

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the 2023–24 Budget Estimates

Melbourne – Thursday 15 June 2023

MEMBERS

Sarah Connolly – Chair

Nicholas McGowan – Deputy Chair

Michael Galea

Paul Hamer

Mathew Hilakari

Lauren Kathage

Bev McArthur

Danny O’Brien

Ellen Sandell

WITNESSES

Ms Ros Spence MP, Minister for Prevention of Family Violence,

Ms Peta McCammon, Secretary,

Ms Kelly Stanton, Acting Chief Executive Officer, Family Safety Victoria, and

Ms Jo Pride, Executive Director, Prevention of Family Violence and Reform, 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 here with us today.

On behalf of the Parliament, the committee is conducting this Inquiry into the 2023–24 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 of 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.

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

I welcome the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence the Honourable Ros Spence as well as officers from the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing. You are very much welcome here. Minister, I am going to invite you to make an opening statement or presentation of no more than 5 minutes, and after that committee members will start their questions.

Visual presentation.

Ros SPENCE: Thank you, Chair, and thank you to the committee for the opportunity to present on the prevention of family violence portfolio, including our government's investment in the 2023–24 state budget. I would also like to begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which we are meeting today and pay my respects to elders past and present.

The prevention of family violence portfolio is working to end family violence by ensuring that victim-survivors of family and sexual violence can access the help that they need when they need it and working collaboratively across the system to ensure that perpetrators stop their violence, take accountability for their actions and change their behaviour.

It has been a really big 12 months for the prevention of family violence portfolio. In January this year the Victorian government announced the implementation of the 227 recommendations from the Royal Commission into Family Violence. There is much more that we could say on this, but what I will say is this was the first time that victim-survivors were given a chance to be heard. Not only did we hear them but we implemented what they said would work best, and that is something that we are really proud of. But we also said that whilst this was a really important milestone, there is still so much more to be done. In particular we heard through the royal commission that an open door for support was needed, and in October 2022 the final Orange Door was launched. The Orange Door network is now operational statewide and has helped more than 333,000 Victorians, including 136,000 children, since its services commenced in May 2018.

We have also delivered almost 100 individual projects and initiatives through 17 primary prevention grant programs where people live, learn, work and meet. We have continued to roll out MARAM, the multiagency risk assessment and management framework, with more than 370,000 workers spanning 6000 organisations prescribed under MARAM across the service system. We expanded the adolescent family violence in the home program statewide to deliver a new early intervention model for young people who use violence. The Central Information Point has been expanded to Safe Steps and Men's Referral Service to further increase visibility of perpetrator behaviour and risk across the system. We have continued to deliver on our commitment to a community-led, safe, determined response to end family violence against Aboriginal people through the Dhelk Dja – strong culture, strong peoples, strong families.

Victoria continues to lead the nation in preventing and responding to family violence. Since the royal commission more than \$3.86 billion has been invested to transform Victoria's family violence system, and this is more than every other state and territory combined. The 2023–24 state budget builds on this investment by providing a further \$77 million to end family and sexual violence. This includes \$31 million to maintain Aboriginal-led family and sexual violence service delivery; \$4.5 million for increased provision of sexual assault support services for victim-survivors of sexual violence and the first Australian memorial to acknowledge victim-survivors of sexual assault; \$3.5 million to intervene early with children and young people to prevent and reduce harm; \$15 million to ensure victim-survivors of family violence continue to receive the support they need to stay safe, recover and thrive; and \$23 million for perpetrator responses to keep people who use violence engaged, in view and accountable. The next stage of reform is focusing on strengthening the family violence system and progressing our ultimate goal of stopping violence before it starts. These priorities will guide the development of the third and final family violence reform rolling action plan for 2024–26.

In closing, I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge all victim-survivors and people who have lost a loved one to family violence and violence against women. I would also like to thank all of the organisations across the family violence, sexual assault and prevention sectors, as well as people with lived experience, for their tireless efforts over the past 12 months to ensure that Victorians can access help and support, and I thank the committee again for your interest in this portfolio.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much, Minister. The first line of questioning will come from the Deputy Chair.

Nicholas McGOWAN: Minister, I am just wondering whether you or your department have undertaken any work in terms of coercive control and whether you are looking at doing any work in that space in the forward estimates period.

Ros SPENCE: Yes, we have. In regard to coercive control, this is a topic that has a lot of discussion in the community, and there is also a bit of confusion in regard to that where there seems to be confusion as to whether or not Victoria has any coercive control laws as such. We do not have a standalone coercive control piece of legislation, but we do hold many of the levers and enablers that are required to tackle coercive control.

We have progressed a range of strategies that build a comprehensive response to coercive control. Coercive and controlling behaviours are already identified in the definition of family violence in the *Family Violence Protection Act*. The definition allows for coercive control to be addressed through intervention orders, which if breached constitute a criminal offence. So that is one way in which coercive control is identified as a legislative breach.

Identifying, assessing and responding to coercive control is also really central to that MARAM framework. When assessors are looking at behaviours, coercive control is one of those key behaviours that comes up as a risk in identifying family violence as an identifier. It comes up through there. Through that statewide MARAM implementation, workforces are being equipped to identify and understand the use and the impact of coercive control as well as its links to system abuse and perpetrator misidentification, so it comes up in that regard as well. And Victoria Police are also continuing to strengthen their response to coercive control through updating their policies, their training and their targeted initiatives.

But we will continue to embed that ongoing understanding of coercive control as something that is underpinning family violence within our existing legal frameworks, and in doing that, we will continue to take the advice of experts, the community and victim-survivors, because ultimately this is all about keeping people

safe. We need to take the advice and look at what is happening in other jurisdictions. It is quite a complex issue, and there is a diversity of views. We are working on what was recommended by the Royal Commission into Family Violence, and this is what has stemmed from that. We will continue to take the advice from the sector and from survivors and from community as we go forward.

Nicholas McGOWAN: I am going to ask you a bit of a difficult question, because there is no silver bullet, right? But it strikes me, as somebody who has a daughter, who has a sister and who had a mother, the fact that still one woman a week is murdered by a partner or ex-partner – if I was in your shoes, I would be tearing my hair out trying to understand how the hell to stop men killing their former partners or their partners.

Ros SPENCE: You have asked me the most difficult question that you could. You have prefaced it with the answer, in that there is no silver bullet. If I had that silver bullet, I would produce it.

Nicholas McGOWAN: If you had money, what would you do? The is the ultimate question. You get this job as minister and you say to yourself –

Ros SPENCE: And this is it – it is not money, it is generational change. When we started upon this work it was made very clear to us that it was going to take a good 10 years to start to see ultimate change. We are seeing good change take place, and I can go through some of those changes for you. But it is going to take quite some time. It seems counterintuitive to be pleased with high reporting rates, to be pleased with high crime statistics, but there is a positive in those in that it does show a confidence in the system – that the people are coming forward, that there is now more confidence that people have access to a system that they feel that they can come to. It seems counterintuitive that a high number of breaches of orders is a positive, but having police responding differently and having their processes be different is actually a positive. The system changing is going to take a while, but we are now seeing that at the seven-year mark of reform reports appear to be plateauing, which is good. We are turning that corner, which is very encouraging. There is now –

Nicholas McGOWAN: Can I just interrupt you, Minister, there. I understand the reporting side. I am also curious in respect to whether we are doing any research about young boys and their behaviour –

Ros SPENCE: Oh, absolutely.

Nicholas McGOWAN: because clearly these patterns of violence or resorting to actions or violence versus words starts early on.

Ros SPENCE: Yes, we are.

Nicholas McGOWAN: Do we actually have specific research projects that are looking at how that starts in the family home, clearly, and how that then perpetuates in later life?

Ros SPENCE: Yes, we are. We going to run out of time, in case you want to come back to it, but there is a significant amount of research being done. There also are some research gaps, and we are aware of what those research gaps are, and that is what we are targeting in on now to try and do more work there. But there is a significant amount of research, and there is a real focus on that. I will also mention that the affirmative consent work and going into schools, and early into schools, through Respectful Relationships – all of that is bringing that next generation with a different set of views, and that is where we going to see real change as well. But it is a really crucial issue. So, yes, now we are seeing change, but what we are going to see over the long term is that really significant shift in attitude.

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

Michael GALEA: Good morning, Minister. Good morning, officials. Thank you for joining us. Minister, I would like to refer you to budget paper 3, page 44. We know that Aboriginal women and Aboriginal children are at a higher risk of family violence than other women or than Aboriginal men regardless of whether they live in rural, regional or urban areas and whether it be the hands of non-Aboriginal or Aboriginal people who use violence in the home. Minister, can you please update the committee on what this budget does to continue our support in ways that are culturally safe and appropriate for these groups and also in a way that is aligned with our commitment to self-determination for Indigenous people in this state?

Ros SPENCE: Thank you, Mr Galea, for your question. We know that Aboriginal self-determination is crucial to effectively addressing the issues affecting Aboriginal families, so I do thank you for your interest in this area. *Dhelk Dja: Safe Our Way – Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families* is the key Aboriginal-led Victorian agreement that commits Aboriginal communities, services and government to working together to prevent family violence. As a key recommendation from the Royal Commission into Family Violence we take this commitment very seriously. The Dhelk Dja partnership forum and its members are the champions and strategic leaders of its action plans and the ongoing monitoring and evaluation of its progress and outcomes via the *Dhelk Dja Monitoring, Evaluation and Accountability Plan*. This year's budget ensures that this crucial work can be continued through Aboriginal frontline family violence services under the *Dhelk Dja* agreement by providing continued and ongoing funding of \$25.6 million over four years and \$6.8 million ongoing for Aboriginal-led family violence services. It also provides for the continuation of Aboriginal-led sexual assault services by providing \$5.5 million over four years and \$1.6 million ongoing for Aboriginal-led sexual assault support services.

The *Dhelk Dja* 10-year agreement and the *Victorian Closing the Gap Implementation Plan* both prioritise sustainable and ongoing investment so that Aboriginal services with the required specialisation and expertise are resourced to lead the way as primary providers of family violence overseas for Aboriginal people, and the additional funding will enable the retention of approximately 30 FTE workers who deliver critical, culturally appropriate, holistic responses across 23 funded services. This ongoing funding will enable Aboriginal family violence service providers to retain and build the capacity and capability of an Aboriginal specialist family violence workforce, increasing access to culturally safe and responsive support for Aboriginal victims of family violence, Aboriginal people who use family violence and family groups through family-centred services and programs that offer a range of integrated and holistic supports.

This total funding of \$31 million in this year's budget ensures that our partner organisations are resourced and supported to undertake this important work, and it is part of the \$77.2 million in this year's budget to support the prevention of family violence. The funding will allow the Dhelk Dja partnership forum to pursue its priorities of strengthening Aboriginal culture and leadership; Aboriginal-led prevention; self-determining Aboriginal family violence support and services; and Aboriginal-led and informed innovation, data and research; and this \$31 million investment is a really significant investment in the sector and shows this government's clear priorities when it comes to supporting Aboriginal Victorians and doing so in a way that places Aboriginal self-determination at the centre of our investments.

The work is also really critical to helping us achieve Victoria's implementation plan for the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, 'Target 13', which by 2031 is that the rate of all forms of family violence and abuse against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children be reduced by at least 50 per cent as progress toward zero. This is an important target, and we are really committed to continuing this important work that is required to achieve it.

Michael GALEA: Thank you, Minister. Digging in a little bit deeper on – you mentioned Dhelk Dja. And it is the same budget paper reference, budget paper 3, page 44. Could you outline how Dhelk Dja provides a culturally appropriate and robust workforce to maintain their services?

Ros SPENCE: Sure. In alignment with our commitment to providing a sustainable workforce to enact the major systemic reforms that we have put in place, we are ensuring that alongside this we build that specialist Aboriginal workforce and in partnership with Family Safety Victoria, the *Dhelk Dja* three-year action plan will increase Aboriginal representation across the family violence workforce. Aboriginal frontline family violence services are being strengthened through the design and implementation of the Dhelk Dja fund and Aboriginal family violence industry strategy. The Dhelk Dja fund provides assistance to Aboriginal students so they can obtain the necessary mandatory minimum qualifications to work in prevention of family violence, and these workforce initiatives are really critical, which is why this year's budget investment is so important.

Dhelk Dja is also represented along with Djirra at our family violence reform advisory group bimonthly meetings, which are another important way to focus specifically on workforce and capacity building.

Michael GALEA: Thank you, Minister. Thank you, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. We will go for the next 7 minutes to Mrs McArthur.

Bev McARTHUR: Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Minister. Minister, the budget for addressing family violence for older Victorians appears to have been cut by half, from \$2.9 million last year to \$1.4 million this year – and I refer to budget paper 3, page 40, table 1.11. This is particularly concerning as the number of homeless women over the age of 55 is increasing. So do you expect the number of older women being forced into homelessness after leaving violent partners to increase because you have reduced the budget?

Ros SPENCE: I do not know that I would make that connection, but I would say that women facing family violence, regardless of their age, if they are then facing homelessness they would become part of that priority cohort in the housing space. So I do not necessarily make any connection between funding of family violence supports to –

Bev McARTHUR: It has been cut by half. Why have you done this?

Kelly STANTON: If I may assist.

Bev McARTHUR: Thank you, Kelly – Ms Stanton.

Kelly STANTON: Thanks, Mrs McArthur. A couple of comments I would make about that. Senior Rights Victoria delivers services for people that have experienced elder abuse. The Orange Door that is available right across the state supports people of any age to access services, including housing and homelessness services. Specialist family violence services also support women of any age to access a range of services. So the family violence system is predicated on people being able to access services irrespective of age, gender, sexual identity or racial or cultural background.

Nicholas McGOWAN: Do you have any data that you can share in terms of the Orange Door program itself and cohorts or people that are obviously accessing that service?

Kelly STANTON: The Orange Door only rolled out statewide, finalised, in October 2022, so we have not yet had a full year of data in the Orange Door. So the data that we have on demographics would not be a full set of data, because it only just finished rolling out in October of last year.

Bev McARTHUR: Just going to the issue of cutting the family violence budget, it appears, in the budget by half: why have you done that, and you don't think there will be any repercussions as a result of that?

Kelly STANTON: Mrs McArthur, are you referring to the elder abuse?

Bev McARTHUR: Yes, the budget for family violence for older Victorians – \$2.9 million last year, \$1.4 million this year.

Kelly STANTON: Mrs McArthur, for those reasons that I outlined just a moment ago, I would not expect to see any change in the service delivery for older Victorians.

Bev McARTHUR: So you do not think there are any services being cut due to this reduction in funding?

Kelly STANTON: Direct service delivery? No, Mrs McArthur.

Bev McARTHUR: Okay. Well, we will continue on, Ms Stanton, perhaps. In budget paper 3, page 201, we heard from the local government minister yesterday – sorry, wrong question. Budget paper 3, page 191, the number of nights of refuge accommodation provided to victims of family violence is expected to be less this year than last year, delays in additional refuge capacity will result in 7000 less than expected refuge accommodation nights. How far behind schedule are these projects, do you know?

Kelly STANTON: We have delivered 14 refuges to date, we will be delivering another one this year and the remainder next year. The COVID pandemic and resultant impacts on supply chains and materials, alongside the careful selection of land for refuges, has had an impact on the delivery of the program.

Bev McARTHUR: So we have still got victims in hotels, have we?

Kelly STANTON: We do have victims in hotels.

Bev McARTHUR: How many? Could you tell us?

Kelly STANTON: I could not tell you a comprehensive figure, because obviously victim-survivors access services through a range of services, so there is not collated data on that. We are working to achieving that. Safe Steps, as part of our system, provides the centralised entry point to the refuge system, so we are working with them to build the data capacity in relation to people that request refuge services and those that are not able to access those services. That is work that we are doing right now – increasing the data capacity across the system.

Bev McARTHUR: We do keep hearing that data collection seems to be an issue for many departments, so I am curious to know how you can actually implement policies without good data collection. Anyway, it is obviously working, to be improved. How many women and family groups have been forced to stay in a hotel for more than a week because appropriate accommodation cannot be sourced? Do you have that information, or would you be able to find it?

Kelly STANTON: Thanks, Ms McArthur. That relates to the earlier point that I made in relation to the number of services across the state that are providing accommodation for women and children, so we do not have a collated dataset for those.

Bev McARTHUR: When are we going to get the collated dataset?

Kelly STANTON: We are working across our specialist family violence services. As I was saying, we are introducing a crisis response model, which will build the data of the specialist family violence system to be able to talk more confidently to that data.

Bev McARTHUR: When do you expect that construction to be completed – of the data model?

Kelly STANTON: The crisis responses model will be implemented from August, and we are working alongside that to build the data system, in particular with our central Safe Steps referral point.

Bev McARTHUR: Do you think you would be able to report back to PAEC with the information – that hopefully you will have gathered – that we are asking for?

Kelly STANTON: I think it will take us this year to build that data picture.

Bev McARTHUR: The whole year to build the dataset?

The CHAIR: Mrs McArthur, you may be able to ask it next year.

Bev McARTHUR: Next year. Thank you, Chair.

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

Mathew HILAKARI: Thank you, Minister, and thank you, officials, for your attendance this morning. Minister, this will probably not be a surprise to you because we have talked about this before: multicultural communities and their interaction with the family violence system. Obviously, both of us represent highly multicultural communities, as do other members on this committee. I would like to take you to budget paper 3, page 44. I would just like to understand: how are the family violence services meeting the needs of multicultural communities and diverse communities – like mine, like yours?

Ros SPENCE: Thanks, Mr Hilakari, and thank you for your ongoing interest in this really important issue. It is incredibly important that our family violence system can support all Victorians, and we know that our multicultural communities often have a unique set of challenges in this space. Limited family supports, a lack of knowledge around our legal system and added pressures around citizenship status are just some of the issues that can add to their particular vulnerability. There are a number of initiatives in the budget that support our multicultural communities. The budget supports the continuation of specialist supports for women with complex needs, at \$1.5 million over four years. The budget also ensures the continuation of our culturally specific flexible support packages, funded at \$0.345 million in 2023–24, and this is supporting victim-survivors to access culturally appropriate supports.

We also acknowledge the importance of family violence crisis brokerage to our multicultural communities and have provided in this budget \$6.143 million in 2023–24. This funding also supports victims on temporary visas who have no income, and it enables refuge providers to meet the costs of supporting them when they have no

income. Then there is the continued support for multicultural communities through our continued funding for case management supports at \$5.3 million over the next two years. This funding will ensure continued funding for key community organisations that support CALD communities, like GenWest. GenWest will receive more than \$1.2 million over the next two years to provide continued case management supports through the western suburbs of Melbourne across both the western Melbourne and Brimbank–Melton regions. GenWest does a terrific job in Melbourne’s west, and I am really delighted that this budget provides continued support for them and for so many organisations like GenWest that support our multicultural communities. I am sure, Member for Point Cook, you are very familiar with the great work that they do, and this budget really backs them into continuing to provide those really vital supports out in the west.

Wellsprings for Women is another organisation that many would be familiar with, and they do a very similar and effective job in Melbourne’s south-eastern suburbs. Mr Galea, you would be no doubt familiar with their great work.

Michael GALEA: They do amazing work, yes.

Ros SPENCE: Yes. I was really delighted to announce last month that the budget provides \$788,000 over the next two years to Wellsprings for Women to support their really great work. This funding increase will enable that organisation to continue their work to support women from migrant, refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds experiencing family violence, and it builds on the funding that they have received through the supporting multicultural and faith communities to prevent violence grant program.

Can I also add that last year the Labor government established a multicultural working group to help improve family and sexual violence responses for multicultural communities, providing a statewide platform for cross-sector dialogue between community leaders; multicultural, ethnospecific and faith-based community organisations; and specialist family and sexual violence organisations. This group is doing some really fantastic work already, so that is quite a success. This year’s budget boosts case management supports, and it is really vital to ensure that Victorians of multicultural backgrounds experiencing family violence have got the supports that they need.

Mathew HILAKARI: Thank you, Minister. I am just so pleased to understand in the budget that GenWest is being supported for these two years. Thank you for the department’s and all your work in providing that.

I just want to drill down on one specific area, which is culturally specific flexible support packages. I was just hoping you could outline to the committee how they go to improving women’s lives and anyone suffering family violence.

Ros SPENCE: Thank you. I note that in the Point Cook electorate these packages are provided through GenWest in partnership with InTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence. Both organisations really do do a fantastic job. Flexible support packages are a specific type of brokerage fund available to victim-survivors, including children, who are case managed by a specialist family violence service. As the title suggests, they are flexible in that they can be used to meet a wide range of victim-survivor needs, and they have really become a critical part of our family violence response. The nature of the packages means that they can be tailored in a way to address the unique risks, needs and impacts of family violence on a particular client. It means that they can access short- and long-term accommodation or be able to stay safely at home through the purchase of security measures via the personal safety initiative schemes. They enable victim-survivors to purchase material items as well as specialised counselling and training and education courses such as English language learning or even pay off bills or debts that might stay in the way of their recovery, so they are really flexible. They can be used to increase victim-survivors’ employability or return someone to their country of birth. They are really vital supports, and I am very delighted that this budget delivers the funding to support our multicultural communities in this way, particularly in a way that recognises the need to be flexible in addressing how we respond.

Mathew HILAKARI: Thank you, Minister.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. We will go to Mr O’Brien.

Danny O'BRIEN: Thank you, Chair. Good morning, Minister and team. Page 171 of budget paper 3 outlines some of the prevention of family violence performance measures. Can I just ask, Minister, though, do you have data on how many perpetrators who have completed programs have reoffended or been jailed?

Ros SPENCE: Reoffending data?

Danny O'BRIEN: So someone obviously who has been charged or diverted to a prevention program.

Ros SPENCE: A prevention program. No, I do not have that data.

Danny O'BRIEN: Is it something that is kept at all?

Ros SPENCE: No.

Kelly STANTON: No, we do not have a reoffending rate.

Danny O'BRIEN: So one question I would follow on there with is: how do you measure the effectiveness of those programs?

Ros SPENCE: That is a very good question, and that is, as I mentioned to the Deputy Chair earlier, about the evidence gaps. Whilst there has been a fair bit of research done in many aspects of family violence, we do know that there are some evidence gaps, and that is what we are drilling down on. There does continue to be investment in research in this. What we have been able to establish through evidence that has been undertaken – I can give you some examples. So ANROWS have undertaken research that shows that, even when the male participating in the program has no desire whatsoever to participate, there is a benefit to the program in that it addresses a monitoring risk and also provides partner support. So that is one benefit of participation. But then there has also been some Queensland evaluation that has highlighted the importance of the programs operating within a broader system of accountability and support for both perpetrators and survivors – individual support was needed for some men, supporting their preparation and integration. But more importantly, there has been more in-depth research done about the economic evaluation as to what the programs may provide. I am just trying to find that. It provided an interesting range as to what the economic value may be as to –

Danny O'BRIEN: In terms of preventing further family violence?

Ros SPENCE: Yes. I cannot lay my hand on it at the moment. It was really quite stark.

Danny O'BRIEN: Just for interest, the crime stats have just come out, and I understand family violence related offences have just gone up 3.1 per cent in the last year, so clearly we have still got some work to do. I noticed, Minister – while you are looking for it – that there is quite a big surge in people participating in prevention programs, and it says that it is due to online activity. Do you have any data on the effectiveness of online? And not to get too much into the weeds, but if you are doing an online course – and we have seen Mr Hamer here is very attentive and he is on the screen – everyone knows there are those online things where people just switch off the screen and go and get a cup of tea. Can we see what sort of effectiveness there is in online programs for prevention of family violence?

Ros SPENCE: We do continue to evaluate. I will let Ms Stanton talk more about the actual evaluation of the various providers and the work that is going on there.

Kelly STANTON: Mr O'Brien, if I may just follow up on the research matters, the Victorian government has funded a research agenda for family violence and sexual assault, and three of those research pieces involve young men and boys using intimate partner violence in early relationships but also, critically, perpetrator program attrition and engagement and also a focus on LGBTQ men who use violence. In relation to your questions about online programs, they are very carefully calibrated programs. There are a couple of elements to that. The person that is the subject of the program cannot just switch off the computer and move away, because that indicates their engagement with the program. There is a critical element around family safety contact, and that is where the service is maintaining contact with the victim-survivor to look at any issues that are arising. So there are a range of safeguards that were put in place during COVID-19 in relation to those online programs. There was also an evaluation piece done during that time to look at the efficacy of that program.

Danny O'BRIEN: In Victoria?

Kelly STANTON: Yes.

Danny O'BRIEN: Have you got the results of that evaluation?

Kelly STANTON: I do not have those here with me today, but we could –

Danny O'BRIEN: If it is finalised, would you be able to provide it to the committee? That would be of use. I know a couple of years ago in my area there were literally like 800 men on a waiting list for diversion programs and the like, and it is an area obviously that we need to do more in, as the data I have just read out shows. Speaking of which, the data also on community-based offender supervision, so page 275 of budget paper 3, indicates the targets for completion of community-based offender supervision for family violence. The target is 70 per cent for completion – and I think we are actually above that, which is great – but I would have thought that if you have been sentenced to a community-based order of some description for family violence we would want 100 per cent. Why isn't it reaching that level?

Ros SPENCE: You are talking about an Attorney-General matter.

Danny O'BRIEN: But I am talking specifically in relation to family violence. That is the issue.

Ros SPENCE: That is community corrections. I cannot talk to a BP3 measure of community corrections.

Danny O'BRIEN: Well, no, but from a family violence perspective, if you have been sentenced to a community-based order and the target is only 70 per cent to complete it, surely we actually want perpetrators to be doing their time, even if it is community based.

Ros SPENCE: Mr O'Brien, noting that it is another portfolio, I would say that not all perpetrators are on community-based orders.

Danny O'BRIEN: Oh, no, of course not. All right. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr O'Brien. We are going to go to Ms Kathage.

Lauren KATHAGE: Thank you, Chair, Minister and officials. I want to just carry on from Mr O'Brien's line of questioning. I know this government has been unequivocal that perpetrator accountability needs to be emphasised if we are to address family violence. From BP3, page 44, are you able to take us through the funding for behaviour change programs to address the behaviour of people who use violence at home?

Ros SPENCE: Thank you, Ms Kathage, for your question and your interest in this issue. This budget's investment will maintain that really important focus on keeping people who use violence engaged, in view and accountable, and that is very important. The funding attached to this commitment totals \$20.6 million over four years and \$5.5 million ongoing. The funding will enable the continued delivery and development of accommodation-based interventions for perpetrators of family violence that have been excluded from the family home due to family violence. This includes the men's accommodation and counselling service delivered by the Men's Referral Service and the Medium-Term Perpetrator Accommodation Service, which is piloted by mainstream services in partnership with a housing provider in Central Highlands, Loddon and north-east Melbourne, and additionally by ACCOs providing support to Aboriginal clients in north-east Melbourne, Hume Moreland and inner Gippsland areas.

The budget also provides \$2.6 million over four years and \$0.7 million ongoing to continue funding for men's behaviour change programs. These are really vital supports that provide appropriate attention on those who use violence, and this investment has been really warmly welcomed by organisations including No to Violence, which said:

Victoria has led the way in family violence funding.

And:

This funding builds on previous ... investment into family violence.

CEO Jacqui Watt went on to say:

This funding is vital to keeping victim-survivors safe at home while connecting men who use family violence with the services – and housing – they need to begin to change their behaviour.

So it is really clear that these investments are important, but we know that there is still so much more to be done, and we are getting on with the task that is in front of us to do this really important work.

Lauren KATHAGE: Thank you, Minister. You touched on accommodation-based services. Are you able to expand a bit on how perpetrators are obliged to stay engaged with the program?

Ros SPENCE: Thank you for your supplementary question. Often perpetrators use the excuse of having nowhere else to go as the reason why they must stay in the family home, and in other cases they are under court orders to leave the family home. We know that if you are homeless or in insecure accommodation because you have left the family home it is difficult if not impossible to engage with support services. The perpetrator accommodation and support service, otherwise known as the men's accommodation and counselling service, has been expanded to include not just men that have been legally excluded from the family home but also men who have been excluded at the request of the victim-survivor and in some cases at their own request. They could not previously access this service, so this expansion is really important. Place for change, the medium-term perpetrator accommodation service, was established in three initial pilot sites in 2021, with two additional Aboriginal-specific pilot sites commencing in 2022. Perpetrators in these programs are assigned a caseworker, and that is to keep them actively engaged with the service system to support their behaviour change journey and their accountability with the service. So this investment is important, and it works to support victim-survivors along with those who use violence.

Lauren KATHAGE: Thank you, Minister. I was interested in the conversation you were having with Mr McGowan earlier about the attitude change population wide that is occurring at the younger ages. Complementary services around behaviour change, men's behaviour change, are funded here, I can see, on page 44. Can you talk a bit to why those types of programs are important for prevention as well?

Ros SPENCE: Sure. Thank you. As I previously mentioned, the budget investment will maintain our focus on keeping people who use violence engaged, in view and accountable. The men's behaviour change programs really play an important role in doing this and in promoting the safety of Victorian women and children. That is why we are providing that \$2.6 million over four years for the continuation of these behaviour change programs. The men's behaviour change programs work to end the use of violence and other problematic behaviours through initiating a change process in men's behaviour and providing a forum to explore and challenge beliefs. Within this there is a clear focus on holding men who use violence accountable for that violence that is used towards their family members, including ex-partners. The program involves intensive work to enable men to accept responsibility for their choices and behaviour and to handle strong emotion and conflict with understanding, confidence and control. The program teaches men how to stop using violent, abusive and controlling behaviours, allowing them to become better parents, better fathers and better partners and to improve their sense of self. The programs are available all over Victoria, and while there is room for variation in the approaches that are adopted by the individual program providers, a set of minimum standards do exist to make sure that there is consistency across the programs.

Lauren KATHAGE: Thank you, Minister.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Ms Kathage. We are going to go to Ms Sandell.

Ellen SANDELL: Thank you, Chair. Good morning, everybody. Good morning, Minister. I would like to ask about legal services. Community legal centres obviously play a really important role in the response to family violence, and I see that there is some welcome additional funding in here for community legal centres and legal assistance at new specialist family violence courts. The community legal sector has also been advocating for community legal centres to be properly integrated into the Orange Door network, and I was just wondering if this is on the cards or whether you can speak to that integration.

Ros SPENCE: In regard to community legal centres in general I will park that and specialist family violence courts, as great work has been done there. I will park that in general. The integration with the Orange Door I might pass to Ms Stanton, if you do not mind.

Kelly STANTON: Thank you for the question, Ms Sandell. There are a few elements that I would talk to there. From the inception of the Orange Door we have recognised how critical the interface is with legal

services, so all of the Orange Doors will have arrangements with the community legal services, Victoria Legal Aid or the relevant Aboriginal legal service where they will deliver services from the Orange Door and have referral arrangements. The department of justice has also funded a pilot for legal services in the Orange Door which is in Bayside Peninsula – again, looking at a more structured involvement. It is really recognised as a very critical element of the work with victim-survivors, which is why we have arrangements in place across the state.

Ellen SANDELL: What is the time line for that pilot? Is that just in that one location at this stage?

Kelly STANTON: Yes. It is a two-year pilot that sits in the justice portfolio.

Ellen SANDELL: Okay. All right. Then presumably you will take a look at that and see whether you need to roll that out. I appreciate that the services exist, but I think the issue is the seamless integration into Orange Door.

Kelly STANTON: I would say the pilot was a welcome addition. But I just want to stress that we do have legal services delivering from Orange Doors across the state as an in-reach service and we have referral pathways with legal services. It is a very close and productive working relationship.

Ellen SANDELL: Thank you. I also want to ask, following on from earlier, about multicultural communities. What we are hearing is that there are still some gaps when it comes to family violence, particularly as it pertains to migrant and refugee families. My understanding is that there are a number of grassroots organisations, perhaps smaller organisations, that provide tailored family violence support. You have spoken about some of the larger services. Can you speak a bit more about whether any of those smaller services or organisations have received support or what the gaps are that you see in terms of particularly services for migrant women and families?

Ros SPENCE: Yes, I can. It is really challenging because often it is the community organisations that are the first port of call, where people will present with any issue, and it does not matter whether it is family violence, health, mental health. Regardless of what the issue is, if that is the place of familiarity, that is where they will present. We have hundreds of community organisations, each in their own doing great work but not each in their own capable of being a family violence service provider or a mental health service provider or a health service provider. Working with them to provide them with the information where they feel confident referring those families to the Orange Door network, which is the place where we need people to go, where the workforce is equipped to deal with multicultural communities, because we are working with organisations to make sure that their workforce is dealing with everyone, that is probably the challenge – getting organisations to work with us to help us get people to the Orange Door. Because it is a real shift – it is a shift in how they have worked for a very long time.

We cannot do everything with everyone. I know, putting my previous hat on as Minister for Multicultural Affairs, we were funding up to 350 community organisations to do some work with us during COVID. We could not fund 350 organisations to do family violence work, and we would not be able to provide the consistency of service that was being provided. That is why the royal commission recommended an Orange Door-type network so that people were having the one access point experience. Continuing to work with the organisations and the community to get that system working better is a challenge that I think is going to take a little while, because we have only now got all of the Orange Doors rolled out – the access points, the outposts. Getting the confidence also of our multicultural communities where they feel comfortable using that but they also see themselves in the workforce so there is not the internal barrier to accessing those services, I think that is going to take a little bit of time too. We are seeing it more. We are seeing more presentations, but I think that is going to take a little bit of time before we have more presentations and remove some of those barriers that we still see there.

Ellen SANDELL: Thank you. I also –

Ros SPENCE: Sorry, did you want to add something, Kelly?

Kelly STANTON: I just would also add, like the discussion around the legal services, each of the Orange Doors have very close partnerships with local grassroots multicultural organisations and groups. Some of the

more diverse areas have dedicated multicultural advisory groups. We work very closely, and again, at a central governance level, we have the multicultural working group that supports that.

Ellen SANDELL: Thank you. I imagine my time is almost up, is it?

The CHAIR: Right on time, Ms Sandell. The last 7 minutes are going to Mr Hamer. We will see if this tests our IT. Over to you, Mr Hamer.

Paul HAMER: Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Minister and officials. I am assuming that you can hear me okay. I just want to take you to budget paper 3, page 44. There is a line there about funding provided to 'meet increased demand for sexual assault services and sexual abuse treatment services'. I was wondering if you could just provide a little bit more detail on the funding being provided. Obviously, it indicates that there is an increased demand, and I was just wondering what the extent of that funding will be and what that will be going to.

Ros SPENCE: Thank you, Mr Hamer. It is good to see you even though you are not here in person, but we can still see you and hear you, and that is terrific. Thank you for your interest in this area. I am really pleased to provide an update on our continued investment in this area. As the committee would be aware, sexual assault is any unwanted sexual behaviour or activity that makes the victim feel uncomfortable, frightened or threatened. It is sexual activity that the person has not consented to, and it refers to a really broad range of sexual behaviours, including the use or threat of violence to force another person to engage in a sexual activity against their will.

The lifelong harm that this causes to victims and to those closest to them and the ongoing trauma of recording, reporting and pursuing some form of justice really cannot be overstated. Presently there is a statewide network of 19 sexual assault support services in Victoria which deliver therapeutic interventions to victim-survivors of recent and past sexual assaults. These are funded by the Victorian government, and services are free and confidential to all victim-survivors of recent and past sexual assault regardless of their gender and age. There are also five Aboriginal-led sexual assault pilots operating across the state. The services offered include immediate crisis care response, ongoing counselling, casework, group work, medical and other services, advocacy and a system-wide after-hours telephone crisis service. Agencies also provide community awareness, education and professional consultation services that work towards the prevention and early identification of sexual assault. Of the network of 19 support services, 11 of these also provide evidence-based specialist interventions for children and young people who display problematic sexual behaviour or sexually abusive behaviour towards others.

To continue to support the important sexual assault service delivery, the 2023–24 budget includes funding of \$3.95 million over four years to help fund additional sexual assault support services. This includes funding to continue crucial services and respond to current demand for specialist sexual assault support, including for diverse communities. There is also a further investment of \$5.5 million over four years for Aboriginal-led sexual assault support services and \$1.92 million over four years to address the increased demand for sexually abusive behaviour treatment services.

We are also investing \$500,000 in this budget to build the first Australian memorial to acknowledge victim-survivors of sexual assault, which will be located in Ballarat. The Continuous Voices survivors memorial in Ballarat is a public art project that will be built near the lake, adjacent to Plane Avenue in Victoria Park. The memorial will be designed to recognise the pain and trauma that is caused by all forms of sexual violence as well as to provide a space to support healing. We will work with the wonderful advocates of the Continuous Voices community reference group to ensure that the memorial is a reminder to all victims and survivors of sexual abuse that we see you, we hear you and we believe you.

The Andrews Labor government is making headway on this truly terrible and damaging issue with the development of the 10-year strategy to prevent and address sexual violence, abuse and harm, which is underway. I am pleased that this budget provides continued investment over the next four years.

Paul HAMER: Thanks, Minister. I was wondering if you could perhaps elaborate in terms of the sexual assault and sexual abuse assistance that we will be providing to workers in the sex industry. Obviously, that is a really important area, but it is often not one that is discussed that much.

Ros SPENCE: Thanks, Mr Hamer. We are pleased to be able to provide some much-needed support for those who have been harmed and exploited through their work in the sex industry. The budget provides \$1.5 million over four years for the continuation of specialist support for those with complex needs. This funding will be administered by Project Respect, which is a specialised support service and peer community for women and gender-diverse people with experience in the sex industry, including those who have experienced trafficking through sexual exploitation. Project Respect provides one-on-one strengths-based support to women to access essential services and delivers evidence-based workforce development training to empower community service providers so that they can support those in the sex industry as well as those who have experienced trafficking. It is clear that this investment is critical to supporting the complex needs of those who have experienced abuse or trafficking in the industry, but we know that there is still more to be done, and we are getting on with the task in front of us. This investment of \$1.5 million over four years for the continuation of specialist support for those with complex needs is really important for supporting those who have experienced sexual exploitation in the sex industry.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much, Minister. Minister and department officials, that is the end of questions for this session this morning. Thank you very much for appearing before the committee today. The committee is going to follow up on any questions taken on notice in writing, and responses are required within five working days of the committee's request.

I understand this topic may distress some viewers that are watching today. In every region victim-survivors can access support through the Orange Door. If you need help, you can call the Safe Steps Family Violence Response Centre, and you can call them on 1800 015 188. Please, if you are in immediate danger, call 000.

The committee is now going to take a very short break before beginning its consideration of the suburban development portfolio at 9:45 am. I declare this hearing adjourned.

Witnesses withdrew.