

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the 2022-23 Budget Estimates

Melbourne—Monday, 6 June 2022

MEMBERS

Ms Lizzie Blandthorn—Chair

Mr Danny O'Brien—Deputy Chair

Mr Rodney Barton

Mr Sam Hibbins

Mr Gary Maas

Mrs Beverley McArthur

Mr James Newbury

Ms Pauline Richards

Mr Tim Richardson

Ms Nina Taylor

WITNESSES

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

Ms Brigid Sunderland, Secretary,

Ms Eleri Butler, Deputy Secretary and Chief Executive Officer, Family Safety Victoria,

Ms Louise Perry, Deputy Secretary, Fairer Victoria, Engagement and Coordination, and

Ms Jo Pride, Executive Director, Fairer Victoria, Engagement and Coordination, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing.

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

I ask that mobile telephones please be turned to silent.

I begin by acknowledging the traditional Aboriginal owners of the land on which we are meeting. We pay our respects to them, their elders past, present and emerging as well as elders from other communities who may be with us today.

On behalf of the Parliament, the committee is conducting this Inquiry into the 2022–23 Budget Estimates. The committee's aim is to scrutinise public administration and finance to improve outcomes for the Victorian community.

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

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

We welcome Minister Williams in the first instance for the prevention of family violence portfolio. We invite you to make an opening statement, and this will be followed by questions from the committee.

Ms WILLIAMS: Thank you, Chair. Before I begin please let me also acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we are currently gathered, the Wurundjeri people, and pay my respects to their elders past and present and any other elders who may be here with us today. I also want to acknowledge any victim-survivors of family violence who may be here with us today or indeed who may be watching online and also remember those who have, sadly, lost their lives as a consequence of family violence, and we know there are far too many.

It is a pleasure to be able to be here before you, albeit a little bit later than originally planned, so thank you and apologies. COVID struck me down, as it did probably many of you along the way, I imagine, as well, so I appreciate your understanding in that. I am really looking forward to sharing with you the work of the government and also introducing you to those who are with me here today, who obviously also take responsibility for this work within the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing. We have Brigid Sunderland, our Secretary; Eleri Butler, our CEO of Family Safety Victoria; Louise Perry, our Deputy Secretary; and Jo Pride, our ED of Fairer Victoria, who will be assisting today.

Visual presentation.

Ms WILLIAMS: Six years ago the Royal Commission into Family Violence handed down its final report, and we committed to implementing all 227 of its recommendations and began the task of, effectively, building a new, stronger and more coordinated family violence system. Since then we have invested more than \$3.7 billion to prevent and respond to gendered violence here in Victoria. That is more than every other state combined and more than the previous commonwealth government, although we certainly hope that will change in years to come with a new commonwealth partner. With 204 of the 227 recommendations now implemented and the remaining 23 well underway, we have made substantial progress in building the foundations of a strong and sustainable family violence system. We are expanding our work to stop violence before it starts by bringing

innovative primary prevention programs to more of the places Victorians live, learn, work and play. We continue to provide a range of specialist responses to victim-survivors of family and sexual assault to assist them to stay safe, recover and thrive, and that includes of course things like therapeutic responses, case management, flexible funding and crisis and helpline services as well. Perpetrators are also being kept in view, with expanded community-based interventions and accommodation programs informed by a comprehensive view of risk through the central information point.

We are proud that despite the pandemic the commitment to this reform by our government and victim-survivor advocates, who are at the centre of our reform, and of course our outstanding sector partners, has not wavered one bit. Almost 90 per cent of the actions under the *Family Violence Reform Rolling Action Plan* are now either complete or in their final stages, with 12 months to go. Our work to break the cycle of violence under *Free from Violence*, our 10-year primary prevention strategy, has continued with the launch of a second action plan, including 57 deliverables to build on and scale up successful prevention initiatives. We have supported over 137 prevention programs under *Free from Violence*, backed by more than \$177.3 million in funding since 2017.

The Orange Door network has commenced in a further seven areas in 2021–22 and has fundamentally changed the way our system responds to family violence, with more than 216 000 people across Victoria having been assisted since 2018. It is also important to note that within that is 87 000 children assisted.

Ongoing work to phase out communal refuges has continued, with 11 core and cluster refuges now complete and handed over. We have delivered more funding to sexual assault services and supported Sexual Assault Services Victoria as the peak as well.

We have embedded Respectful Relationships education in every Victorian government school and built on this commitment with mandatory consent education and now also a healthy masculinity pilot. We are ensuring a community-led, self-determined approach to preventing and responding to family violence within Aboriginal communities through our Dhelk Dja agreement, and every step of the way we are keeping the voices of victim-survivors central to our reform.

The 2022–23 budget continues this work with \$241 million over four years to prevent and respond to gendered violence, including demand uplift for victim-survivor and perpetrator services. This support will be allocated in line with our ongoing commitment to the Aboriginal prioritised funding policy, whereby at least 10 per cent of all family violence and sexual assault service delivery funding will be provided to ACCOs.

The budget also reflects our ongoing efforts to recognise the distinct needs of children and young people as victim-survivors in their own right, with dedicated funding to continue therapeutic interventions for children and young people who have experienced family violence and sexually abusive behaviour.

\$43.4 million will ensure that we are able to respond to increasing demand for specialist family violence services, including for specialist family violence case management; flexible funding and brokerage; and culturally appropriate and tailored support for Aboriginal victim-survivors, LGBTIQ victim-survivors and victim-survivors from culturally diverse backgrounds, including those on temporary visas.

There is \$30.1 million for perpetrator responses, which will continue the government's work in broadening the suite of interventions available to keep perpetrators in view and also to keep them accountable and supported to change their behaviour. More support for Respect Victoria is also included in this year's budget to continue their work to prevent family violence and all forms of violence against women. And there is \$69.1 million to expand refuge and crisis accommodation options for victim-survivors; \$33.4 million to prevent and respond to sexual violence, including increased capacity for our after-hours crisis line; and \$30 million to continue operations of the central information point and expand access to the men's referral service and Safe Steps.

We acknowledge there is still significant work to do. This work is not easy. We have wonderful partners in our sector and also in the victim-survivor advocates, who pour so much of themselves into making sure that this reform meets their needs. The work is a long way from finished, but we are dedicated to the task of building a nation-leading family violence system and a life free from violence for every Victorian. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. Mr Newbury.

Mr NEWBURY: Thank you, Minister. Minister, do you or Ms Sunderland have any data with you on the number of women that have been deemed a higher priority in terms of public housing and waiting on the public housing waiting list?

Ms WILLIAMS: Bear with me. While we just see whether we can get something more specific, Mr Newbury, housing is obviously a foundational issue in this area of policy, as you would well know, and one that we have sought to meet through a suite of different options, from crisis through to longer term accommodation. As you would have heard me just outline, there is funding provided for an expansion of our core and cluster refuges, which are really the gold standard in the refuge model, as well as crisis accommodation properties and uplift to existing agency properties so that they can expand the capacity of those, all the way through to obviously the impact of investment through the government's Big Housing Build, which obviously has within it a commitment to have allocated from that roughly around a thousand additional family violence properties for longer term options, which we know are really important. Crisis is important but people also need somewhere to go, and so boosting that capacity through those public housing and social housing models is very important and something that is very front of mind. I think in terms of your question around priority listings for social housing through the housing register—was that effectively what you were looking at?

Mr NEWBURY: Yes.

Ms WILLIAMS: In December 2021 there were a bit over 30 000 priority applicants on the VHR, and—

Mr NEWBURY: Sorry, 30 000?

Ms WILLIAMS: 30 554, to be precise, and those were in urgent housing need. And people—

Mr NEWBURY: Is that broken down? Sorry, I was just going to say—

Ms WILLIAMS: Yes, sorry. People escaping family violence comprise about 10 per cent of those priority applicants, to answer that question. We are seeing—

Mr NEWBURY: I was just going to say, you may not have this with you, but I note that there was an increase in the wait last year, up to I think it was 16 months. If you are able to take it on notice, if you do not have it with you, do you have a figure from around that time of what the wait was like? So if it was 10 per cent of 30 000 in December 2021, when the wait was 16 months what number were waiting? Are you able to take that on notice?

Ms WILLIAMS: Sorry, in terms of—

Mr NEWBURY: So when the wait was 16 months for priority access, what was the figure in terms of the number of high-priority people waiting? So you had the December 2021 figure. All I am asking for is at a different point in time, if you are able to take that on notice if you do not have that with you.

Ms WILLIAMS: Look, I think that 10 per cent is probably consistent. Is that a fair—

Ms SUNDERLAND: Yes, that is—yes.

Ms WILLIAMS: Yes. I think that 10 per cent is probably a fairly consistent figure there. It is worth noting that we have seen some really innovative models coming out to support women and children predominantly, as those affected by family violence, to get into that longer-term housing. It is worth pointing out one in particular that was recently opened by Launch Housing called Viv's Place, in Dandenong. That provides for about 60 women and 130-odd children in housing that is permanent so long as they do not effectively repartner and move in with someone else, because men are not allowed on site. It has wraparound services on site as well, and that is a really important part of our thinking around these models too. It is about not only just getting people out—obviously housing is foundational—but also what we can then do to support them to be able to recover and also to give their children, where there are children, that special attention to help them recover in their own right as well. So there is the issue of housing and making sure we have got the right suite of housing options available, which is very much what this budget has been focused on, but there is also making sure that we have got the service response too to be able to support them to recover, to rebuild and to move on to be able to live fulfilling lives, trauma free, as best they can.

Mr NEWBURY: Thank you. And you may not have this with you, but if you feel that you want to take it on notice please do. Just in terms of average wait times, anything further you have on longest wait or shortest wait, any further data on that, would be great.

Ms WILLIAMS: Still in regard to the housing register lists?

Mr NEWBURY: Yes.

Ms WILLIAMS: Look, as you know, the housing register and the broader social housing area will sit within the Minister for Housing's responsibility. I can talk to you within my portfolio area more fluently around the refuge—

Mr NEWBURY: I am specifically talking about women who are high priority.

Ms WILLIAMS: Yes, absolutely. But in terms of the division of labour across the government the Minister for Housing will still have responsibility for those social and public housing properties and the Victorian Housing Register. We will have responsibility to a greater extent for the refuges and the crisis accommodation properties that are specifically targeting women and children escaping family violence, but of course we work closely with the Minister for Housing and have done so in order to secure that commitment around the Big Housing Build and the allocation within that specifically for women and children escaping family violence.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Mr Maas.

Mr MAAS: Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Minister, and thank you to the members of your team who are here today as well. Minister, if I could take you to the topic of perpetrator responses. To that end, budget paper 3, page 38, details \$29.16 million for 'Perpetrator responses', and that is over the four years of the forward estimates. There has been a growing acceptance since the royal commission that in order to reduce the impact that family violence has, we must work with those who use that violence. Are you able to provide some further detail about what that investment will provide?

Ms WILLIAMS: Yes, certainly. And as you rightly point out—and I think it is something that many of us, particularly as political representatives, have noticed—it is now broadly accepted I think within our community that in order to make a meaningful difference to the safety and wellbeing of victim-survivors we really must directly consider and put concerted efforts into those who use violence, in terms of encouraging a change of behaviour there. If that part of the equation is not adequately dealt with, we will not get the results that I know we all want to see. Since the Royal Commission into Family Violence there has been a really notable and important shift in that public conversation, I think, around family violence. The mainstream narrative, as you have pointed out, has rightly moved away from asking 'Why doesn't she leave?' to 'Why doesn't he stop?', and I think this is a really critical step in the path to family violence reform and stopping family violence before it starts with a range of early intervention measures and suites of support that we know are needed to support those who use violence to stop using violence. The royal commission told us that—I am going to quote from it if you do not mind:

It should never be regarded as the victim's responsibility to stop family violence: those who use violence should always be held responsible for their actions.

Efforts to keep victims safe must be strengthened through a consistent and rigorous approach to perpetrator accountability.

Logic tells us that effective and long-term perpetrator interventions will be one of the most powerful strategies for us to be able to drive down the presence of family violence in our communities, alongside of course critical primary prevention initiatives to change the attitudes which we know lead to gendered violence. Since the royal commission the range of perpetrator interventions supported by the government has expanded significantly—and it needed to. We have strengthened and broadened the intervention system by working together with agencies and services that interact with perpetrators and people who use violence.

The choice of perpetrators to use violence continues, we know, to have a significant impact on the health, safety and wellbeing of Victorians. At this point in the reforms, the system is increasingly shifting its focus to perpetrators as a source of family violence and to building a web of accountability around them. There was a point in time when that was actually controversial—to focus on the actions of perpetrators and indeed to invest in them—because I think there was probably a perception that that was money that was not being invested into

victim-survivors, but as we know, the purpose of this funding is always about keeping victim-survivors safe and is always ultimately about driving the best possible outcomes for them.

In response to the royal commission we established the expert advisory committee on perpetrator interventions. The committee considered how to increase the accountability of perpetrators and to shift the burden away from victims, and their final report and recommendations are informing our whole-of-system approach to perpetrator accountability through the family violence rolling action plan. Since then the Victorian government has continued to deliver significant investment year on year in perpetrator interventions. This year's budget builds on these commitments by investing \$29.16 million for the provision of men's behaviour change programs, perpetrator brokerage, culturally safe responses for Aboriginal people using violence, the extension of perpetrator trials and the provision of accommodation-based services as well. This funding will deliver on the approved actions in the whole-of-Victorian-government perpetrator accountability plan as well as recommendations of the Royal Commission into Family Violence and the expert advisory committee into perpetrator interventions, improving the range, accessibility and robustness of Victoria's perpetrator interventions.

We have got some work to go. I think there is certainly something to be said also around the need to build the evidence base around it, and that is also work that we are committed to doing.

Mr MAAS: Okay. Thank you. You mentioned accommodation services; I was hoping you would be able to provide some further detail about the investment in the budget and what that will do to progress this developing model of perpetrator accountability, where perpetrators are provided accommodation.

Ms WILLIAMS: Yes, sure. As I just outlined, we have invested \$29.16 million to deliver a system of perpetrator interventions. Is that my time up?

The CHAIR: It is the time. Sorry to cut you off there, Minister. Mr Hibbins.

Mr HIBBINS: Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Minister and your team, for appearing this evening. The Multicultural Alliance of Women against Family Violence was launched at Parliament House recently. They are a group of women and organisations who have come together to advocate for more resources and funding to support culturally specific family violence services. Now, I note that budget paper 3, page 45, refers to funding for 'Refuge and crisis accommodation'. Is any of this funding specifically targeted for culturally specific or refugee-specific communities?

Ms WILLIAMS: Thanks, Mr Hibbins. Part of the funding, as I outlined already, goes to expanding the core and cluster model of refuges. Now, we have committed to an extra two core and cluster refuges, and that is in addition to the 17 that we have previously already committed to—I think about 11 of which are completed; the rest will be completed by the end of this year—plus 3 designated Aboriginal refuges, taking that number to 20 plus the two in this budget. The reason I single out the core and cluster refuges is the strength of that model really is the flexibility it enables in allowing families and women to live independently and live according to their own cultural backgrounds, faiths and traditions, and, where there are children, to be able to make sure that that consistency and those traditions are very much a part of those kids' recovery as well. It also enables culturally specific, relevant and appropriate services to come into those refuges, so it is in that sense our most flexible model of accounting for the diversity in our community.

The challenge, I guess, with moving to a model of ethno-specific refuges, if you like, is that, to use my own community as an example, I represent the most culturally diverse electorate in the country and I have got 158 different nationalities represented. Would it make sense to have 158 different refuges? Arguably potentially not. But having a model that allows families to live independently and allows them to practise their faith and traditions the way that suits them and to have the relevant services come in to service that need is, I think, probably our best bet and is certainly regarded in the sector as the gold standard in refuge and crisis accommodation.

It is also worth noting that we have a series of primary prevention programs too that are specifically targeted to CALD women and where culturally and linguistically diverse women themselves are very much at the heart of how we manage those conversations within the community and how we can better respond to violence within that community. But in short, the core and cluster refuges really are a remarkable way in which we can adequately meet the diverse needs within our community. Just to give you an example, I was at a refuge—I will

not reveal which one or where, for obvious reasons—on Friday, a core and cluster refuge, and they were pointing out to me that they have accommodated about 46 different nationalities within their programs and facilities, and that has been done in a way that has respected the cultural traditions and needs of those families, predominantly women and children.

Mr HIBBINS: Okay. Thank you. And given this is a new group, will you meet with the alliance to discuss their priorities for multicultural family violence programs?

Ms WILLIAMS: I am always happy to meet with stakeholders.

Mr HIBBINS: Okay. Terrific. Thank you. Can I ask now just quickly in terms of the issue of victim-survivors being misidentified as perpetrators. I understand the family violence monitor released a report into this and found that despite the royal commission's recommendation being implemented, it still continues to occur. Is there any funding within this budget to address that issue?

Ms WILLIAMS: Thank you for that question. And you are right, the misidentification of victim-survivors as perpetrators of family violence is a significant issue that can lead to really tragic errors and have very far-reaching consequences. We acknowledge that accurate identification of the predominant aggressor of family violence is a really critical component of our risk assessment and our risk management processes and obviously, as your question goes to, really integral to keeping victim-survivors safe. Since the Royal Commission into Family Violence there has been increased awareness of the causes and prevalence of misidentification of both perpetrators and victims across our response system. The act of misidentifying perpetrators as victims or victims as perpetrators has, we know, a very serious consequence for all victims. Is that my timer?

The CHAIR: It is the timer.

Ms WILLIAMS: I am sorry. Apologies.

The CHAIR: That is okay.

Ms WILLIAMS: I would have loved to have said more. Sorry, Sam.

Mr HIBBINS: No worries. Thanks, Minister.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. Ms Richards.

Ms RICHARDS: Thanks, Minister and your officials, for appearing this afternoon and for the work that you do in this important area. I would like to continue on from where Mr Maas left off and explore perpetrator case management. Minister, just keeping with those who use violence, I note budget paper 3, page 203, outlines the number of case management responses provided to perpetrators of family violence. Could you please outline to the committee what this kind of response looks like and why a range of perpetrator interventions are important to contribute to a long-term reduction in family violence?

Ms WILLIAMS: Yes. Thank you, Ms Richards. We really have to believe, I think, in the work that I do and my colleagues do, that people can change and that with the right support they will change. In doing that I think we have to recognise that different people have different needs, and in seeking to fundamentally change the way that someone acts this necessarily requires a suite of different options, as I was alluding to with Mr Maas earlier. That really goes to the need for a variety of different tools in the toolkit to change the attitudes and behaviours which lead to violence and also the interventions that we know people need once they have already got themselves into a pattern of using violence. The Victorian government is developing a suite of consistently delivered, evidence-based interventions to provide timely, accessible and culturally appropriate, as well as flexible, responses for perpetrators. We are building a system which provides a sophisticated approach to working with all perpetrators in a way that recognises multiple and often intersecting aspects of their identity, and we continue to lead the way as an innovator in reform in this space, particularly when it comes to building that evidence base around new and diverse perpetrator interventions.

To go to your original question, men's behaviour change programs are a group-based intervention that support perpetrators to take responsibility and to stop their violent behaviour and that keep perpetrators in view of the system and provide critical information to victim-survivor services to manage that risk as well. It is not only what they get out of the programs, it is also about having people engaged in a way where the risk they pose can

be monitored for the sake of a victim, which is critical. Case management, on the other hand, provides individualised, tailored and timely responses to perpetrators to reduce the risk associated with that perpetrator's use of family violence and to address the barriers to engaging in the change process, which we know is critical. It provides a very important function in supporting perpetrators with complex needs and also those who are unsuitable or not yet ready for those group setting programs. Case management can also support perpetrators prior to, during or even following a behaviour change program, therefore increasing the likelihood of sustained behaviour change and improved outcomes for victim-survivors. It is important to note that this is not easy work and that the people that work in this space are exceptional. They undertake this work always with a view to keeping victim-survivors safe. As I said, they are often dealing with a myriad of different and complex issues and characters, and it is incredibly challenging work.

Services working with people using violence will have increased responsibilities, too, for risk assessment and risk management, especially as our MARAM reform continues—that is the multi-agency risk assessment process whereby universal services are trained to more readily identify family violence risk, which we know has a flow-on effect for those other services that effectively, from that process, may well get referrals and then have to work with people, whether that be victim-survivors or indeed people who use violence, to try and deal with that risk for the benefit of victim-survivors. As part of this work, men's services will be required to provide a real leadership and coordination role in multi-agency risk assessment and management processes—of course, though, in collaboration with specialist family violence and specialist victim-survivors practitioners, ensuring that the diversity of perpetrators is met with a tailored response and an effective system response to meet their needs.

Ms RICHARDS: All right. Thanks. With just a few seconds left, I think I will leave it there, Chair. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Ms Richards. Mr Newbury.

Mr NEWBURY: Thank you, Chair. If I can take you to page 202 of budget paper 3, there is a cut in the primary prevention of family violence spend, from \$28.5 million to \$27.1 million. Why is there going to be a cut?

Ms WILLIAMS: In short, Mr Newbury, effectively there is not, in the sense that firstly it is really important to note that crime prevention and responsibility across the family violence reform agenda are a whole-of-government responsibility. What we have often seen, including in this budget, is work that has effectively been picked up in individual portfolio areas. Effectively, there is what falls within my portfolio area, and then there are a range of prevention initiatives that fall within other portfolio areas, whether that be justice, education, health—there are a range of them. There is funding for women's health services out of the health portfolio. There are obviously the education programs I referred to earlier within the Minister for Education's portfolio.

Mr NEWBURY: So therefore why has there been a cut in your portfolio?

Ms WILLIAMS: You are referring to the \$27.1 million, compared to the revised?

Mr NEWBURY: Yes—\$28.5 million to \$27.1 million.

Ms WILLIAMS: That is effectively driven by our multicultural communities initiative in the 2020–21 state budget. That program was around capacity building, so the idea was that as the program became more established and the awareness raising that was being done by those organisations was taking place, it was able to stand on its own two feet. So effectively it was a declining funding profile of a time-limited program which was very much geared towards capacity building so that that program could bear fruit beyond just the funding profile from the government, which is what a lot of programs that we often invest in are aimed to do. Capacity building, we know, is critical in primary prevention, and we continue to support those organisations. But I think it is really important to note that whole-of-government agenda around not only response but also prevention and the fact that we see that investment borne out across government. So looking at that in isolation to one portfolio is not an accurate reflection of the level of investment and buy-in particularly in the prevention space across government.

Mr NEWBURY: Thank you. If I can take you to page 216, the average waiting time for public rental is now targeted to be 10.5 months. Then if I take you to page 197—sorry to take you around a little bit—

Ms WILLIAMS: That is all right.

Mr NEWBURY: there is a cut to housing assistance of \$115 million, if I got that right. So noting that there is a 10-month wait, are you concerned that there is a cut in housing assistance funding?

Ms WILLIAMS: Again, just to go to a previous comment I made in terms of your focus on social housing initiatives, they fall outside of my portfolio. What I can say to you, to draw your question to relevance in my own portfolio, is around our investment in particularly the refuge and crisis space and of course the partnership with the Minister for Housing in terms of building that social housing stock. But in terms of the particular points that you have made here, that would be a question for the Minister for Housing to best respond to in terms of his program that you have asked about.

Mr NEWBURY: Presumably you provide policy input on these programs as your portfolio is directly affected by them.

Ms WILLIAMS: Well, I think you can see the input with our level of investment in the area of family violence housing that I have responsibility for and the fact that we are growing those responses in our area and that indeed they have been a key part of making sure that we boost those housing options through the Big Housing Build as well, which the Minister for Housing oversees. But in terms of my responsibilities as the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, you will see a very significant investment into boosting our core and cluster properties—those additional two properties that I mentioned, in addition to the 20 that we have previously committed to—as well as those CAP properties and the expansion of existing agency properties to provide that greater suite of options.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. Ms Taylor.

Ms TAYLOR: Thanks, Minister and department officials. I just wanted to take aspects of changing behaviour and preventing violence, particularly with regard to building an evidence base, a little further. I note budget paper 3, page 38, and the output description, which says that funding is provided to ‘contribute to an increasing evidence base about what works to change behaviour and prevent violence’. Can you please outline for the committee how this funding will increase the evidence base about changing behaviour and why it is so important?

Ms WILLIAMS: Sure. Thank you, Ms Taylor. I think understanding when and how to work with perpetrators to facilitate change is really critical to designing service responses and the right service responses. Recommendations 87 and 88 from the Royal Commission into Family Violence and the subsequent expert advisory panel that I referenced in an earlier response recommended that the government fund evaluation studies to establish longer term effectiveness and assist in improving program design in the long term. It is worth noting that one of the greatest gaps in our current knowledge base is understanding men’s behaviour and attitudes over time and the journey to recovery for both perpetrators and victims, and that is a global shortage in knowledge. The need to build the evidence base in perpetrator interventions is something that is not unique to Australia. Indeed some years ago I was speaking to the architects of the Caledonian model of perpetrator interventions in Scotland. In unpacking and getting them to explain to me the design of their programs I asked what the longitudinal modelling was telling them, and they responded by saying that they had never been adequately funded to be able to do that kind of research, which was really telling because they then added that is why they were so excited about what we were embarking upon here in Victoria, because they saw the investment that we were putting into the response and prevention system and into research as a really critical part of that knowledge base building not only here in Victoria and indeed here in Australia but globally.

That really drove home to me how important it is that we do this work. It is complex work. It requires really significant ethical and operational considerations, I should note, so it is beyond just the commitment to doing it; it is actually the difficulty in carrying it out as well given the complexity of the circumstances and the people that we are dealing with. But a robust evidence base, we know, is really critical to understanding what works in the short, medium and long term. It is also critical to understanding the value created by our investment in perpetrator interventions. Of course we want to make sure that we are investing in the right programs and in the right combination of programs and that no matter where people are at they have a program that can best suit their stage of the journey, if you like, noting that there is no silver bullet to this—often the sorts of interventions somebody will require will change depending on where they are in their lives and what they have going on in

their lives at that time—so these sorts of evaluation models which allow us to test what we are doing and find its place in the broader system are going to be really, really important going forward. By virtue of the fact that a lot of our work is quite literally world first, sometimes this means that we are, as I have outlined, building the evidence base as we go, and not just for our own benefit but for the benefit of many jurisdictions.

Right from the beginning of implementing the royal commission's recommendations we undertook that we would be led by evidence-based best practice, and rightly so, and that is why we have continued to pilot, to monitor and to evaluate our perpetrator programs. We have trialled a range of new and innovative models of perpetrator intervention tailored to the needs of individuals and also of families. As we improve the collection, the quality and the use and analysis of data about perpetrators we are also strengthening our understanding about demand, about perpetrator characteristics and the way they use services, and I think this is going to help us improve the design and delivery of frontline services for perpetrators or people who use violence. So this investment really will I think improve our system's understanding of how to stop perpetrators' use of violence and sustain a positive behaviour set in the long term and also assist in filling the gap in the Australian and international evidence base by taking that longitudinal view which fundamentally requires us to understand the complexity and the difficulty of this issue and the fact that there are no short-term fixes, that we need to be in it for the long haul, and I think that is my time up, sorry, Ms Taylor.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. Deputy Chair.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Minister. Good afternoon.

Ms WILLIAMS: Good afternoon.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Can I just go back to the question that Mr Newbury was asking with respect to women escaping family violence needing access to emergency accommodation. You said there were on the housing register priority list 30 554, and about 10 per cent of those were women escaping violence. Is there an actual figure?

Ms WILLIAMS: I think again that would be a question best directed to the Minister for Housing, who will obviously have responsibility for the housing register and best visibility of those figures. I can give you what I have, which is what I have given you, but beyond that that detail is best directed to the responsible minister.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Okay. In response to the budget, Safe Steps welcomed the funding for new refuges but did say:

... it does fall short of meeting the demand we know exists for refuges to keep women and children protected, safe and supported when they are experiencing family violence crisis and where the risk of lethality is so high ...

Do you have any idea how many women will not be able to access safe refuge due to the shortfall in refuge places that they have highlighted there?

Ms WILLIAMS: Look, in short, the picture is more complicated than probably the way you have presented it in the sense that refuges are only one part of the overall system. We have our refuges and our crisis accommodation properties, but we also have programs, for example, like our flexible support packages or crisis brokerage, which are other mechanisms through which victim-survivors and their families can access accommodation services. FSPs provide up to \$10 000 for a range of different things that might be—and it is in the name—flexible and might meet the needs of those individuals, whether that be, for example, assistance with paying for a bond to get a rental property, hotel accommodation if it is short-term need or the like.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Okay. I get all that, Minister. Does your portfolio keep data on the number of women on any given night who are without somewhere to stay because they are fleeing family violence?

Ms WILLIAMS: We certainly have a sense, and it might be something that Eleri might want to add to in more detail in terms of what we know about the demand for these services. I think before I pass on to Eleri—

Mr D O'BRIEN: I am happy to. I am short on time. I am just specifically after data if you have got some numbers.

Ms WILLIAMS: Sure.

Ms BUTLER: Well, in relation to refuges, we know that there were 800 families that received refuge responses last year.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Sorry, can you just repeat that?

Ms BUTLER: There were 800 families receiving refuge responses in the last year, which is a funded BP3 target. We also know from Safe Steps data that a number of additional survivors will be in motels and temporary accommodation, for example. But I think one of the key things is, in relation to the refuge program increase, the refuge redevelopment program is going to actually increase the number of households that can stay in refuge accommodation across the state by 73 family spaces; by the time we complete the refuge redevelopment program, 197 households on any one night will be able to access refuge accommodation.

Ms WILLIAMS: It is also worth—

Mr D O'BRIEN: But the question I am trying to get to, and this might be a negative that you cannot answer, but how many do not have access?

Ms WILLIAMS: What it does not tell you—and I suppose this is the point of my initial response, Mr O'Brien, about the suite of options available—is that refuges alone are not the only calculation of where people may go.

Mr D O'BRIEN: No, no, I understand that. I am looking—

Ms WILLIAMS: So different parts of the system will effectively pick people up. It is also worth noting in the data that Ms Butler just gave you, which refers to last year—and indeed if you look at the data in the year before, and I think we actually discussed this at last year's PAEC—that because of the impact of COVID and the impact in particular on communal refuges where for public health reasons they were not able to be accessed, we had put in place additional measures including a significant boost to our ability to house people in hotel accommodation during that time, and that is in fact reflected in some of that data over the last couple of years. But I say that just to demonstrate the fact that looking at one part of the system alone and saying, 'Well, who didn't go there', does not reflect that they have options outside of that one area through those other fundings.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Yes, yes, I get all that, Minister.

Ms WILLIAMS: So it is not going to give you an accurate picture, in essence, of what you are trying to get to.

Mr D O'BRIEN: No, I am actually trying to find out the number of women who do not have any form of accommodation at night, not all the different options they can have. If you can provide that on notice, that would be great. If not—

Ms WILLIAMS: Yes, but that is what I am saying to you. That would require looking across all the programs, because, for example, if a refuge was not available, it may well be that they would be connected with crisis brokerage or to a flexible support package and then an option would be provided through that.

Mr D O'BRIEN: And that is what I am after, so how many of those?

Ms WILLIAMS: I am happy to pass on to Ms Butler if she has got more detail on that, but my understanding would be that you would be effectively having to look across many, many, many different—

Mr D O'BRIEN: If we could try and take that on notice, if you have got some data on that—

Ms BUTLER: So crisis accommodation properties, for example, can accommodate 60 households, and there are 63 of those properties across Victoria. So refuge providers not only have access to a refuge but also the crisis accommodation properties—

Ms WILLIAMS: It is more than just refuges.

Ms BUTLER: and other forms of accommodation.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Yes. The specific question I am after is—

Ms BUTLER: So it is a suite of accommodation options that are available with housing-related support that is attached to them.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Yes. The question I am after is the women who do not get access to any of those things, so if you can provide that on notice if you are able to, that would be appreciated.

The CHAIR: Mr Richardson.

Mr RICHARDSON: Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Minister and department representatives, for joining us today. Minister, I want to take you to the topic of sustaining family violence reforms, a really important topic after the 227 recommendations. I take you to budget paper 3, page 38, which outlines a further \$43.4 million in commitments to provide sustaining family violence reforms. I am wondering for the committee's benefit if you could please provide some further details about what this investment will provide.

Ms WILLIAMS: Thank you, Mr Richardson. This year I can very proudly say that the government is continuing its proud history of family violence reform and investing in those services that we know victim-survivors rely on to recover and to rebuild after significant trauma. The Victorian family violence reforms are at a really critical juncture six years on from the royal commission. We are at a point where we are really implementing the final handful of recommendations out of that 227. The first phase of the reform has built the foundation of the system. That includes of course the Orange Door; the central information point; the family violence information sharing scheme; MARAM, as I referred to before—our risk assessment tools and framework; our specialist family violence courts; Victoria Police's family violence response model; and improved and expanded services as well for victim-survivors, which we know are critically important.

To realise the benefits of the progress we have made, we really have to continue to fund and support the sustainability of services for victim-survivors. To ensure that specialist family violence services can provide critical and timely support to both adults and children in Victoria and to also manage that growth in demand, this year's budget provides that \$43.4 million, as you have identified, over four years, and that funding is really about continuing therapeutic interventions in crisis case management and response for victim-survivors of family violence, including of course children and young people, noting the importance of the royal commission's recommendation around acknowledging them as victims in their own right. Historically I think there was a mindset that if Mum is okay, then the kids will be okay. But we now know that kids, whether they are directly victims of that violence or indeed witnesses, have their own trauma that they need to overcome, and it is really important to address that in its own right in order to break the cycles of violence.

That funding will also ensure ongoing support for things like our statewide 24/7 crisis services; our flexible support packages, which I was just referring to before in answering Mr O'Brien's question; culturally safe responses for Aboriginal survivors; and support for women on temporary visas. And the funding is really the core of our system. It provides the essential supports that victim-survivors, both adults and children, need to escape, to stay safe and to recover from family violence, which can be a lengthy process. As I am sure you would appreciate, leaving is one of the most difficult decisions somebody will make. It is also a very dangerous point in the cycle, sadly. But that process of recovery beyond that can be incredibly complex for people. So that funding bucket that you have referred to includes funding for Safe Steps. That is that 24/7 family violence crisis response service. This provides really life-saving support to victims of family violence every single day. We know that they do an enormous amount of work and do it with great professionalism and are a great asset to us. All the workers in that sector, particularly on the back of the pandemic, have really I think done us all proud in what they have been able to achieve.

It is a really big decision—and I cannot emphasise this enough—in the life of any victim to make the call to a service like that or initiate a web chat, like what Safe Steps developed during the pandemic, with a crisis response service. For women who live every day in fear, the opportunity for that conversation may only arise once. Their window may be small, and so we need to make sure through this funding that when that opportunity arises the support is indeed available to them. But it also ensures that ongoing help is available through things like case management, ensuring victims are supported with the support they need to recover and to rebuild after the family violence trauma. The government understands that for therapeutic supports to be effective they must be responsive to the needs of individual victims of family violence. It cannot be a one-size-fits-all model, and that is why the investment includes a range of services that can be tailored to individual needs through those flexible support packages and brokerage, because the needs of individual victim-survivors

will be very different. Everybody's circumstances are a little bit different and their priorities may be a little bit different, and really for me the strength of flexible support packages and brokerage funding is to enable those families, those women, to be able to put money and resources to what they need most at that point in time.

Mr RICHARDSON: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Richardson. Mr Barton.

Mr BARTON: Thank you, Chair. Minister, with the Orange Door network, budget paper 3, page 202, the expected outcome for 'Support and safety hubs established' at the end of the 2021–22 is 16, and over 65 000 risk assessments will have been undertaken. The Orange Door in the inner east and the outer east have both commenced services in the last financial year. Can you please outline how the work of the Orange Door is supporting the victim-survivors of family violence?

Ms WILLIAMS: Yes. Thanks, Mr Barton. I have not faced you at a PAEC before, so it is a pleasure. Look, we are now in a really fortunate position to have the entire eastern half of Victoria serviced by the Orange Door network, a great achievement. And as I said, the number of networks that we have managed to roll out during the pandemic is testament to an enormous amount of work by my departmental colleagues but also the sector themselves, who have, despite the challenges during that time, really rolled up their sleeves and been committed to getting this part of the reform done.

As you have observed, the inner-east Orange Door commenced in September 2021, and it services Boroondara, Manningham, Monash and Whitehorse. Local residents can access health and support in a range of different ways for those services—phone, email and in person at the Box Hill site, with work underway to establish additional face-to-face access points in the region, and that work continues. The outer-east Orange Door commenced more recently, on 10 May, so not all that long ago, and services the Knox, Maroondah and Yarra Ranges local government areas, and local residents can access support, again, through those same mechanisms: phone, email and face to face in Croydon, with further sites also planned in Yarra Junction and Belgrave to ensure help and support is available no matter where people live.

It really is worth emphasising that it is a network. These are effectively coordination hubs that then draw on the service system around them to connect people to what they need and ensure that a victim-survivor does not have to retell their story over and over again and that that load is taken off them and managed by the coordination hub. In both the inner and outer east there is a really strong partnership. We have got Anglicare; the Boorndawan Willam Aboriginal Healing Service; the Eastern Domestic Violence Outreach Service, better known as EDVOS to most of us; the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency, VACCA, who have been a partner with us on many sites; and of course the government; and Uniting Vic.Tas are an initial partner in the inner-east network as well. It is very strong partnership of local and statewide organisations there that effectively breathe life into this model.

The rollout of the Orange Door network was underpinned by a \$448.1 million investment and is part of that critical system infrastructure that sits at the heart of this reform agenda. The findings of the royal commission told us that—this effectively goes to why we have implemented this model. It is world leading, but it was drawing on the findings of the royal commission that told us that women and children needed a joined-up service system where people could be quickly and easily connected with the right support at the right time when they needed it. It told us that our practitioners needed to be able to collaborate across services to support people and to be able to draw on one another's expertise and specialisations to be able to provide that integrated assessment of risk and need and to be able to take that whole-of-family approach where children are recognised as victim-survivors in their own right. This is effectively about getting services to operate not in silos but more collaboratively, and our reforms around information sharing are also around ensuring that we can build a better risk profile by better sharing the information available to us and through doing that get a much more accurate view of somebody's situation and therefore a much more accurate view of the risk that may well apply to them.

So the Orange Door and all the systems that sit beneath it, whether that be the central information point, information sharing or those important initiatives like MARAM, do exactly that. It brings together workers from specialist family violence services, from family services, from Aboriginal services and from services for the men who use violence and puts them in one place. It enables agencies to collaborate, to share knowledge, to share information and their specialist skills, noting of course that many of these sectors have a very tailored and

specific lens for the work that they have and it can often be very useful for them to share that with another part of the system that has a slightly different perspective or focus in their work. And all of that really culminates in an informed and tailored response to families experiencing family violence.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. That concludes the time we have set aside for consideration of the family violence estimates today. We thank you for appearing before the committee in this capacity. The committee will follow up on any questions taken on notice in writing, and responses will be required within five working days of the committee's request.

The committee will now take a 5-minute break before moving to consideration of the Indigenous affairs portfolio.

Ms WILLIAMS: Aboriginal affairs.

The CHAIR: Thank you. I declare this hearing adjourned.

Witnesses withdrew.