’Brien

Ms Pauline Richards

Mr Tim Richardson

Ms Nina Taylor

Ms Bridget Vallence

WITNESSES

Ms Gabrielle Williams, MP, Minister for Prevention of Family Violence,

Mr Ben Rimmer, Deputy Secretary, Housing, and Chief Executive Officer, Homes Victoria,

Ms Kelly Stanton, Executive Director, Program and Service Development, Family Safety Victoria,

Ms Jane Sweeney, Executive Director, Policy and Design, Family Safety Victoria, and

Mr Greg Stenton, Deputy Secretary, Corporate Services, Department of Health and Human Services; and

Ms Sarah Gruner, Director, Office for Women, Department of Premier and Cabinet.

The CHAIR: We resume consideration of the portfolio prevention of family violence and again welcome the minister and her officials to the table. We thank you for appearing before the committee today. You have 5 minutes for a presentation and then we will alternate with questions between committee members. So we invite you to make a 5-minute presentation again.

It is on the screen now; is that right? Excellent. We have just fixed it. There was an issue with corruption of the file, but it now appears to be on the screen. Thank you, Minister, and we will see how we go.

Visual presentation.

Ms WILLIAMS: Thank you very much, Chair. Please let me again acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet and pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging and any other elders who may be here with us today.

I will jump straight into the presentation if I can. I am very pleased to be able to talk to the committee today about this government's important work in family violence service reform, which has been at the heart of our government agenda for a term and a half now. The data speaks for itself, and it is not good. One in three Australian women have experienced physical violence since the age of 15, which I think we would all agree is fairly alarming. In 2015 our government initiated a world-first royal commission into family violence. I think we are having some difficulties moving through the—

The CHAIR: Everyone has a copy of this.

Ms WILLIAMS: Have you got it in front of you? That is good. When the commission handed down its 227 recommendations we committed to implementing all of them and we set ourselves an ambitious 10-year plan to rebuild the family violence system, noting the complexity of that.

This budget pushes our total investment in family violence reform to over \$3 billion, which is more than every other jurisdiction, including the commonwealth, combined, and four years in we have acquitted 166 of those 227 recommendations. We have rolled out seven support and safety hubs, now known as the Orange Door network, across the state, with the remaining to be operational by 2022. They are in Ballarat, Bendigo, Frankston, Geelong, Heidelberg, Mildura and Morwell, with more to come. We have continued to roll out information-sharing reforms so information can be shared among professionals from justice, police, courts, family violence and child protection services to get better assessment of risk that a perpetrator poses. We have also continued to implement critical reforms to courts and justice services. This budget builds on previous investments and is keeping us on track to deliver a future that is free from violence.

Slide 2 just notes that we know that gender inequality is a leading cause of family violence. The royal commission told us this, and that is why in this budget we are investing a further \$435 million in gender equality and preventing family violence. Of course that is just the direct funding. There is a lot that sits around that that is not included in that figure but contributes to better outcomes for victims of family violence.

Slide 3 there—that is the next slide. Of that \$435 million, \$238.3 million is specifically for preventing and responding to family violence, which includes courts, refuge, reform monitoring and elder abuse. This reform, though, is a whole-of-government effort. That figure, for example, does not include a record \$5.3 billion housing build, which will supply over 12 000 homes in total but 1000 of which will be specifically for victim-

survivors of family violence. The areas I have direct responsibility for are really around that \$108.7 million in family violence service delivery and the \$9.7 million in primary prevention.

We go to the next slide. This year has been a year like no other. We knew in the early days of the pandemic that, based on international evidence and common sense, COVID restrictions were likely to increase the incidence of family violence because of an increase in exacerbating factors, including social isolation, financial stress and the like. Victim-survivors would be also, we know, less able to find a safe space to reach out for help given the phone-based nature of our system, and programs would be less able to offer face-to-face support. To that end we invested \$20.2 million to help Victorian family violence and sexual assault services adapt service delivery and meet increases in demand during COVID-19, including moving to web-based rather than phone-based services as well as investments in emergency accommodation and crisis accommodation.

Slide 5. We are investing \$87.3 million over four years to continue offering critical therapeutic supports to keep women and children safe from family violence. That includes \$85.1 million for flexible support packages used to cover costs for victim-survivors leaving a violent relationship. They are what they say—they are designed to be flexible. There is \$2 million over three years to continue the adolescent family violence program. We are continuing our work to change violent behaviours, with \$10.7 million over four years to hold perpetrators to account and encourage them to change their behaviour, and that includes money for case management brokerage and also \$6.1 million for the Caring Dads program, which has been showing some promising results.

The next slide shows that we are also investing \$10.6 million to build the vital architecture that underpins the family violence reform—the things that enable the system. This includes the central information point—what we call CIP—and continuing the rollout of information sharing and shared risk assessment. We move on. We continue to build on previous years' investments with a total output in this budget at \$439.2 million for family violence service delivery. This includes outcomes from previous budgets that are being allocated this year, and this is three times the amount invested since 2014. We have a strong commitment, and we are continuing this work as we will in future budgets as well.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. First I will call on Mr Danny O'Brien, MP, and just for the minister's benefit I will note the other two members of the opposition have also ceded their turns to Mr O'Brien as well.

Ms WILLIAMS: Sure. No problem.

The CHAIR: Mr O'Brien.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Minister. We have only just received the department's budget questionnaire response this morning so have not had a lot of time to go through it, but I just want to ask whether there are any elapsed family violence programs in the current year, and what has happened to them?

Ms WILLIAMS: The bulk of the lapse in programs actually come up for the budget next year, is my understanding. I might ask my colleague here to elaborate on that, but the overwhelming majority are next year.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Perhaps really just if there are any that have lapsed and not been funded again this year.

Ms STANTON: No, there are not any that have lapsed and have not been funded again.

Mr D O'BRIEN: There are not. Okay. Perhaps on notice, if I could ask—I am sorry, it is really hard to see your names.

Ms WILLIAMS: Ms Kelly Stanton, sorry.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Ms Stanton. Perhaps on notice, if I could ask what those programs are for next year, and we can deal with that—

Ms WILLIAMS: You can grill me all you like next year about those as well of course.

Mr D O'BRIEN: It is going to come around faster than you will realise, Minister.

Ms WILLIAMS: Oh, it will come around faster than normal. I am very aware of that.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Yes. I just want to mention—and I think you mentioned—the Family Violence Implementation Reform Monitor. It is listed there in the budget papers on page 115. I am just interested to note there is no funding listed for the current financial year. What money is available for the current year? Is that still there from previous years, and if so, how much?

Ms WILLIAMS: Just bear with me on that. I understand the funding for the implementation monitor ends at the end of the next financial year—so mid next year. My understanding is also that given we have obviously got a new implementation monitor in this cycle than we have had before, she sees us through I think it is one more report and then there will be a discussion around what the implementation monitor looks like going forward, understanding that the monitor's role was to get us through these initial phases of the reform and then for us to review what her—currently it is a her—role is going forward. So once we work out what the ongoing operation of the monitor will be—I think it is fair for me to say there will be an ongoing monitor; it is just whether it is in the current form—that is when those ongoing funding decisions will be made, but it has not been necessary for us to make that decision yet in this budget cycle.

Mr D O'BRIEN: So just to clarify: when you said her position expires at the end of next financial year—so 2021–22?

Ms WILLIAMS: No, I understand it is as of the end of the current financial year that we are in. Sorry.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Right. Hence the \$1.1 million and half a million for the following two financial years. Yes, okay.

Ms WILLIAMS: So just to reiterate on that, I know there has been a lot of interest in the ongoing role of the implementation monitor as that position currently exists. We are currently in work with all parts of the reform across government and the sector to work out what that monitoring role looks like ongoing, whether it takes its current form or whether it takes a different form, noting that we are heading into a different stage of the implementation to when the monitor was first brought on. But what we do acknowledge is that her role has been an incredibly important one, and we have been very open, obviously, about opening ourselves up for review in this reform, noting that much of the reform is a world first and with no best-practice template. So it has been an incredibly important function to get that consistent feedback. It is really just making sure that the mechanism matches where we are up to in the family violence reform to make sure it is fulfilling the right role for the right time, if that makes sense.

Mr D O'BRIEN: So going forward, there has been a bit of speculation that the role might be rolled into a broader royal commission implementation monitor, with the mental health royal commission. Is that something that is under consideration?

Ms WILLIAMS: At the moment there are quite a number of options on the table, and we are actually working with the current monitor in that discussion, too, and getting her feedback on how she thinks the role needs to function going forward. That is obviously really valuable input given that she has been fulfilling this role currently. Essentially, there are a number of options on the table. We have not settled on one yet, but we are hoping to soon.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Is the funding that has been allocated for the next two years—

The CHAIR: Sorry to interrupt you there, Mr M O'Brien, but your current time allocation has expired. I will hand the call to Mr Gary Maas, MP.

Mr MAAS: Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Minister. I would like to take you to the topic of perpetrator programs. If I could take you to budget paper 3, page 64, which outlines a \$10.7 million commitment over the forward estimates to perpetrator responses. Minister, I was hoping you would be able to elaborate on the components of that allocation.

Ms WILLIAMS: That is, the components of the \$10.7 million?

Mr MAAS: Yes.

Ms WILLIAMS: Thank you, Mr Maas. Yes, I can. As you point out, the conversation really has shifted in recent times I think—the conversation around perpetrators, that is. We have really moved from asking, 'Why

doesn't she leave?' to 'Why doesn't he stop?', and I think that has been a really important step forward in the discussion around family violence and really highlights that we are not going to see progress in the reform unless we start dealing with the issue of perpetrators as well as making sure that we are supporting victims. So we firmly believe that addressing perpetrator behaviours is really the only way that we can end family violence.

We know that family violence and violence against women is driven by gender inequality and, as a part of that, disrespect. The royal commission made this point, as has a raft of other research over the years. So one part of the puzzle is addressing this issue of disrespect through behaviour change campaigns, such as Respect Women: Call It Out, and other primary prevention programs that address inequality and discrimination. Another critical piece of work—and a really critical piece of the puzzle—in this package relates to addressing violence once it has already occurred or when it has been identified that there is a really high risk of it occurring. The need to do this was a clear finding from the Royal Commission into Family Violence and has been a clear feature of the reform agenda. So in 2017–18 we provided \$49.5 million over four years to boost access to men's behaviour change programs but also to develop and trial new interventions and in the 2019–20 budget we provided \$85 million over four years and \$22.3 million ongoing to maintain access to community-based interventions for people who use violence. This budget continues that commitment by providing this further \$10.7 million—I mention that context because it is important to see how that has built over time—which is really about addressing the demand for interventions for perpetrators of family violence.

That funding will deliver the expansion of the Caring Dads program—which if I am afforded time I will talk a little bit about—but also opportunities to build evidence about the long-term impact of perpetrator interventions and the impact on victim-survivor safety, noting that the royal commission identified that the evidence base around those programs was pretty thin globally, not just here. Obviously that is really important to ascertain so we know that we are investing in the right interventions and to know where those interventions belong in the suite of interventions that we support, and I think the reality is that it needs to be a suite of programs rather than expecting any one to be a silver bullet. Also included within that \$10.7 million is an extension of brokerage funding that provides assistance to perpetrators to decrease the risk for victim-survivors.

Just quickly on the expansion of the Caring Dads program, this is I think a really interesting and valuable program, and I recently—or last year—had the opportunity to meet with one of the men who had gone through that program. It effectively uses the role of a parent as an access point to have important conversations around abusive behaviours but also upskills these men to be better equipped to be fathers, to be parents, and also work on their relationships and their behaviours through that upskilling. The gentleman I met was really effusive about the value of Caring Dads for him and the fact that it had led to him being able to care for his son, but more than that, being able to have a more functional relationship with his ex-partner. Even more than that again, he said the skills he learned in that program enabled him to get a promotion at work, because he applied those same skills to junior members of his team where he worked, and that was recognised by management and he was given a promotion on that basis. So it changed his life. I mean, he wanted to do the course—the 17 weeks—again a second time so that he could both refresh the skills but also look at another layer that he might have missed the first time round. So it is really important that we are able to expand that program and basically enable access to others and also in doing so keep track of and evaluate what works.

Mr MAAS: Thanks, Minister.

Ms WILLIAMS: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. I will pass to Mr Sam Hibbins, MP.

Mr HIBBINS: Thank you, Chair. And thank you, Minister, and your team for appearing today. I want to ask about the rollout of the Orange Door program, the hubs, and get an update as to the rollout of that program and ask how you are addressing some of the difficulties that were raised or the concerns that were raised in the Auditor-General's report in terms of the rollout of that program and how they are being addressed. The Auditor-General did state that the first hubs did not have the infrastructure, staff and processes they need to support clients and also remarked that none of the first five hubs opened with the full workforce, contributing to a backlog of cases—just one of the issues. So can I ask for an update on the rollout of the Orange Door hubs and how you are addressing the issues raised by the Auditor-General.

Ms WILLIAMS: Sure. There are probably a couple of issues in there in terms of the feedback from the Auditor-General's report and also an update on Orange Door more broadly. In terms of the VAGO report I think the best starting point I could possibly give you is to say that we welcome all feedback and learning as we roll out what is a world-leading reform, particularly the Orange Door model. The fact is that there is no best practice template globally on this; we are the ones doing it, and I know this has been a cause of significant excitement abroad too as they are watching very closely how this rollout works for us and trying to gain the lessons from that. So we very proactively opened ourselves up to scrutiny and oversight to that end so that we can learn the lessons that have been identified, whether that be through the monitor, and indeed we are equally as receptive to feedback from VAGO. And obviously since the release of the VAGO report we have opened another two networks which might go some way to the update, which are in Loddon and Bendigo and Central Highlands and Ballarat, both of which have incorporated feedback from the reviews, in terms of both the reviews from VAGO and the reviews from the implementation monitor. And it is worth noting there that there was an overlap with similar feedback there, so we were already on the path to addressing some of the VAGO feedback because it had come up in the context of the implementation monitor. So some of our response to that was already well underway by the time the VAGO report was handed down.

Another point to make, I guess, was that when we embarked upon the Orange Door model and this reform it was really pretty impossible to get a sense or project demand for the services. I mean, part of what the royal commission was talking about was the fact that there was an under-reporting, a significant under-reporting, of family violence in the community. So effectively you are trying to make a projection on what is invisible under the surface. You know it is there; you just do not know how bad it is. I think one of the benefits of the Orange Door is that it has enabled us, where we have rolled that out, to really get a better sense of demand in a true sense. And as we have created a system that people have confidence in, we have seen reporting—whether that be reporting to police or indeed turning up to services—increase, which is a positive sign. It sounds counterintuitive to say greater police reporting is a positive, but in that sense it is because it means that at least people are reaching out for help. So in that sense the rollout of the Orange Door is an opportunity for us to get a better sense of that demand and then work out how we need to manage it from there.

I also wanted to highlight that we are four years into this reform, but modelling from Our Watch demonstrated that we could not expect to see probably a decrease in reporting or demand for probably at least 10 years. So we entered this reform knowing that this was a long-term commitment and being prepared to make that commitment. Again it probably goes to the update about Orange Door, but as of 31 July this year more than 101 000 people had been referred to or sought help from the Orange Door, and that includes over 39 000 children.

In terms of the recommendations—sorry to jump around a bit; it sort of seems easier to deal with some of these things as I get to them—we have accepted the recommendations. That is probably evident from my initial comments. We have also fast-tracked what I have identified as really critical pieces of work as a part of that. So we accepted all nine of the Auditor-General's recommendations that went to things like detailed planning, consistency of practice, integrated practice training, cultural safety training, working with children, improved monitoring and reporting of demand, performance monitoring and client relationship management system and governance arrangements.

The part that was already underway—of those recommendations—before the Auditor-General's report was sort of new implementation structures that were established to support workforce recruitment, site selection and the establishment of governance. So again it is that governance piece; that was already well underway. And they have been incorporated also in the planning for the next areas; so we are making sure, with every new phase of the rollout, we have learned the lessons and applied them to the next one. And I think what is evident is that the rollout is becoming a bit more streamlined as we move through because of those learnings.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much. Mr O'Brien.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Thank you, Chair. Minister, obviously COVID-19 has had a big impact on many things, including family violence. I think in June there was a shocking increase of 108 additional family violence offences. We had an additional nearly 4500 calls to 1800RESPECT made in June compared to the previous year. That is really just the first wave.

I wonder whether you have any data on either family violence reports or incidents during the second wave of the lockdowns, for a start, and would you agree that the harsh, extended lockdown has actually made things worse in a family violence situation?

Ms WILLIAMS: In context of the data, you are right. You may have heard me speak to what we experienced throughout the lockdown in terms of reporting rates and family violence. Effectively what happened was when we went into that first lockdown we actually saw a dip in reporting rates, as you would expect. You have alluded to this—and for all of the reasons identified in one of my answers earlier—around the fact that many victims may be effectively holed up at home with an abuser. It can be very difficult to reach out for help in those circumstances—to make a phone call, for example—particularly when you take into account the coercive behaviours which often exist in those contexts as well. Then what we saw as we opened up out of the first one was the rate started to sort of creep up.

Now, we take our data from more than one source, so we do not just look at police. We will look at access to specialist family violence services; for example, the Orange Door. Police get some level of indication from data coming out of, for example, child protection as well. We put all of that together to create a complete picture of what exactly is happening, because any one dataset on its own does not necessarily tell you the full story. So what we noticed was the datasets across those many areas were quite inconsistent. They were up and down quite a lot throughout the course of the pandemic, but I think it is fair to say what we saw coming out of that first lockdown was a trend upward. Then we went into the second one. It had started to trend—it was still a bit inconsistent across different datasets—but then when we got to the second one it dipped again and then we had that same kind of inconsistent bouncing-around. But by taking it all together and looking at it all cumulatively, what we were able to see as that second lockdown went in was it start to trend upwards again, which is what we anticipated effectively. What we are anticipating now as we enter that sort of recovery phase is a continuation of that upward trajectory as people are now free to report and access services again. And as services are able to start operating in a more face-to-face environment where they obviously have not in recent times, I think we would expect to see that translate into greater demand.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Given that expectation, particularly from the first wave, Minister, what action did you take within government to lobby to, as best we possibly could, limit the length and the severity of the lockdowns?

Ms WILLIAMS: Obviously the lockdown itself had to be conducted in a way that was responsive to public health need and advice, so that will have been firm across the whole length of the pandemic—that any measure that we took was firmly with public health advice. In terms of what we did, though, in relation to trying to do all we could to keep victims or potential victims of family violence safe during that time, you would have seen a number of announcements that we made during that period around an allocation of funding for emergency accommodation plus a significant \$20 million boost for services to adapt their service delivery. Understanding that face-to-face service delivery would be challenging, we delivered a lot of, for example, tech upgrades that would enable remote service delivery as well as supports for workforce to be able to work in that way—noting of course it is an incredibly challenging environment for workers to work in, given they are trying to protect their own families from the impacts of their work. So there were additional supports, but—

Mr D O'BRIEN: So I guess—I am going to run out of time, Minister, and thank you for that answer so far—one of my concerns and I think a concern of many is that the response, particularly with respect to lockdowns, was all about COVID. There was very little consideration of the secondary effects, and family violence is one of those. Did you talk to the Premier and say, 'Look, we've got to minimise this. We've got to think about this'?

Ms WILLIAMS: Of course. Look, I contest the assertion that there was very little consideration. There was extensive consideration of family violence impacts, and I of course advocated and spoke about that need, which is what resulted in the significant funding that we allocated—well over \$40 million—during that COVID period. You have seen that built upon in what we are doing but also translation of materials, for example, that sent a very clear message that if you were escaping a family violence incident, you could leave your home, you could cross borders. We did not inhibit people's ability to leave and we made sure as best as we could that all parts of the community understood that, and certainly Victoria Police understood that and were not fining anybody who was, for example, leaving their home because they had to.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. I will pass to Ms Pauline Richards, MP.

Ms RICHARDS: Thank you, Minister, and thanks again to your officials for appearing this afternoon. I am going to again take you to budget paper 3, table 1.13, page 64, and continue the discussion from Mr Maas before about perpetrator accountability. I am interested in having some sort of understanding and greater insights into the brokerage funding, so I am hoping you can explain what that is used for.

Ms WILLIAMS: Sure. Thank you very much for that question. So effectively the intention of brokerage is to assist case managers who are working with people who use violence to address crises such as homelessness or other barriers that may be preventing that person from engaging with services. So that might be, for example, taxi vouchers where mobility is a significant barrier. That is just one example. Providers have reported that brokerage enables them to respond really flexibly—not only flexibly but also very effectively—to men's individual needs, which helps them obviously to reduce that family violence risk.

As with all programs in the perpetrator area, the focus is squarely on the safety of the victim-survivor and their children. We know that perpetrators need to be in view of the system for us to be able to best manage their risk. The worst possible outcome is for them not to be engaged with the system at all, because it makes it very difficult in those circumstances to be able to ensure that we are keeping a victim safe, and that is always our primary concern and the primary concern of the sector.

So in the absence of perpetrator case management brokerage, victim-survivors can be required to seek refuge or crisis accommodation themselves to escape violence, which we know disrupts really important connections to family, to work and to school—for their kids if they have got them. In the absence of specific brokerage supports for perpetrators, it is more difficult to facilitate the rehousing of perpetrators than it is to effectively source alternative accommodations for victim-survivors, and this means that women and children are more able to stay safely in their home.

Obviously we only work and the sector only works to keep women in their home and remove the perpetrator where it is safe to do so. That is not appropriate for all situations, and we have a wonderful family violence sector that is very adept at making that assessment of when that is an appropriate response and when it is not. So that is also being expanded on the basis of an evaluation from Deloitte, which shows that brokerage is a low-cost way of increasing the safety of victim-survivors, which is a very welcome bit of feedback.

To give some indication about what brokerage is mostly used for, if that is helpful to you, it is essentially immediate basic needs, transport, physical and mental health and wellbeing, support for social engagement, short-term accommodation and the like. So a practical example is of a case where brokerage paid for three nights of accommodation so that the perpetrator would not return to the family home, which effectively gave enough time to enable crisis safety planning for the victim-survivor to occur and avoided additional justice and statutory system involvement, effectively, because without it the perpetrator would have been likely to breach orders or safety notices because of a lack of an accommodation option. So you are giving a bit of breathing space to do the work you need to do and also, in doing so, preventing what would have probably otherwise ended up with a justice intervention, which as we know creates a whole other backlog in another system which already has a very high workload, I think it is fair to say.

So the availability of brokerage has been shown to support the holistic response model for people who use violence, and there are considerable opportunities for continued growth and development of this form of assistance, which is I think why this funding allocation is so very important.

Ms RICHARDS: Thank you, Minister. In the short time I have got left, using the same budget paper reference, I am interested in understanding a little bit more about the challenges in Aboriginal communities. I see that there is some specific funding going towards intervention for people who use violence in our Aboriginal communities, and we know that violence is not a part of Aboriginal culture. So I am interested in understanding more about the work with Aboriginal and diverse communities more broadly.

Ms WILLIAMS: Thank you. In short, noting I do not have a lot of time, the work with Aboriginal communities is effectively guided by two key frameworks: one is Dhelk Dja, which is a partnership agreement between Aboriginal communities and government to address family violence, and the other one is an Aboriginal holistic healing framework. So Dhelk Dja recognises that Aboriginal violence, as you have outlined,

is not a part of Aboriginal culture and that family violence against Aboriginal people is perpetrated by both non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal people. That partnership approach is really important with that piece of work.

Ms RICHARDS: Terrific. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. Thank you, Ms Richards. Mr David Limbrick, MLC.

Mr LIMBRICK: Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Minister, again for appearing, and the staff. In budget paper 3, on page 69, it talks about an establishment of a new family violence graduate program. Could you outline: what is this program actually doing, and what sort of courses would someone need to be enrolled in to take part in one of these graduate programs?

Ms WILLIAMS: Sure. I will just be a moment. Sorry, Mr Limbrick, I am just trying to find the right part.

Mr LIMBRICK: That is all right. It would appear to indicate that there is some sort of workforce shortage that it is trying to address, and I am just trying to understand what sort of workforce we are talking about.

Ms WILLIAMS: Yes. Within the family violence sector, absolutely. Part of our challenge in the broader reform—to speak to that—is that we need to significantly grow the workforce to meet the demand, and that probably links into what I was talking about earlier in the context of the royal commission recommendations. One of the challenges identified by the royal commission was the under-reporting, which means you are trying to make educated estimates on what you think the demand actually is in the community from a starting point of knowing that much of it is invisible. As we have rolled out the reform we are getting, largely through the Orange Door, a better sense of exactly what that demand is. With that and also though with the expertise that is required of significant parts of the reform there is absolutely a need to grow the workforce significantly to be able to in turn meet that demand.

For example, more recently you will have seen an announcement that was shared between me, Minister Merlino and Minister Donnellan, where we announced a significant package of funding that went in part to this. My component of that was funding that went towards workforce traineeships to better support organisations to be able to take trainees in. That is really important because we know the on-the-job aspects of that work basically deliver really important training for those individuals who may be doing relevant TAFE courses to get their qualification, but it also ensures that by getting that real-world experience we have got a greater chance of retaining workforce as well. You know, you get better outcomes I think by giving people that exposure to real-world work, particularly in such a difficult sector, which also goes a significant way to improving the quality of the services that we are there to roll out and support. In terms of the point that you are getting to around why we have mechanisms, whether it be through traineeships or indeed through supporting free TAFE relevant qualifications, that is very much designed to try and attract people to this workforce but also—understanding that there is a lot of mental load that comes with working in this area—to make sure that we can retain them, and that means supporting organisations to be able to help with that retention piece as well.

Mr LIMBRICK: So we are talking about TAFE graduate programs, not university graduate programs. What type of courses would someone be doing that would go into this graduate program?

Ms WILLIAMS: Well, one of the recommendations of the royal commission was that workers in the specialist family violence sector have a social work or equivalent qualification, so obviously that is mostly a university degree, but there are TAFE components to the training, also keeping in mind there can be TAFE components to various training opportunities in the sector. But the family violence sector is more than one workforce, if that makes sense. You have got the specialist family violence sector, but then you have also got a range of other sectors that intersect with the issue of family violence. Therefore you have got a range of different workforces that would need to contribute to that overall effort in terms of our reform.

Jane might like to expand on particularly that aspect that goes to the recommendations of the royal commission and the qualification aspect of it. I do not know if it is Jane or Kelly that might be better placed to; but I think, Jane, that is your area. If I have missed out on anything in terms of not only the royal commission recommendations but also the support that we have been required to give to get that significant uplift to our workforce, I might let you add that.

Ms SWEENEY: Thank you, Minister.

The CHAIR: We are actually out of time for this session. Perhaps if there is anything relevant, you could provide it to the committee.

Mr LIMBRICK: Thank you.

The CHAIR: I will give Mr Tim Richardson, MP, the call.

Mr RICHARDSON: Thanks, Chair, and thank you, Minister. I will take you five pages back from where Mr Limbrick was at and to budget paper 3, which outlines more than \$85 million over four years for flexible support packages. Can you outline to the committee what they exactly are?

Ms WILLIAMS: Sure. You would have noticed in my introduction I referred to flexible support packages and said they are what they sound like—by their very definition flexible. They effectively respond to a need for very flexible but also tailored options to support victim-survivors of family violence, so the packages provide very unique responses based on individual needs and goals of each person. They are designed to obviously not be overly bureaucratic in their distribution and rollout, obviously recognising the fact that many of the needs that these are servicing need to be met fairly quickly. So to that end, packages of up to \$10 000 are used to assist victim-survivors to access a range of supports. It might be, for example, counselling, wellbeing, education needs, employment needs or financial counselling but also some of those more tangible, practical needs around transport, housing and things that go to financial security or other material needs. So although the packages can be up to \$10 000, the average unit cost is around probably \$3300 to meet those needs.

Funding is available through the packages to access also a range of safety and security measures. You can see that might be incredibly important for a victim-survivor who wants to, say, remain in their home but wants to have the added security to enable them to do that safely and also to feel safe. So that might include, for example, CCTV, personal devices and property modifications, which comes under the personal safety initiative. That, as I said, is really about making sure that we can assist victims-survivors to remain safely in their own home or to relocate safely to a new property if they fear that there might be an attempt to track them down. Now, the continued delivery of flexible support packages will ensure that victim-survivors of family violence who are at different stages of their journey, whether that is during a very high-risk period, which often comes after somebody leaves, or a period of crisis or escape or when they are attempting to really recover and stabilise their life after a pretty traumatic period—whatever their stage—can access those critical goods and services and supports that they might need to enable them to move forward and establish sustainable arrangements that support their long-term health and wellbeing and allow them to live freely from abuse and violence; that is our ultimate aim. The funding supports the delivery of about 5700 packages each year and delivers on two recommendations of the royal commission, which are recommendations 13 and 17.

Mr RICHARDSON: Thanks for that answer, Minister. Obviously there is a range of diversity and different uses as well, but can you take us through any more of the range of uses that these support packages are provided for to support people in great need?

Ms WILLIAMS: Sure, and I outlined some of those earlier, but to drill down into that a little bit more, they can be used to purchase goods and services that have been identified by the victim-survivor through a case plan as important or critical to their recovery. The case plans are developed in partnership with their service provider, so their service provider works with them on that. And as I said, as per the name, they are designed as much as possible to be flexible. We have been really careful with the design of these not to be too prescriptive as to how they can be used, and we do that because we are acutely aware that there is a significant diversity and complexity of need among victim-survivors.

So to give you some examples of how they have been used by a diversity of people to meet that diversity of need, we have got packages that would meet basic material needs like food, clothing, care packs; bills—for example, utilities or utility debts that would run a risk of obviously greatly disrupting their lives; and technology or safety support, as I went to. I think I mentioned CCTV, but that might also be a mobile phone if that significantly improves your safety, as you can imagine it might, or security doors and lighting—things of that nature. And then also things that go to good mental and physical health, which might be, for example, medical or pharmaceutical costs.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. I will pass to Mr Danny O'Brien, MP.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Thank you, Chair. Minister, can I just come back to the government's family violence response with respect to lockdowns. One of the questions I had was about Operation Ribbon, which I acknowledge is not your portfolio but run by police to go and check on known family violence perpetrators. As a civilian I just found that a little bit odd—that police are going to randomly rock up to the door of a known family violence perpetrator, check 'Is everything all right?', close the door and walk away again. Was there any evidence or concern that that actually caused more issues?

Ms WILLIAMS: Look, that is probably a question best directed to the minister for police, who obviously has direct oversight of Victoria Police and Operation Ribbon as it related to it. To give you an overview of what I understand about that response, obviously family violence is more than a justice response; it involves a whole-of-service delivery and whole-of-government, really, response to meet the need. But police do play a really important part in that. I understood, if I can remember correctly, that on the back of Operation Ribbon I think there were some 8000 engagements between police—or 8000, I think it was, incidents detected in that time, so I think that data alone over the course of a number of months would probably indicate a pretty positive outcome.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Okay. So you had no concerns, or no concerns were raised with you by the sector?

Ms WILLIAMS: No. Me personally, no acute concerns. I think what is worth highlighting in this context though is that the police would work hand in glove with the service system. Obviously a lot of the reform work that we have done on the back of the royal commission has been about improving that whole-of-system response, and that means improving the police response as well and how they do it. We have specific training programs now for police about how they approach family violence situations, so the training of police has greatly been stepped up. The sorts of things they take notice of in a family violence situation have also been fine-tuned, for want of a better term, but also their referral practices. For example, to use a case I know of personally, somebody has a family violence incident and the police turn out after a call, and within 24 hours because of that they had a contact made by a local service provider, the victim did, to check and connect her to whatever she needed. Often it is the police response that will trigger the service response, so in that sense it can lead to better engagement with the service system—

Mr D O'BRIEN: I am sorry to cut you off, Minister, but I am running out of time and I just want to get in a couple more questions.

Ms WILLIAMS: Sure. Sorry, go for it.

Mr D O'BRIEN: You talked before about men's behaviour change programs, so I was wondering if I could get what the current waiting list is for men trying to get into those programs.

Ms WILLIAMS: I will endeavour to see if I can get you a figure on that, Mr O'Brien. Obviously there are the broad two categories of the men's behaviour change. There are ones that are voluntary and then there are ones that are a product of a court-based intervention.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Happy for you to take it on notice if you do not have it.

Ms WILLIAMS: I just want to check that we have not actually got it to hand. Look, I suppose part of the complexity in giving you that response too is that it is effectively a point-in-time proposition but it also is different across different agencies at different times, depending on the intervention, so it might need to be a bit more of a specific request if you have got a specific agency or case in mind that you are thinking of or organisation in mind as to what a waiting list for a particular program is.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Okay. Righto. The departmental questionnaire on page 70 indicates that \$740 000 has been reprioritised from Office for Women for family violence prevention programs, and if I am reading it correctly it says that it has been reprioritised to multicultural affairs. I am wondering what that \$740 000 is and what impact that will have on the programs.

Ms WILLIAMS: Bear with me, and I will try and locate some details.

Mr D O'BRIEN: It says it is from the 2017–18 budget, but I am just interested to know what it is and what impact it will have.

Ms WILLIAMS: We have got a representative from the Office for Women here who may be able to shed some light on the reprioritisations, or have you—

Ms GRUNER: Is it reprioritisation?

Ms WILLIAMS: I think that is what the member was saying—

Mr D O'BRIEN: Yes, page 70 of the questionnaire:

Office for Women—Family Violence Prevention ...

There is a reprioritisation. What was going to be there this year, and what actually is there this year?

Ms GRUNER: Look, it is reprioritisation simply because the multicultural affairs—

Mr D O'BRIEN: Sorry, can you come to the microphone. I cannot quite hear you.

Ms GRUNER: Sorry. The multifunding for prevention initiatives has now been moved over substantively to the Office for Women so that all the prevention programs are being run together under our banner. So we do prevention programs across all settings in all communities, and it enables us to actually pull together a far more consolidated and nuanced approach in terms of what works and draw in learnings in terms of what might be working in multi settings, LGBTI settings et cetera to build our evidence base over time and improve our prevention interventions.

Mr D O'BRIEN: But this would appear to say that the funding has gone from the Office for Women to multicultural affairs.

Ms GRUNER: So initially the budget came down into the primary prevention portfolio and it was prioritised for multicultural affairs to actually lead.

Ms WILLIAMS: So this was in relation to the recent announcement of additional funding?

Ms GRUNER: That is right.

Ms WILLIAMS: Right, yes—I know what that is referring to now. Apologies. There was a recent funding boost for prevention work in the multicultural community space which was effectively a partnership in basic terms between myself and the Minister for Multicultural Affairs.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Bottom line, it is still family violence?

Ms WILLIAMS: Yes. So effectively it was my contribution from my area to a joint effort with the Minister for Multicultural Affairs into making sure that we were able to boost multicultural family violence prevention work during this time.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Thank you.

Ms WILLIAMS: Sorry. We got there in the end.

The CHAIR: Thank you. I will pass the call to Ms Nina Taylor, MLC.

Ms TAYLOR: I would like to move along to Central Information Point and, if I may, refer you to budget paper 3, page 64, which allocates \$1.483 million output and \$6.439 million asset to the Central Information Point. Can we get some clarity around what central information does?

Ms WILLIAMS: Sure. I often comment, Ms Taylor, that the Central Information Point does not sound like the sexiest part of any sort of budget offering, but it is such a critical piece of infrastructure to the entire family violence reform and something that really underpins so much of the work that we are doing, particularly in the context of the Orange Door. So effectively what it does is it consolidates critical risk-relevant information from partner agencies. Those partner agencies include Victoria Police, the Magistrates Court of Victoria, Corrections Victoria and the Department of Health and Human Services and child protection, and it consolidates that information from those agencies about a perpetrator or an alleged perpetrator of family violence into a single report. So this supports frontline workers with their risk assessments, which also obviously bears on their

management and safety planning for a victim as well. So it helps practitioners make a more informed risk assessment about a victim that ultimately improves the safety of that victim in terms of the supports that can then be put in place, and it empowers victim-survivors to make more informed decisions about their own safety too and increases perpetrator accountability.

So the strength of bringing together different information from all of those different agencies means that you are not basing a risk assessment on only one part of the story. You can imagine that if you only had access to one set of information from one agency, it might give you a very different story to what you would have if you brought together information from across those agencies, which gives you a much more, I suppose, complex picture or full picture of what somebody might be up to or where they are up to at a given point in time in terms of the risk they pose to another.

So it addresses findings from the Royal Commission into Family Violence that a lack of information sharing means that risks posed to a victim-survivor are not always known, and one of the most public—and one of the most tragic too—examples of this was the case of Luke and Rosie Batty, obviously one that we are all quite familiar with. Now, there was a range of additional information about Luke's father—about his arrest history and his behaviour—that if it was known to services, and maybe even known to Rosie herself, could or would have changed their understanding of the risk that Luke's father posed. The absence of this information led to that inability to put the whole picture together to get that comprehensive picture of risk so that the right response could then be put into action.

The royal commission made a series of recommendations to remedy this problem, notably recommendation 7, which outlined that the Victorian government should establish a secure Central Information Point, CIP, that consists of a co-located multidisciplinary team with representatives from those agencies I just outlined—being Victoria Police, the courts, DHHS and the department of justice and regulation, which takes in corrections—who are authorised to obtain information from their respective databases, and a summary of this information should be provided in order to develop a more accurate risk profile of a perpetrator of family violence. To that end, we committed I think \$89.5 million to establish the CIP, and the investment that you referred to earlier continues that commitment. It really is key to the function of the Orange Door model and key to us delivering on this joined-up system that we promised as a part of the royal commission.

Ms TAYLOR: Okay. Just building on that, how specifically will the additional funding help, do you think?

Ms WILLIAMS: Currently data custodians from each area are co-located and copy and paste relevant information into a single report. This funding, though, will effectively deliver output funding for ongoing operations and service delivery to the Orange Door, which critically supports increased demand as the Orange Door rollout continues statewide, including workforce and project staff, ICT infrastructure, system hosting and maintenance and support services. It also includes asset funding which supports the completion of integration work packages with CIP partner agencies, which will achieve partial automation of data fields from partner agency systems, which obviously is really important for the efficiency of the system as a whole. There are others too, but I think I just heard the bell that tells me I have to stop.

The CHAIR: Thank you. That concludes our time for consideration of this portfolio today. We thank you and your officials very much for appearing before our committee today. The committee will follow up on any questions taken on notice in writing, and responses will be required within 10 working days of the committee's request. Indeed we thank all ministers and their officers who have given evidence to the committee today. I also thank Hansard and our committee secretariat. The committee will resume its consideration of the 2020–21 budget estimates on Tuesday, 1 December. I therefore declare this hearing adjourned.

Committee adjourned.