T R A N S C R I P T

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY LEGAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into capturing data on family violence perpetrators in Victoria

Melbourne—Monday 19 August 2024

MEMBERS

Ella George – Chair
Annabelle Cleeland – Deputy Chair
Chris Couzens
Chris Crewther
Cindy McLeish
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WITNESSES

Phillip Ripper, Chief Executive Officer,

Dr Rebecca Buys, Head, Policy and Research, and

Olsen Clark, Policy and Advocacy Adviser, No to Violence.

The CHAIR: Good afternoon. My name is Ella George and I am the Chair of the Legislative Assembly's Legal and Social Issues Committee. We will now resume public hearings for the Committee's Inquiry into capturing data on family violence perpetrators in Victoria.

I begin today by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which we are meeting, the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people of the Kulin nation. I pay my respects to their elders past, present and future and extend that respect to First Nations people across Victoria.

I am joined today by my colleagues Jackson Taylor, the Member for Bayswater; Christine Couzens, the Member for Geelong; Annabelle Cleeland, the Member for Euroa and Deputy Chair; and Chris Crewther, the Member for Mornington, is joining us via Zoom.

The Committee recognises that evidence to this inquiry may be distressing, and we urge people to reach out for support. You can contact Lifeline on 13 11 14, 1800RESPECT or the Blue Knot helpline on 1300 657 380.

All evidence given today is being recorded by Hansard and broadcast live. While all evidence taken by the Committee is protected by parliamentary privilege, comments repeated outside this hearing may not be protected by this privilege.

Witnesses will be provided with a proof version of today's transcript to check, together with any questions taken on notice. Verified transcripts, responses to questions taken on notice and other documents provided during the hearing will be published on the Committee's website.

I am now pleased to welcome from No to Violence Phillip Ripper, Chief Executive Officer; Rebecca Buys, Head of Policy and Research; and Olsen Clark, Policy and Advocacy Adviser. Thank you for joining us today. I invite you to make a brief opening statement of 5 to 10 minutes, and this will be followed by questions from members. Thank you.

Phillip RIPPER: Thank you, Ella. I would also like to begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of the lands on which we meet today. Here today it is the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation, and I pay my respects to elders past and present and any First Nations people watching online. I also acknowledge the devastating and disproportionate impact that family violence has on First Nations communities. You will have seen much in the papers and in the evidence previously about that disproportionate impact, and at No to Violence we commit to walking side by side with First Nations communities on a path of reconciliation and justice.

I would also like to acknowledge the women and children who have lost their lives through family violence and the courage that so many women and children have had to come forward and share their stories and inform the work of our organisation and the broader family violence sector. It is the safety and the quality of life for women and children that drives everything we do at No to Violence, so it is supporting men to end their use of family violence.

In terms of our opening address, we believe that data is at the very heart of solving this wicked problem that is family violence in this country. Without knowing what the problem is that we are facing, without knowing the scale, the size, the nuance and the complexity of this issue, we cannot hope to solve those problems. That makes this Committee and this inquiry incredibly important, and the work you are doing will be no doubt very valuable to playing its part in ending the scourge that is family violence.

What we call on you to do is to look deeply at the complexity of the issues of family violence. You will no doubt already have seen lots of government data, which is a lot of easy to collect stuff that will tell you gender and age, it might give you a bit of background on some demographics, but very little of it I would characterise as being useful. We would say to you: if we are to get to the heart of family violence, we must start collecting and analysing useful information. So we would be saying: whatever you come up with, let us make sure that it has a use and that that use is known right up-front. You are starting a journey of delving deeper and establishing a more complex understanding of the dynamics of family violence, and what we need to know is more about who uses family violence and why. This inquiry is an opportunity to advance that understanding also of what works, for which man and at what time. Developing a deeper and more complex understanding of family violence and its perpetration will enable us to make significant inroads into stopping it. As I said, we are asking

you to be courageous and to fundamentally shift the current assumptions around who uses family violence and what works to stop it. We need to move beyond assumptions and move towards evidence and knowledge.

As you will already know, No to Violence is the Victorian peak body for organisations and professionals who work with men to end their use of family violence. We have existed for over 30 years and have grown and developed our understanding of men's use of family violence over that time, but this particular submission has been grounded in insights from our members, specific consultations across Victoria with people who have been working in this field and experts in this field over many years. We have also made a special effort to engage those voices that are often underheard, particularly through organisations like inTouch, working with culturally and racially marginalised communities; Thorne Harbour Health, who work with the LGBTIQA+ community; organisations like Djirra, working with First Nations women; as well as key players in the sector, such as Family Life and Safe and Equal among many others. The evidence we give and the perspective we bring is one that is well informed by years and years of practice wisdom but also the strength of organisations such as those I have mentioned before.

We think in this area there are a lot of problems, and you are hopefully looking for solutions. So what we would like to present today are five problems as we see them and five solutions. Our first problem is that we in Victoria continue to rely heavily on government data. That is no fault of anyone. That is the nature of the data we have. The information we have comes from police, comes from courts and comes from services. But we know 70 to 80% of people experiencing family violence never report it to police. In New South Wales the family violence prevention strategy quotes 82% of family violence not being reported to police, so if we are only looking at that 18 to 20% or 30% of information that is on view, we are missing a very, very large part of the story. We say by looking only at that tip of the iceberg that we can see, we are hiding and obscuring the reality of family violence for so many women and children every night in this state. We need to do something different to uncover what is really going on.

Our solution one to that problem is a commitment by the state of Victoria to develop a statewide perpetration strategy, a piece of work that is owned by government that says we understand the complexity, a strategy that identifies who it is that uses family violence—that brings together current research on scale as well as important research on context, on tactics, on nuance, on complexity, on practice; that brings together that practice-based evidence along with the scale of population-based evidence; that understands the psychology of using violence; that understands the drivers of using violence; that understands the government agencies and the non-government agencies where people who use violence come into interaction—a strategy that outlines the journey to using violence for so many people, the points that we can engage, the points of opportunity to affect that pathway into using violence and disrupt those pathways into violence; a strategy that outlines what we know is best practice in intervention and what works for what men at what time and what are those pathways out of using family violence.

This strategy is something that is desperately needed in the state. At the moment we have a whole bunch of initiatives—I like to say a whole bunch of tactics frantically in search of a strategy. We have got to level it up, and we need to bring this piece of work together that can exist in the first instance maybe as a three-year strategy and then a 10-year strategy, a strategy that continues to evolve, because we are not going to solve this problem with one-off budget announcements or one-off responses to funding or one-off research studies. This needs a vehicle to carry this work through this Parliament, the next Parliament and the Parliament after, because this work will not be solved in three years. It needs an architecture, and it needs commitment from all sides of politics. It will gain the support of the Victorian public because people in this state are saying enough is enough. They want to see something done that is more than just another bunch of announcements. It needs leadership in thinking and action. That is our solution one. Part of that will bring into view that 80% of family violence that is sitting under the surface.

Problem two is what we see as fragmented information-sharing processes that inhibit best practice. I am sure you have already heard this: information sharing is critical to best practice responses, it is critical to keeping women and children safe in this state and it is critical for the services that work with women and children and with men to be able to know what they are dealing with. Our solution is to expand access to the central information point to all specialist family violence services. The central information point—no doubt you have had a look at it—is a wealth of knowledge that is critical to those organisations doing their work to the best of their capability. By denying specialist family violence services direct access to the CIP, we are asking them to do this incredibly complex work—dangerous work in many cases for women and children—blindfolded and

with one hand tied behind their back. It is a very easy fix, and we advocate for broader access to the central information point.

Problem three is that interventions for people using violence are not being measured against what they are trying to achieve. I am calling for a strategic approach to intervening in men's use of family violence. To be strategic is all about knowing what the goal is in mind. What are we trying to achieve here, people? We do not have an outcomes framework for the work that we do with men in terms of behaviour change. Some people would say, 'You would not know a good outcome if you got it,' and that is just not okay. We spend good taxpayers money intervening and working with men to change their behaviour, but we do not have a robust outcomes framework to tell you whether taxpayers are getting good bang for their buck and we are making a difference.

I would extend that further to say not just an outcomes framework for men's behaviour change programs but the broader system as well. How effective is a police call-out? How much does a police call-out cost, and how effective is it in ending family violence? How much does a hearing in front of a magistrate cost, and how effective is that in ending family violence? We need to be asking ourselves these questions, to be saying, 'Where do we get the most bang for the buck? What actually works to end men's use of family violence? Let's invest in those.' But at this stage the state really does not have those answers.

I asked the CEO of the Magistrates' Court of Victoria: how much does it cost to get a man in front of a magistrate to issue an intervention order? Core business to the Magistrates' Court. He could not answer me. He did not know. Absolute core business, getting men in front of a magistrate with an intervention order—could not tell me. That is appalling. We do not have a framework that demonstrates cost-effectiveness for the interventions that we provide. An outcomes framework will help us determine what is getting results. That is our solution three. Problem three: effectiveness. Solution: build an outcomes framework.

Our fourth problem goes to our understanding of who uses family violence. We have limited shared understanding of the pathways in and the pathways out. What we need is an increased investment in research that centres practice-based knowledge. We need to bring together the broadscale, population-based knowledge we have, we need to bring together the work we do in early childhood development, we need to bring together existing research that touches on family violence, but centre that in a family violence lens to be able to talk to what are those factors that contribute to people ending up using violence, so that we can identify intervention points to stop it at the source, before we ever get to that point. Some of that will be psychological, some of it will be developmental and some of it will be social factors, but we need that framework. We need to understand where we intervene and how we get an outcome for that investment.

Our fifth problem is around misidentification. Our data on who uses family violence is still problematic in some cases, but it is particularly problematic when we talk about culturally and racially marginalised communities and particularly problematic when we are engaging with First Nations communities and First Nations women. We know that rates of misidentification in those cohorts can be up to 50%. If we are looking at data, we must be looking at getting it right, and dealing with misidentification is a really important part of that. So our solution five there is to accept that to some degree misidentification is always going to be with us, but what we can do is create an accessible, effective and responsive mechanism to rectify misidentification when it occurs and make it easy and accessible. So they are our five problems, as we present them to you, with our five solutions, and at that point I will pause for questions.

Olsen CLARK: I might just add that we have a case study that we have compiled in partnership with Thorne Harbour Health, one of our members, and we will table that for you and send that through to be shared. That speaks to the devastating impacts of misidentification of the predominant aggressor as well as some of the inaccuracies in data collection and how they relate to the data collection framework and our recommendation for that to be reviewed.

The CHAIR: Great. Excellent. Thank you. I will hand over to Chris Crewther for the first question. Thanks, Chris.

Chris CREWTHER: Thank you very much, Chair. Thank you for your very comprehensive remarks—particularly outlining the five problems and the five potential solutions, a number of which I think will be worthy of looking at in terms of our final recommendations. I have a question on one of your

recommendations. You recommend expanding access to CIP to all specialist family violence services, which reflects one of the solutions you just outlined. Which services should be added as a priority, in your view, to begin with?

Phillip RIPPER: All specialist family violence services that are funded by Family Safety Victoria—that would be organisations working with men who use family violence, so men's behaviour change programs, as well as those who are working with victim-survivors who are not directly part of the Orange Door. They are not our members, but we would still advocate on their behalf for access to the CIP.

Chris CREWTHER: Yes. If there is a particular process and bureaucracy and administration in rolling that out, is there a priority organisation that needs to come first, though, if it takes a year to roll out such a sharing?

Phillip RIPPER: No. Look, our members would all be considered equal in terms of their need for that access. For organisations working with women and children, I would not wish to speak on behalf of that cohort but would defer to Tania Farha, my colleague.

Chris CREWTHER: Yes. Thank you. What is the current process for receiving a CIP report for those services?

Phillip RIPPER: I will hand over to Olsen for more detail.

Olsen CLARK: Sure. For services that are not embedded within the Orange Door—which is a large majority of our members working with men using family violence—to get information that is held within a CIP there are two avenues. They can request it through the Orange Door, who would then process that CIP request and then feed information back. They do not feed the whole report as itself; they will feed information back to the service provider.

Phillip RIPPER: Often heavily redacted.

Olsen CLARK: Often heavily redacted—it will go through a process of assessment by the Orange Door of their subjective assessment of what is risk-relevant information. There is often a disconnect in understanding around what that risk-relevant information is. This means that service providers often will not receive the information that they need to undertake a comprehensive risk assessment.

The other issue with this process is that the Orange Doors can only submit these CIP requests for clients that have been referred to the service provider from the Orange Door or for someone who is believed to be perpetrating against an individual referred to the Orange Door, as in a victim-survivor. Some of our members have told us that as little as 10% of their clients have been referred to the Orange Door, so they are not able to go through that process. And when they do, it is a very slow and burdensome process. The other mechanism for them to get the information that is in a CIP report is to put individual information requests in to the agencies, so Victoria Police, courts, child protection and so forth. That is taking away the beauty of the streamlining of CIP. There are a lot of time pressures with those information requests, and often they take weeks to be received, if they are received at all.

Phillip RIPPER: And the futility of it—having that data available sitting in the CIP but then people having to work around the CIP and then the agencies to respond to those information requests going around the CIP when it is already sitting there in a central information point. It is bonkers. That is a technical term.

Chris CREWTHER: Thank you. And thank you, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Chris. Annabelle?

Annabelle CLEELAND: Thank you, Phillip, for your comprehensive opening statement. You have answered so many questions that we had prepared, to be honest, so now we are going into the detail. And Chris took my questions too. Just regarding your statewide perpetration strategy—excellent. We have heard a lot about a national survey or a statewide survey if a national one is not an opportunity. Is this something that would be incorporated as part of your strategy? Can you maybe just home in on the details about what that strategy looks like and why it is important.

Phillip RIPPER: Yes, well, look, I think that strategy needs to be an overarching piece that brings together so much of the existing knowledge. In many ways I sort of feel like if I was doing the first statewide strategy, I reckon we could almost do it at cost neutral by simply bringing together all the work that is already being done. We know organisations in the state have done incredible, nation-leading work. The Man Box study—the Jesuit Social Services do incredible work about attitudes. We know the work that Our Watch do around men who use family violence. We know that ANROWS funds a lot of work around people who use family violence. We know the state is funding a project to share evidence-based practice. But all of those pieces of work are just sort of sitting in the ether. They are not brought together to a cohesive point, they are not brought together in a way that they are mutually supportive and they are not brought together in a way that they lead to the next obvious action. So there are lots of little bits of work that are done, but they do not necessarily create a pathway forward. They do not build on one another. They do not progress the conversation. They just exist as a patchwork or a scattergun approach. Building the evidence base I would see as being a really fundamental plank of any strategy that this state develops, and there are lots of good people who can do that.

Annabelle CLEELAND: There is a real domino effect with your suggestions; you cannot do one without the other without the other. I can see how it is all coming together.

Olsen, I know that you said you have got a case study on this, but can I ask for a bit of disclosure, because we are interested in rectifying misidentification—how you see that occurring and who would be responsible for undoing that misidentification.

Olsen CLARK: I might pass to Bec.

Rebecca BUYS: Sorry, we are bouncing around here. I think the key part is obviously preventing it from happening in the first place is absolutely central. There is so much additional violence that victim-survivors burden from that process of being misidentified. But when that has happened, I think there are a number of processes at play. You have processes in VicPol, you have processes in the Magistrates' Court, but we actually need a whole-of-system mechanism because the impacts sort of leach across. If you have been misidentified in child protection, that can leach across into other areas and back. People live complex lives. They do not get neatly siloed into the specific government department that they are engaging with—dammit—so I think it is really a whole-of- system mechanism, which has been talked about a lot but progress has not really been made on that. It is more the individual agencies. You will have had VicPol in; they are doing a lot of work around rectification, but it really needs to be whole of system.

Annabelle CLEELAND: We are challenged by that because of imagining what that looks like, where I guess my understanding is Victoria Pol's one moment in time, but it can linger for a long time on someone's profile. So when you say whole of system, build that for us a little bit more.

Rebecca BUYS: I will bounce back to Phil in a moment, but it talks to actually the governance structure in Victoria around family violence. We have lost an absolute nation-leading and absolute crucial mechanism in the last sort of 18 months, and that is the end of the FVRIM, and that is an incredible accountability mechanism that sits outside of processes. One thing we have been talking about is to differentiate delivery versus evaluation, delivery versus accountability—so what sits outside of the Premier's office, for example. How can we set up a mechanism of accountability? Accountability is at the heart of the work we do. We ask men to become accountable for their behaviour, but what about systems accountability?

Annabelle CLEELAND: So what is the acronym?

Rebecca BUYS: The Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor. That was the independent monitoring of the implementation of the royal commission, yes.

Phillip RIPPER: There were 227 recommendations done. Great, we can dismantle that architecture. But I think it was a mistake. I think that role that provided that whole-of-system oversight really should be something that we reinstate in that form or some other, in a broader sort of system monitoring, because we are sort of acquitting the 227 recommendations, which is great, but the system still needs to continue; the ongoing work will never be done. So having someone outside of justice and police or Family Safety Victoria or the courts sitting there watching the various elements of the system and saying, 'How is it still going?' is really important. and it was a great loss.

Rebecca BUYS: And Marcia Neave was just recently interviewed—she was the commissioner of the royal commission—and was asked what the most valuable outcome was of the whole reform process, and she said the FVRIM.

Phillip RIPPER: The independent monitor.

Rebecca BUYS: The independent monitor was the most valuable thing in those 227 recommendations. So we have a blueprint; it is scary to hand over power to be independently held to account, but it is absolutely crucial.

The CHAIR: Do you have any more questions?

Annabelle CLEELAND: I do. It is probably a supplement to what you just said, but we are grappling with a survey, a strategy and a database: who will own that and manage that? But did you just kind of answer that? Is it an independent –

Rebecca BUYS: I do, and we have spoken about this around that kind of architecture of governance and being able separate those who are responsible for delivering, for those who assess the delivery of that work to create that web of accountability, that web of government accountability. So I think when we think about the strategy, that has to be held at a very high level in accountability to that strategy. The research component is only part of the strategy. It is core, but our knowledge base has to build alongside our practice base, and they have to be deeply entangled with each other. Does that sort of –

Phillip RIPPER: Yes. In short, if there was to be created in the office of Premier and Cabinet an office of family violence reform that had independent monitoring of the system and oversight of a perpetration strategy, we would think that was ideal, yes.

Rebecca BUYS: Yes.

Annabelle CLEELAND: So within government?

Phillip RIPPER: Yes; it would be absolutely fine if it was sitting in Premier and Cabinet. Yes.

Rebecca BUYS: But you sort of pointed to the tension around the FVRIM and how independent is independent, and how –

Phillip RIPPER: More independence is better.

Rebecca BUYS: Yes.

Annabelle CLEELAND: You gave me two answers. I just want black and white.

Phillip RIPPER: Whatever we can get.

Rebecca BUYS: A model that is close to the FVRIM or an extension of the principles that underpinned the implementation monitor: where could we police it that would hold those principles best? Thank you.

Annabelle CLEELAND: Thank you. Thanks, Ella.

Rebecca BUYS: Thank you.

The CHAIR: I would like to talk about the outcomes framework for men's behaviour change programs that you touched on in your opening statement, Phillip. I have a few questions around this, if I may. You make a recommendation to implement an outcomes measurement framework on perpetrator interventions. How would this differ from the existing Victorian Family Violence Outcomes Framework?

Olsen CLARK: I will take that. The current framework is not focused on the outcomes for interventions for people using violence. Unfortunately, the current approach that we have is very focused on output measurements in terms of what is reported from services working with men using family violence. They are looking at how many men attend programs, completion rates and so forth, but they provide very little insight into the impact of these services. And that very narrow contractual framing of what success means has

contributed to our limited understanding of what works for what men and what time, whereas we recommend an outcomes measurement framework that will specifically focus on people using violence and better recognising the complexity of the behaviour change journeys. We are open to exploration of what it would include, but we would recommend some things to include demonstrable changes in attitudes and behaviours, such as harm minimisation, evidence of help-seeking behaviours from people attending programs as well as the perception of increased safety of affected family members.

The CHAIR: Okay. Relating to this but also slightly different: how can the government best ensure consistent outcomes evaluations across all men's behaviour change programs?

Olsen CLARK: An outcome, a framework to begin with, would be our number one. Another thing that can be looked into is a review of the minimum standards in Victoria, which were developed quite a few years ago—they could be looked to be reviewed—and ensuring that there is adequate and sustainable funding for these services to ensure that they are able to consistently improve on their service delivery.

The CHAIR: By minimum standards, do you mean the minimum standards for men's behaviour change programs?

Olsen CLARK: Yes.

The CHAIR: Okay. What do you see are some changes in that space?

Olsen CLARK: We might take that on notice.

The CHAIR: That is fine. Within the existing Family Violence Outcomes Framework, and having more of a focus on perpetrators outcomes, would you recommend expanding the existing outcomes framework or would you recommend a separate outcomes framework?

Olsen CLARK: We might take that on notice as well.

The CHAIR: Yes, sure. That would be fine.

Olsen CLARK: Unless you have got anything?

Phillip RIPPER: No, no. It is sort of one of those 'We'll take it however we get it'.

The CHAIR: Okay. In Victoria we have a well-established family violence research agenda already, and I think it is nation leading. It is something to be very proud of here in Victoria. Do you have any recommendations around the research agenda about where the Victorian Government can do more to focus on people using violence?

Rebecca BUYS: Absolutely. A lot of people that you have had sitting before you will have outlined the importance of a whole-of-population study as it is very, very good for getting a sense of scale. But your Committee has been charged with scale and nature, or scope and nature, so in that sense I think what we are missing in the research landscape is a deep understanding of the ways in which different violences compound. While we think that a whole-of-population study is very important, there are things with that type of research or methodology—and it can be used in quantitative or qualitative research—that are looking for cause and effect, simple intersections of variables. We know this is a very complex problem, and we need to get down into the complexity of that. We believe that for 40 years of men's behaviour change programs people have been working with men using violence in this state, but that intimate knowledge is not shaping political and policymaking decisions. There is a history behind that, and we understand that history, but it is a moment in time now where we can step far more deeply into this. I think a lot of our knowledge in many ways still employs a kind of methodology which is looking for causal relationships between variables. It does not get into the complexities of people's lives and how multiple forms of violence bear down on a person's life to shape it, be that the person using violence and also the victim-survivor. We think there is a lot more space to understand the problem much more deeply and then as a result to build a service system that adequately meets the needs, to create the change that we all want. And we do not have that at the moment.

The CHAIR: With the research agenda I know that perpetrators and people using violence is a research priority. Is enough focus being given to this research priority compared to the other research priorities as part of the agenda, or does there need to be more focus on this priority?

Rebecca BUYS: Look, it is the same at the national level as well. I think every researcher that you will talk to will say more is needed. This is a growing space. The research attention historically has not been applied here. We have probably only got maybe 10 years; we do not have a deep, long research history that we are leaning into. We know we are not going to stop family violence if we do not stop men's use of violence, and we need to spend time better understanding that so that we can build a service system, a broad suite of interventions—targeted, effective, appropriate, available interventions—to create the change that we all want and ultimately shift the burden, as it currently sits with victim-survivors.

The CHAIR: Looking specifically at people who use violence who do not come into contact with the service system and research in that space, is this research being supported by the Victorian family violence research agenda, or are you aware of any research being undertaken commissioned by the state?

Rebecca BUYS: I am not aware of specific research, but I would say in general at the moment the lean-in to find that is whole-of-population studies, which absolutely have their place. They especially have their place on scale. What I am also really interested in that I am not aware of happening is: if we think around 20% end up in some way known to government services, then we are looking at a figure of around 80% that do not. So there is a scale issue that we want to clarify, but there is also a nature issue. Now, we could surmise that the practices are similar, but what are the practices of these people using violence that keep them out of view of the system? What are the special systems abuse tactics that they are using? How do we get to those? Partly it is listening to victim-survivors; it is partly data that is held with service providers about why that is happening. There is a little bit of that. We have the PSS—so you have got a little bit of that in the personal safety survey. But we also know that if people are going to tell anyone, they tell family and friends. There are people in our community who know, but their knowledge is not being centred. So when we think about a whole-of-population survey, how do we think about those questions that enable a friend or a family member or a local pastor or footy club chair—how do we, in that survey, start to get into their heads and start to see what they are knowing and then what they are knowing of those tactics?

Phillip RIPPER: But I think the short answer—not that there was anything wrong with the long answer—is no, we do not know of any funded research that is looking at that 80% unreported. It does not mean it is not there, but they are not talking to us if they are doing it.

Rebecca BUYS: Yes, it is very difficult to get to that bit—very difficult.

The CHAIR: We have heard a lot about the value of a national survey in understanding the scope of the perpetration of family violence. Do you think there could be value in a national survey in helping understand some of the drivers of family violence and the ability that that can then have for the prevention of family violence?

Phillip RIPPER: Absolutely, and I would also be adding: what are the protective factors as well? We know that there are your big cohorts of young boys or young men who you can predict can end up using family violence as adults. We would also be keen to look at others in a similar cohort who do not go on to use family violence—what were the protective factors there, what happened in their life course and what interventions maybe occurred there that could be applied to the other group? So let us look both at pathways in but also protective factors that keep young men and boys from using family violence, because not everyone goes on to use family violence. What is it about those people?

Rebecca BUYS: The national plan is set up around these four domains, but in reality we do not live our lives in neat domains, and we never live in one aspect of a domain at a certain time. You might have a young boy in a Respectful Relationships class at school, but he might also be a victim-survivor, he might be witnessing it at home or he may have for the first time started using violence against a sibling, for example. We have to see this holistically and welcome its complexity. So in some ways it is: how could you do this and not look at the drivers?

The CHAIR: Okay. Thank you. Christine.

Chris COUZENS: Thank you all for your comprehensive submission and comments today. I note the 13 recommendations that you have got in your written document—and now you have got another five, and I am sure they relate to each other.

Phillip RIPPER: They duplicate a bit.

Chris COUZENS: I am sure they do. A lot of my questions have already been asked, but I just want to go back to the perpetrator strategy that you have been talking about. I might have missed it, but who would lead that work?

Phillip RIPPER: It should be owned by government on behalf of the community, whether that is in a unit of Premier and Cabinet or in Family Safety Victoria. Again, we would be happy if it sat in Family Safety Victoria if there was independent monitoring through Premier and Cabinet or outside of government.

Chris COUZENS: Would that be seen to be independent, though?

Phillip RIPPER: If you create a statutory authority, that is great—very happy with a statutory authority to monitor family violence. I know in other jurisdictions they are looking in similar ways. I think in Queensland they have got some interesting system oversight through a parliamentary taskforce. So there are a range of different ways. And again, I would say we will take the maximum independence that we can get. You could have a family violence ombudsperson. I am making stuff up on the go, but you know what I mean.

Chris COUZENS: Yes.

Phillip RIPPER: You might solve the problem with a one-stop shop to address misidentification if you had an ombudsperson who could liaise with government departments consistently to correct records of misidentification. At this stage we would say we welcome any further conversations about how they might be rolled out but say that something like a strategy should sit with a government department and it should have oversight that is as independent as possible.

Chris COUZENS: And just on misidentification—and I know we have spoken a lot about that already—we know that Aboriginal community multicultural groups and more vulnerable people in our community tend to be victims of misidentification. Do you have any strong views about how that could be addressed? I know we have talked a bit about it, but I think it is a big one for those people in the community.

Phillip RIPPER: Yes.

Rebecca BUYS: It is huge, and how quick the state then moves—people lose children, incarceration—like, it compounds. The racism that sets it off, then locks in and speeds up very quickly. The momentum comes in very quickly.

Chris COUZENS: You could argue we need to get rid of systemic racism before we can do anything, but anyway –

Rebecca BUYS: Amen to that one. Absolutely. I do not want the prevention piece to slip out when we talk about rectification because so much damage is done from there. We have talked about a whole-of-system rectification mechanism. That seems so simple, but if you spend a bit of time with Victoria Police, with other places, it turns into this enormous thing—weeks go by, months go by. We do have to hold a very close eye on prevention of it happening in the first place and that, exactly to your point, asks us as a society, as government, to think about those violences that are enabling that.

Phillip RIPPER: There is the obvious training piece for frontline staff. I am not convinced that we have invested enough in training for frontline police in terms of that misidentification, but there is also some interesting work being done around bringing specialist family violence knowledge into that decision-making process. Even if it is to hold back identifying predominantly the aggressor immediately, it gives some time for secondary consultation around the specialist family violence workforce or specialist family violence liaison staff with police. There is work being done in some jurisdictions around linking specialist family violence organisations as co-responders to family violence, some providing advice through body-worn cameras for police. So there is a range of that sort of capacity building, let us say, for frontline police to address misidentification. We would be saying we know where the problem areas are too, so it should not be that hard

to resource frontline police in those situations where there are questions around predominant aggressor with linking them to family violence units within the police or specialist services outside.

Chris COUZENS: What is your view on whether it is an agency or some sort of body that actually takes –

Rebecca BUYS: I think this comes back like that conversation with Annabelle. I think there is a question, there is a conversation that we would really like to be part of about thinking about that architecture of governance. How do we set this work? We have had the last 10 years where it has been framed by the FVRIM. We have had this 10-year strategy. We are heading into the third and final in this round rolling action plan. What is next for the state? There is a moment in time that is rapidly coming when that 10-year strategy ends. What does happen next? We do not have all the answers to that, but we believe we will miss an opportunity in this state if we do not take a moment very shortly as that 10-year strategy rapidly comes to an end where we actually say, 'How do we govern this going forward?' You know, on misidentification, we are leaning into that FVRIM report. That is what we are all still leaning into. So one of our key things we are talking about, we are still leaning into that and there is a range of areas where it is like, 'What was the FVRIM report on that?'

Phillip RIPPER: Because at the moment, with all due respect to our friends at Family Safety Victoria, and they are up next, when we look at the data, we go 'Who sets the data questions? Who sets the data collection mechanism? Who sets the contracts? Who monitors the data? Who analyses the data?' It is all the same people and you go, 'There's vested interests here.' That is not a criticism or impugning the reputation of anyone involved in Family Safety Victoria, it is just the architecture of government. If we need to drive reform, we need levels of independent scrutiny and oversight and levels of accountability, and that is what we are calling for. We love our friends at FSV. They do great work, and they are amazing people.

Rebecca BUYS: But it is absolutely the point you raise. The state has a history of violence towards particular communities as well, and we have to be really serious about the ongoing impact of that on community. Will it ever be safe? Is reporting going to increase if these systems remain so unsafe? So I do feel misidentification is actually absolutely crucial because it captures so much of the overarching issues.

Chris COUZENS: Just one last point—I suppose it is really about Aboriginal data sovereignty, where you sit with that and whether you have got any views to put on record.

Rebecca BUYS: I absolutely support it. With research as well as with government we have seen the dangers of white researchers engaging with Aboriginal people, Aboriginal knowledge, and analysing that and understanding it through a white, colonial lens and then the flow-on application of that. Absolutely that needs to be respected, as does the data sovereignty of other vulnerable groups as well.

Phillip RIPPER: Yes. And I would expand it from data sovereignty to First Nations ways of knowing and being. When we talk to our members who work in First Nations communities, they will talk about their practice being significantly different. Ways of working in white, western, capitalist, patriarchal structures work very well for most of our members working in that cohort with that group, but they do not work for all First Nations men and they do not work for all First Nations women, families and children. When you sit and have a good conversation about how people do the work in First Nations communities it looks very different, because it centres family and it centres community. And when you talk about accountability, in white mainstream western capitalist structures you are talking police and courts. For First Nations communities, who is this accountability to? It is to self, to family, to your community.

Rebecca BUYS: There is a lot of learning that mainstream organisations can do from First Nations people but from other marginalised communities as well, because there is a deep disruption of some of these norms. If we segment and say, 'This is good for you, and we do it this way,' we further embed that, because we do not say, 'This is valuable; we can learn from this.' We do not flip it on its head, and there is so much to be learned from that.

Phillip RIPPER: In all these reforms and in everything, we would be saying in our evidence that that needs to be respected and understood. If we are developing an outcomes framework, we need to develop an outcomes framework and then we need to be saying, 'Is that fit for purpose for First Nations communities? Does that need to be looked at completely differently? Do we need to make it separate or different or additional or modified?'

Chris COUZENS: Some elders would argue to just do it their way for everyone.

Phillip RIPPER: Yes. Exactly.

Rebecca BUYS: Yes. Absolutely.

Chris COUZENS: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Jackson.

Jackson TAYLOR: Thank you, Chair. Thank you all again for today and for answering our questions. One of the recommendations you make is around increasing training for police on types of mental ill health and disability and how these factors can intersect with family violence. Has this been raised with Victoria Police, and were they receptive?

Rebecca BUYS: I have not had a specific session with them on it; that is a great question. I think our work particularly in the disability space and the mental health space is growing, and there is much to be done there. It relates to data. One piece of data I would really love to understand—in our men's behaviour change programs, some of the ones we run our ourselves, sometimes it can be that 60% of people do not make it through intake. What I really want to understand—and maybe you can put it to the next people—is: those people that service providers turn away, why are they turning them away? Because we need to get a much better sense of need. That is only a tiny proportion of people who will ever knock on the door of these sorts of programs, but we turn thousands away. So why are they not making it through? That starts to build a very solid basis for better interventions, like: are we turning neurodiverse men away because there is not something appropriate? Are we turning men away with particular mental health issues, with AOD issues? How many are we turning away? Because then we begin to build the business case for that broader suite of interventions. Too often our social service systems operate such that you do not actually get attention until you are at a crisis point, and particularly for men with mental health issues, that is a common theme. You have to end up being triaged before you can get any help, so we allow things to spiral. But to your question specifically, there is much more work to be done in this space, and we look forward to continuing that conversation.

Jackson TAYLOR: Thank you.

Phillip RIPPER: In my conversations with VicPol around training, they would say they have a robust and comprehensive training program, their resources are always limited and they have competing priorities around the training that is available. So they are always very diplomatic in saying they think they are doing their best.

Jackson TAYLOR: Very good.

Rebecca BUYS: And we do know those horrible two statistics: we know children with disabilities have a hugely disproportionately high rate of being victim-survivors and we know our prison population has a hugely disproportionate population of people with disabilities. There is a link here. There is a gap, and we are not exploring that. It is something we are very keen to explore in more detail, so thank you for the question, because it is a good one.

Jackson TAYLOR: Thank you for the response, more importantly. How can the collection of health and social information about men using family violence—for example, AOD use or mental health—be improved or better integrated into family violence data?

Rebecca BUYS: Well, I think that intake one is the beginning, like actually just mapping it out. There are some incredible projects underway at the moment, like the KODY project, which I think I mentioned last time we were here, with Cathy Humphreys. But actually this work is incredibly difficult. There is a 30-year history of trying to bring these different sectors together. So I think our intake data is a beginning step at mapping across. There is also a case for increasing family violence specialisation within some of those universal services so that they begin to be able to flag it in, because it might not even be something that they are flagging necessarily. You know, with the mental health, often the system means that they present at a very high end of the problem. They are not always assessing it for family violence risk factors, and risk assessment is often not there.

Phillip RIPPER: But we would also say look at the other side of the coin, not just where AOD and mental health issues are being flagged in family violence reports but where family violence is being flagged in AOD services and housing services and mental health services. We would be saying we know people experiencing and people perpetrating family violence are often over-represented in those key social services but are not visible—their use of family violence is not visible—so we would also be saying, 'Let's be asking those questions of those services.'

Jackson TAYLOR: Just lastly, what data is collected from the men's referral service, and what are the risks and opportunities of using this data to develop an understanding of this cohort?

Rebecca BUYS: Oh, my gosh—so many opportunities. We receive thousands of calls a year. They are recorded and they have research consent attached to them, and there has never been a research project done on them. Now, that is part of the history of there just not being a lot of research in this space, but we have men telling thousands of stories—men telling their stories at this particular moment in their service engagement. It is not being tapped, and this is happening across the service system. Obviously case study notes, what is happening in group sessions—all of this rich data is not being used to influence political and policy decision-making. We are not at that level of depth yet.

Jackson TAYLOR: Thanks very much. Thank you, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Thank you, Rebecca, Phillip and Olsen, for your time today, for the evidence you have provided and also the effort that you undertook to put in your submission. We are incredibly grateful for all of your efforts here.

We will now take a short break before our next witnesses.

Witnesses withdrew.