

VERIFIED VERSION

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Budget Estimates 2015–16

Melbourne — 21 May 2015

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Ms Harriet Shing

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Witnesses

Ms Fiona Richardson, Minister for the Prevention of Family Violence,

Ms Rebecca Falkingham, Deputy Secretary, Social Policy and Service Delivery Reform, and

Ms Anna Faithfull, Acting Executive Director, Women and Equality, NDIS and Royal Commission Engagement, Department of Premier and Cabinet.

The CHAIR — I declare open the public hearings for the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee inquiry into the 2015–16 budget estimates. All mobile telephones should now be turned to silent.

I would like to welcome the Minister for the Prevention of Family Violence, the Honourable Fiona Richardson, MP; Ms Rebecca Falkingham, Deputy Secretary, Social Policy and Service Delivery Reform, Department of Premier and Cabinet; and Ms Anna Faithfull, Acting Executive Director, Women and Equality, NDIS and Royal Commission Engagement. Also in the gallery today, from the Department of Health and Human Services, is Mr Scott Widmer, Director, Service Development and Design, Service Design and Implementation Group.

All evidence is taken by this committee under the provisions of the Parliamentary Committees Act, attracts parliamentary privilege and is protected from judicial review. Any comments made outside the hearing, including on social media, are not afforded such privilege. The committee does not require witnesses to be sworn, but questions must be answered fully, accurately and truthfully. Witnesses found to be giving false or misleading evidence may be in contempt of Parliament and subject to penalty.

All evidence given today is being recorded by Hansard. You will be provided with proof versions of the transcript for verification as soon as available. Verified transcripts, PowerPoint presentations and handouts will be placed on the committee's website as soon as possible.

Departmental officers may approach the table during the hearing to provide information to the witnesses if requested, by leave of myself. However, written communication to witnesses can only be provided via officers of the PAEC secretariat. Members of the public gallery cannot participate in the committee's proceedings in any way.

Members of the media are to observe the following guidelines: cameras must remain focused only on the persons speaking; operators must not pan the public gallery, the committee or witnesses; and filming and recording must cease immediately at the completion of the hearing.

I invite the witness to make a very brief opening statement of no more than 10 minutes. This will be followed by questions from the committee.

Ms RICHARDSON — Thank you, Chair, and thank you to all members of PAEC, who have given me this opportunity to speak for the first time in this Parliament about a very important issue the Victorian Parliament is concerning itself with, and that is of course the prevention of family violence. By leave of the Chair, I ask the Chair and committee members if I can somewhat deviate from the normal presentation that is given at PAEC meetings. As this is the first time we have talked about this issue, I think it is important that I broaden out some of the presentation but also perhaps give committee members an opportunity as representatives of their own communities to ask specific questions and also to give their perspective with respect to family violence. I ask leave of the Chair.

The CHAIR — Absolutely. I think both the Deputy Chair and I — and I think we speak on behalf of all members of the committee — would be very happy for this to be more of an iterative presentation with opportunities for feedback.

Ms RICHARDSON — Thank you, Chair.

Visual presentation.

Ms RICHARDSON — The Prevention of Family Violence portfolio, as I said, is a first, and I am in fact the first Minister for the Prevention of Family Violence. It was established because we recognised that we needed to address the crisis, and for too long we know that family violence has been allowed to corrode what is the most important unit within our society, which is of course the family. It was Rosie Batty who really woke up a nation and placed this harm on the agenda and at the forefront of everybody's mind. She said, quite powerfully, when she spoke after her son had been murdered, that family violence can happen to anyone, no matter how nice your house is or no matter where you live.

We have moved the portfolio into Premier and Cabinet, and we also moved the women's portfolio at the same time, because we regard these two portfolios as being very much linked, and I will talk to that a little later. I am very proud, of course, to be the first Minister for the Prevention of Family Violence, but I do not under any

circumstances underestimate the challenges that we face. Family violence is of course a whole-of-community problem, and we need a whole-of-community set of solutions if we are to tackle the harm. I am very pleased to say that we have here in the Victorian Parliament cross-party support for efforts to reduce family violence, and we know that if we do work together, if we do not divide on the politics, we will inevitably have a better outcome with respect to family violence.

We must also acknowledge that our work as parliamentarians and as a government builds on the efforts of an enormous number of community service workers, our police, our courts and the victims, of course, who have campaigned for a very long time to have this issue brought front and centre. I want to thank those people in particular because bringing family violence out of the shadows has been a very long effort indeed. I want to thank them in particular for the work they have done.

While they will acknowledge they have a long way to go, I will also just make special mention of Victoria Police, particularly their leadership going back through Christine Nixon, Simon Overland, Ken Lay and of course our current Acting Commissioner, Tim Cartwright. They have also decided to establish a world first — that is, Dean McWhirter, who is our first family violence prevention deputy commissioner. That is a very important step, and I think it will be one that will help us enormously as we try to tackle this harm.

Turning to the next slide, whichever way you look at the statistics with respect to family violence they are beyond grim. We know that it is the leading contributor to death, injury and disability. Last year, tragically, one woman a week lost her life and this year, sadly, we are tracking at two women a week losing their lives. One in three will experience violence at some stage in their lives. One in five will experience sexual assault.

I went to a community forum last night in Broadmeadows, hosted by the members for Yuroke and Broadmeadows. Everybody who spoke at the forum — it was an at-capacity event — spoke to these statistics. They were, in a sense, the human face, the human toll that these statistics represent. We heard from a victim who congratulated a police officer who had saved her life and the life of her daughter. That police officer was there on the panel last night, Sergeant Carmel Ross. That police officer went back and visited the family, once they had been successfully removed from harm, over the next 12 months, and that is the sort of care and concern that we have seen from some — in fact a great many — of our police officers. That was terrific to see last night.

Sadly, we also heard a report of an honour killing. It was in Greece. Nonetheless, it was illustrative, because he was charged with manslaughter, not with murder. Teachers were also there last night, and they spoke about the changing attitudes in young men in particular. They talked about their concerns and the need to address education in our schools. Victim after victim spoke of — —

Mr DIMOPOULOS — Sorry, Minister, I will take you up on your offer. With the change in young men, obviously it is a negative change. Did they give any more depth to that?

Ms RICHARDSON — They talked about how social media is now becoming an added vehicle for harm and how the normal barriers that are in place between us as we communicate face-to-face are not really there in social media. They were giving some examples of some quite nasty episodes and, in a sense, what attitudes were reflected in those behaviours.

Many of the victims last night spoke about how it was the first time they had walked into a police station. They spoke about how they never expected it to happen to them. They spoke about their frustration about not being believed by some of their friends and family, sadly. We know the economic toll of family violence. It is a \$3.4 billion toll. But in truth the biggest burden is borne by women and children, and they pay a terrible price as a consequence of this tragedy not being addressed. We have our Royal Commission up and underway within our first 100 days, and we see that as a priority. The reason we have done that is that our Premier has made it very plain that he considers that — and he is quite right when he says this — the system is fundamentally broken. It does not protect the vulnerable, it does not punish the guilty and more of the same policies will just mean more of the same tragedies.

I thought I would take this opportunity to talk to you about the sorts of things that we have now uncovered — in a sense, the gaps and the challenges that we have in the family violence response, how we respond in a preventive way and how we hold perpetrators to account. I will talk to those specifically before I get onto the budget, if I can. First of all, the first thing that was very apparent, even before we formally established the Royal

Commission, was the lack of measurability about the scale of the harm. We have the crime statistics. They tell us how crime is on the trend upward, but it will not tell us the full extent of the harm, because we know that this is a massively under-reported crime. When I asked departmental workers and the like to give me a complete picture — ‘We talk about it as a national crisis, but can you tell me how big a crisis it is?’ — what became very clear is that we have all sorts of data, but they are disparate and are not brought together in a cohesive way.

Secondly, what became clear in terms of the lack of measurability is that over time we cannot actually say whether the work we are doing is making a difference. We have all sorts of independent datasets, but we have programs that run over the top of them, and we cannot say for certain whether we are actually making a difference with respect to changing the harm. The other thing that we identified first up was that children can be consistently overlooked with respect to the harm of family violence. Of the 1088 murders in the past 10 years in homes across Australia, 21 per cent of them were children, and 80 per cent of those were under nine years of age. One in three are there at the time the police are called. And what we know too is that children’s brains actually change. Because they are in a developmental stage, they actually change as a consequence of the anxiety and stress that family violence inevitably brings.

But I think what disturbs me most about the effect on children is that we know that if you have experienced family violence as a child, you have an increased risk of being a perpetrator later in life. So stopping the harm, stopping the cycle, is critically important for the next generation as well.

The CHAIR — Just on that point, there is a same-sex couple — two women — who lives in our community, and they adopted two boys. I think the boys were half-brothers, and the mother was a drug addict. The children had some severe learning disorder issues. I remember when they started at our local kinder there was a huge issue caused by one of the boys, who would probably have been four. He had a propensity to grab the heads of girls and to slam their heads against the wall. It was incredibly confronting; it was very distressing, obviously, for the parents, and it was incredibly confronting for the kinder community, because you were looking at a child who was four and who was behaving in a way which was entirely inappropriate. It was very distressing for the adopted mothers, because they were trying to give these children the very best start in life yet were confronted with such an awful set of circumstances. Thankfully the boys are now a little bit older, so they are now progressing to primary school. Although they still have some issues, I think some of those very worst behavioural tendencies have been obviated; at least that would be my sense. But you just cannot fathom that that could happen.

Ms SHING — Chair, just on that point — my apologies, Minister, before you go on — given the sensitive nature of what we are talking about and that the examples are probably going to result in some quite graphic detail being the subject of the Hansard recording this afternoon, it might be worthwhile noting to anybody who is watching this by way of live stream that there may be details here that are triggering for some people, given the family violence experience and the ongoing hurt, injury and upset that can continue well after an experience with family violence has ended —

The CHAIR — Thank you, Ms Shing.

Ms SHING — and to those contributing.

Ms RICHARDSON — The other thing that became increasingly apparent was that our response is not consistent. When you intersect with services you will get a very different response, and that can have a very telling consequence with respect to outcomes. When we think about that response and making it consistent, we need to make gender inequality and poor attitudes towards women and children the driving organising principles with respect to our response, because they are the underlying causes and drivers of family violence. So in the same way that we understand that racism and racist attitudes can contribute to race-related crime and in the same way that homophobic attitudes can lead to homophobic-related crime, we need to understand and embed in our response an understanding that gender inequality and poor attitudes towards women are the main drivers to family violence.

We need to also put more efforts into prevention. Most of our efforts are around the response, and they are embedded mostly in the courts and the police systems, but we are not going to be able to respond our way out of this harm. We have to concentrate on prevention and lift our efforts with respect to preventing the harm in the first place.

Our response also needs to recognise and tailor its efforts towards high-risk groups. You are more likely to be a victim of family violence if you are a woman, but you are also more likely if you have a disability, if you are Aboriginal, if you live in rural and regional Victoria, if you are from a CALD community, if you are aged between 20 and 44, and if you are pregnant. I recently visited the women's hospital and I was told that 27 per cent of inpatients at the women's hospital for that year were currently experiencing family violence.

We must also deal with elder abuse. That is an issue that is often overlooked in terms of our response. There are not a great deal of responses for those that are experiencing harm from the children, as elders. We must also recognise that our courts are more often than not a re-traumatising experience for victims, so we need different models — not just a one-size-fits-all model with respect to our court response. But most of all we must recognise that a great many — in fact the majority — of people do not end up in court and do not end up with the police, so we need to concentrate our efforts on services that provide help for people in that category.

It is also clear that we are failing our kids, because we do not at schools provide curriculum support or information as part of the curriculum around family violence and around respectful relationships. That is an important measure that the Royal Commission will no doubt address.

As I said, this is a whole-of-community problem. It will require a whole-of-community set of solutions. That means that we will need our business community, we will need our sporting clubs, we will need every community sector agency; in fact everybody has a role to play in this space.

In terms of technology, what has become clear is that not only can we use technology to hold perpetrators to account, and there are some initiatives in that space, but we also need to employ technology with respect to communicating to the next generation. I am a bit old and haggard, but I do understand that the next generation tends to communicate in ways that I do not. So appreciating how we need to service our response to their needs and how they communicate with each other is obviously important in terms of how we deal with this harm.

We also need a better integration of services. You will see today just how many government agencies are working to try and respond to family violence. Consistently across groups we hear that we need to better integrate our responses across services. To do that, in part, the police tell us that we have to deal with the challenges around the Privacy Act, because that does provide a barrier in terms of better integration of services.

Our response often does take its eye off the perpetrator. The focus often shifts from his responsibilities and onto hers. There are of course other crimes that a perpetrator might engage in, and that is often a warning sign of other activities going on in the home. What became clear is that we do not have, in a sense, a red flag framework, an early intervention red flag framework, for perpetrators and keeping them in view consistently. We need to work with our commonwealth partners with respect to tackling family violence. They have responsibilities in this area. They also of course administer the Family Law Act, and consistently again, across all the forums that I have held, the Family Law Act clearly comes up as an issue of concern and something that we need to work with the commonwealth government to address.

I could go on of course, but finally, I will say that consistently what is raised with me as a minister is that we need more funding to support services that are already stretched. The Royal Commission has added to the demands as a consequence of the attention and focus that it brings, but services are already stretched. This is a pretty clear illustration of that, because it has a look at the prevalence of family violence and the incident rates and how they have increased. As you can see, there has been significant growth.

Ms WARD — But this is just what is reported, isn't it?

Ms RICHARDSON — That is right. It is still, as I say, a massively under-reported crime. This is just what is reported. Last year we had over 68 000 family violence incidents reported to the police, and over a seven-year period this represents a 100 per cent increase in family violence reported incidents. The intervention orders are there as well, and breaches of intervention orders have also significantly increased. As I said earlier, the crime statistics are a very good resource and a very good tool, and they have gone a very long way to communicating the harm to the public at large. Tim Cartwright has made the point that if you compare the populations in Victoria and in New Zealand, you have a similar population, and the rate of incident-reported crime in New Zealand is 100 000, so that means there is probably one in three incidents that are not being reported here in Victoria, as compared to New Zealand.

I want to talk briefly about the links between gender equality and attitudes towards women and children. Firstly, we know that this is a gendered crime. It is predominantly women who experience family violence — women and their children. Women are three times more likely to have experienced violence by a current or former partner. The drivers of family violence are gender inequality and poor gender stereotypes. I will give you some examples of some of these poor attitudes towards women. Fifty per cent of people when asked if the victim was making up a family violence incident said yes, she is, because she is trying to achieve an outcome in her family law case. In 2013 a national attitudes survey found that one in five people believe family violence can be excused if the violent person regrets it at a later date. One in five also believe there are circumstances in which women are responsible for the violence. My portfolio responsibilities as the Minister for the Prevention of Family Violence and Minister for Women are clearly intrinsically linked, so while we know that gender inequality is a primary determinant to family violence, we need to do more to communicate that to the wider community.

The Royal Commission into family violence has commenced, and it is going to conclude its community consultations on Friday. It has been running those for about a month. There was of course \$36 million allocated to the Royal Commission and \$4 million to support services that were dealing with increased demand arising from the Royal Commission. The Royal Commission will itself hold some public hearings in the middle of the year, and this will give people an opportunity, once again, to present before the Royal Commission. We have tasked the Royal Commission with the job of coming up with a practical set of recommendations, and we have also called on the Royal Commission to look at the way in which we can change attitudes towards women and children in particular and address concerns about gender inequality because we recognise that they are the drivers of family violence.

If I can just go now to the budget; the total spend for the next five years for new family violence funding is \$81.3 million. I am very pleased to say that the budget does deliver in full on the election commitments that we took to the last election, and also I am very conscious of the fact, too, and you would note, that the budget does concentrate effort in the 15–16 financial year. You will see gaps for next year only because we are gearing up for the Royal Commission's recommendations, which are due in February 2016.

Labor's election commitments are detailed here. They have been fully implemented as part of that \$81.3 million commitment, and it includes things like \$5 million for crisis accommodation and counselling services. It also includes a boost to Domestic Violence Victoria. There is also \$100 000 for foster care for pets. We know that pets are often used in family violence conflict situations, so this is actually quite an important initiative. There is also a boost to legal services — \$1.2 million for duty lawyers and \$1.6 million for legal aid. A very important initiative is the re-establishment of the death review in the Coroners Court. This is a very important initiative and one that will give us important insights with respect to family violence. There is also going to be a safety audit undertaken of the Magistrates Court, and that is to have a look at how we can reduce the court setting retraumatising women. There is also a boost to Ballarat CASA of \$500 000 over the next four years to respond to a demand on their services in the Ballarat community, and there is also \$900 000 for a trial for a duress alarm card that will also gather information on the perpetrators if they breach any prevention order.

The budget also provides, in addition to our election commitments, for a \$16 million Family Violence Fund, which has been created to respond to as yet unforeseen demand or increased demand. Contained within that \$16 million is \$2 million that we have provided for the 14–15 year and \$14 million for the 15–16 year. There is a boost for L17 recipients and for family violence access workers at L17 recipient organisations. Also \$6 million has been set aside, unallocated as yet, depending on how the Royal Commission impacts on services.

On top of the 16 million there are also additional election commitments beyond our commitments before the last election. These relate specifically to providing additional legal assistance for victims and helping those from CALD communities to address their particular and unique areas of concern. There is also \$1.9 million to family violence for Indigenous or Aboriginal people. There is also a \$3.9 million commitment for additional workers in the child protection system. There is also \$3 million for men's family violence services and \$2 million for the prevention of violence against women. As I say, these are all additional funding commitments beyond our election commitments of last year.

I will talk about the prevention programs in particular. As I said earlier, we need to do more in the prevention space, and these programs that are listed here are evidenced based and have been shown to be effective. We are, with respect to prevention programs, in a holding pattern because I feel sure that the Royal Commission will

have a great deal to say, especially given that the terms of reference have called on the Royal Commission to address this point in particular. I think this in a sense represents a reasoned and measured response with respect to prevention programs, but clearly a lot more will come once the Royal Commission has told us the direction that we need to take.

There are of course other budget initiatives that work across sectors and do help in the family violence space as well. I think you heard from Minister Foley already, and I am certain he would have spoken about his homelessness innovation action project and also the Child FIRST and family services. This is a very important program in the family violence space because it is, as I say, an early intervention program, and it is going to be expanded to improve parenting skills and support vulnerable families. As I understand it, it is all about diverting children away from the child protection system, so it is very important in the family violence space.

I also note in the budget that child protection worker numbers have been boosted by 110 workers. We know that when it comes to child protection in particular, the rates of family violence and children who are in harm is of course incredibly high. There are also other initiatives around our courts. There is a Court Integrated Services Program, which has been expanded, and this is to coordinate the approach to assessment and treatment of perpetrators and to link them directly with the services they need, like drug and alcohol services and mental health services. There is also \$12 million for a specialist family violence court program expansion. This is to expand services to headquarter courts that currently do not have family violence services. This means it will have special magistrates, special prosecutors, security officers and a family violence register at these courts.

There is the information sharing and risk monitoring pilot. This has been talked about I think in the national COAG initiatives as well. This is about sharing information on intervention orders and the like. This is a pilot program that is also being undertaken.

As I said earlier, under the \$16 million Family Violence Fund, \$2 million of that is actually going to be allocated — and most of it has — in the 2014–15 financial year. This is to support services that we know are currently experiencing an increase to their demand arising from the Royal Commission. To give you an example, Safe Steps, which is the crisis service that responds to the high-risk group of victims, reports that it has had a 30 per cent increase in calls to its service since the Royal Commission was established. They can identify the call-ins specifically relating to the Royal Commission because that is what the victims are telling them.

There is also funding for additional counselling services. I have written to the Minister for Families and Children to get further detail about the funding that will be sent to counselling services in her portfolio. Specifically too, in Minister Foley's area, Safe Steps, as I mentioned, is the crisis line that has received \$600 000, and an additional \$400 000 is being provided to other crisis accommodation and private rental brokerage programs. There are organisations like Elizabeth Hoffman House Aboriginal Women's Services in the northern region, Kara House in the eastern region, WAYSS Ltd in the southern region and Emma House Domestic Violence Services, which are going to benefit from this funding boost.

As I mentioned earlier — and I think we are going to be distributing these now — one of the things that really struck me when I was looking at the scale of the national crisis when I became the minister was just how little we know about the extent of the harm. What became clear too is that in fact no jurisdiction in the world measures or tracks performance with respect to family violence. In the same way that we have a road toll that tells us how we are performing on road safety, what became clear to me was that we needed a Family Violence Index or some sort of measure that would tell us how we are performing over time with respect to tackling family violence.

The interesting thing when you have a look at the road toll is that it has informed us for a very, very long time. It has allowed us to compare, when we introduce new measures, how they have had an effect on the road toll. The advantage of a Family Violence Index is that we know that we need change and in fact generational change. We need to know not just where we are in 12 months but where we are in 5 years, 10 years, 15 years and 20 years down the track. That is how the Family Violence Index will inform governments and inform society about how we are performing with respect to tackling the harm that is family violence.

ANROWS, which is the national research organisation for women's safety, has been commissioned to undertake this work to have a look at what datasets it should pull together to create this new world-first Family Violence Index. The sorts of things that I envision will be included in the Family Violence Index are not just the crime statistics but things like the number of women who present to emergency hospital waiting rooms, the

number of children in out-of-home care, the number of perpetrators convicted as a consequence of family violence, and the range and number of people who are supported by community-based services like drug and alcohol programs and the like.

Importantly, too, it is my view that the Family Violence Index must also contain within it some measure of gender inequality within our society and also the attitudes towards women and whether or not we are having an impact in those important spaces, because they are of course the drivers of family violence.

In summary, the budget delivers on our election commitments in full, I am very pleased to say, but it also provides an additional boost to services that are already stretched and are being stretched again as a consequence of the attention that the Royal Commission is bringing.

We are, as a government, clearly gearing up for next year's set of recommendations from the Royal Commission. It is my view that the Royal Commission will no doubt touch upon a variety of services and a variety of responses that we need to make as a government, so next year's budget is going to be far more concentrated in effort with respect to funding and the like because that is when we will be responding to the recommendations of the Royal Commission, which are due in February next year.

The CHAIR — Thank you, Minister. I will start with the first question. In the context of the 2015–16 budget and your own portfolio responsibilities, can you inform the committee as to how this budget acquits Labor's financial statements?

Ms RICHARDSON — Thank you, Chair; of course. The budget does, as I said, provide funding for each and every one of our election commitments. It does provide crisis support and transport for women and children. It does boost Domestic Violence Victoria, our peak body. It also provides \$900 000 for a trial of a duress card. There is also additional funding for pet welfare — \$100 000, that is, over four years. There is support for the Ballarat CASA, as I mentioned earlier, and counselling services will also get a boost of \$2.5 million.

Family violence duty lawyers will be funded at community legal centres with \$1.2 million, and there is also \$1 million for the Community Legal Centre Assistance Fund. The Coroners Court death review unit, as I mentioned earlier, is also being funded in the budget, and we are auditing Victorian courts as well; there is funding for that. There are funds, too, for men's behavioural change programs, another important election commitment that is being funded in this year's budget.

As I say, these were the commitments that we took to the election last year. They have been funded in full, but in government we have determined that there needs to be an additional boost to services and an additional range of funds for activities to support services that are currently stretched and are going to be stretched once again as a consequence of the Royal Commission. But, yes, Chair, I can very happily report that we have fulfilled all of our election commitments.

Mr MORRIS — Thank you for your extensive coverage — and I mean that in a genuine way, Minister — of the subject. Can I refer you to budget paper 3, page 83, and that reference is in the context of the increased reporting of family violence to Victoria Police. There is a reference in the index of the document as well. I understand it is expected to increase over the forward estimates in terms of reporting, but I am wondering whether that matches the advice that you have received that we are going to see increased reporting.

Ms RICHARDSON — Yes. The police are very keen to see an increase in the number of incidents, because that does, as your question indicates, demonstrate that people are prepared to come forward — victims are prepared to come forward — and the kinds of approaches and mechanisms that the police are putting in place to better respond to family violence are then handling those incident reports in a much better way. But as Tim Cartwright has mentioned on a number of occasions, when you compare the two populations — the same population in New Zealand and in Australia — it is 100 000 incidents in New Zealand, it is 68 000 incidents currently in Victoria, so there is a gap. We know there is already a gap with respect to those two jurisdictions. That means, for example, that one in three incidents of family violence are not being reported to the police.

Clearly we have a long way to go, and that is why we are looking to other measures to determine the extent of the harm because while the crime statistics are going up — and that is a good thing because of increased reporting — we cannot say for sure whether it is going up simply because of increased reporting or whether

violence is actually going up; the percentage of those two is unclear. So that is where the Family Violence Index will become important in the future.

Mr MORRIS — Minister — and I will phrase this carefully because it could be interpreted as having a cheap shot, and it is not intended that way at all — we had discussions when the police minister was here and others that basically the only additional police to be recruited in this term are for the Bellarine area. Obviously if reporting increases there are going to be further demands on the officers of Victoria Police who deal with that area, and who generally do an exceptionally good job, I must say. Is there any funding in your area that will assist Victoria Police with that role, or is it intended that that role be funded from existing resources?

Ms RICHARDSON — You will be pleased to note that Victoria Police is making its own submission to the Royal Commission, and no doubt its submission will address capacity concerns, which is what your question in effect goes to. I think, too, with respect to the police response, there is in a sense a variety of responses that perhaps could be employed to encourage people, for example, to engage with the police in different ways. Not everybody wants to walk through a police station and make an incident report. The police have spoken, too, about the need to perhaps engage with the school community in a more fulsome way, and that will enable different pathways for victims and different understandings in the next generation with respect to the role of the police.

I look forward to reading the submission from Victoria Police to the Royal Commission, and I look forward to the recommendations from the Royal Commission to address the concerns that the police may have about capacity to deal with the family violence incident rate.

Dr CARLING-JENKINS — I am sorry; this is a really difficult one for me. As an MP, I just really want to applaud the government's commitment to this area. I have certainly been trying to keep up with this, reading all the available documents and the media releases around this issue. I particularly want to applaud Premier Andrews's statements, which are reflected in your presentation, that he is prepared to try, and I think that is a realistic commitment to make.

As a survivor of domestic violence myself — I consider myself a survivor, not a victim — I applaud any initiatives which break silence and make it okay to share, and I hope that this commission will make a real difference in making it easier for everyone, not just women, to break the cycle that they find themselves in.

My question is quite a general one. The commission has a very limited time frame to complete its work, and what you have described to us today is a huge task, and I would not think it is unreasonable to consider that this commission could run over time. I guess I am looking for an assurance that provisions have, perhaps, been made for this and that the commission will be given adequate time to consider all of the scope that you have described. Perhaps you could make some comments on that for us.

Ms RICHARDSON — First of all, can I commend your bravery in speaking about what has occurred in your life, and can I say that it does not matter how many times I hear it — and unfortunately in my role I hear it every day — I am inevitably touched by the bravery of someone like yourself to speak out and to bring family violence out of the shadows. Can I say to you, I am sure on behalf of all of the committee, thank you for talking about your individual circumstances. It cannot be an easy thing to do.

Can I say also to anyone listening to this broadcast via the web that if you do require support, I would encourage you to contact Safe Steps, which is our crisis line. It is 1800 015188. It is a seven-day service and it has 24-hour support for victims and survivors of family violence.

With respect to your question, it is a very important question. It is of course a very large scope that we have given to the Royal Commission. The Royal Commission is an independent legal entity, and any consideration that it brings to our attention with respect to time frames will be taken into account. If it does need to extend those time frames, then I have no doubt that the Premier and the government would have a look at those and give them due consideration.

You would have noted in the terms of reference that we noted the causes of family violence. We did not ask the Royal Commission to look at those causes in any detail, because we are of the view that they are well researched and well understood. We wanted the Royal Commission instead to come up with a set of practical recommendations to bring about the kind of system reform that we so desperately need. I do want to assure you

that, as yet, we have not had a request for an extension, but if we do have a request for an extension, we would have a look at that very seriously, because we do want to see an end to the harm. We do want to fix the system that we know is broken.

Dr CARLING-JENKINS — I do not really have a supplementary question except to ask, and I appreciate you reading it out before, if you could repeat the crisis line number for anyone who might be watching?

Ms RICHARDSON — Of course. The Safe Steps number is 1800 015 188, and as I said, it is a 24-hour service.

Ms WARD — Welcome everyone. Welcome, Minister. Thank you very much. I am very glad that we have this portfolio now. As you said, it is an incredibly serious problem and one that our community, especially women and children in our community, have been living with for far too long. I also applaud the work that you are doing regarding gender equality and identifying the fact that this is the main driver behind this horrible thing.

Can I please ask you to look to budget paper 3, page 4? Listed there are a number of paragraphs on the whole-of-government approach to family violence. Can you please give us a bit more detail — you have covered a little bit — in terms of the statistics and so on with regard to the state of family violence in Victoria? Can you also advise us on how this budget will help those families who are affected by family violence?

Ms RICHARDSON — Sure. One of the things we know is that a Royal Commission on its own generates an increased call on services, and that is why we have not only invested in all of our election commitments but actually gone beyond our election commitments and, in particular, put together a \$16 million Family Violence Fund. We have provided some flexibility in that fund, and we have done that deliberately because what we know is that crisis across the state varies and impact on services varies. We want to be able to respond to that difference as it arises, and that is how the \$16 million fund will help us do that. We have also got additional provision in the budget for, for example, men's behaviour change programs, men's family violence services and the personal safety duress card, which I mentioned earlier, and we have also added \$1.3 million to reduce Aboriginal family violence. Those funds will go directly to Aboriginal services. The Royal Commission, as well, is obviously an important part of our response to tackling the harm, and there is \$36 million provided for that.

Ballarat, as I mentioned, has been in need. It is a bit of a hotspot with respect to sexual assault incidents, so additional funding has been provided there. You can see from our budget response, in addition to the Royal Commission, that we are very determined to support the services that are supporting the victims of family violence. We want victims to come forward, and we want victims to get help. We are investing in Safe Steps quite significantly — it is 600 000 already, just to provide more accommodation services for the victims of family violence. This entire budget, in a sense, is a holding pattern, waiting for the Royal Commission's recommendations, but it is also all about supporting those services that support the victims of family violence.

Our courts, as well, are an important part of the family violence response, and we know that they are stretched. I visited the Magistrates Court recently — —

Ms WARD — Thank you for organising that. It was a very informative trip; it really was.

Ms RICHARDSON — You and I both saw how much their services are stretched and the impact that that then has on victims. They do their very best; don't misunderstand me — —

Ms WARD — And I go to your point earlier about bravery. These women stand before a magistrate, not having been in that circumstance ever before in their lives, and have to talk about circumstances that they are enduring or that they have had to put up with, and the call-out for help to help them avoid that was just remarkable.

Ms RICHARDSON — Yes, and you may recall, too, we were told that the more that you can provide perpetrators with legal advice and legal assistance, the less likely they will be to breach intervention orders. We know that for the overwhelming majority of perpetrators the first time they intersect with government services it is with the court system and the police system. Understanding that system, I can tell you, just as someone who is trying to get on top of it — and I am not a lawyer — is complicated and it is difficult to get your head around. If

you are in a stressful situation, which no doubt these families are, having legal advice is critically important, and that is why we are increasing legal support for legal services provided by community legal centres and also by legal aid to make sure that we can support the courts as they undertake their efforts to reduce family violence and to tackle family violence.

Mr T. SMITH — Welcome, Minister. Obviously there is an enormous amount of bipartisan support on this very important issue, as you are aware in terms of the conversations we have had over some time. Take this question in terms of us seeking information with regards to the budget — nothing more, nothing less.

Ms RICHARDSON — Sure.

Mr T. SMITH — The coalition funded \$150 million worth of family violence initiatives during its last term. Could you advise the committee how much of that funding has been reprioritised or redirected?

Ms RICHARDSON — I am happy to inform you that the \$150 million, just to put some perspective and context around it, was announced just before the election in October last year. It was a \$150 million package for five years; it was not \$150 million just for this financial year. The majority of the funding that was allocated by the former government in that \$150 million for the 15–16 year was put into our budget. The initiatives, though, that were about advertising campaigns and the like were put forward, waiting for the recommendations of the Royal Commission. Overwhelmingly the budget does pick up on the initiatives that were for the 15–16 year as opposed to the out years, and it supports those investments with respect to family violence initiatives.

Mr T. SMITH — Minister, with regards to table 1.1 on page 5 of budget paper 3, can you advise the committee what line items you have sole responsibility for — in other words, output initiatives which you do not share with another minister?

Ms RICHARDSON — The initiatives that I have sole responsibility for are the prevention initiatives; also, of course, the Royal Commission itself; and also the Family Violence Fund — the \$16 million Family Violence Fund that I have spoken about. It is a very good question. One of the reasons we have established the first minister in this space is to try to provide a whole-of-government overview, because consistently we hear across the sector that the services need to be integrated and there needs to be more oversight with respect to who is doing what across the government agencies. In terms of your question, which is about what I am wholly and solely responsible for, it is those initiatives, but I work with other ministers to see the delivery of the other initiatives which are detailed in the budget papers.

Mr T. SMITH — Great. Thanks, Fiona.

Dr CARLING-JENKINS — Thank you, Minister. I am going to ask a less emotionally loaded question now on behalf of Ms Pennicuik, who was unable to come this afternoon as she is unwell. Her question is around the magistrates courts.

On 19 November 2014 the then Andrews opposition promised that upon forming government it would make over \$22 million of urgent funding available as part of an immediate boost for family violence support services to relieve short-term pressure during the period of the Royal Commission into Family Violence. Of that 22 million, 12 million was to go towards expanding the family violence court divisions in magistrates courts. Sue has provided the references to this as well. The Australian Law Reform Commission heard in 2010 that specialist family violence courts should be more widely established across Australia, but since then they have not been more widely established beyond the original pilots in Ballarat and Heidelberg magistrates courts.

Ms Pennicuik would like to ask the minister: can you confirm that there was indeed no money provided in this budget for the expansion of the family violence court divisions? If so, can you explain whether the Andrews government continues to support the expansion of the specialist family violence court divisions, and if so, why that expansion is not provided for in this year's budget?

Ms RICHARDSON — Thank you for your question. Just to clear things up with respect to the budget papers — and in a sense it folds very nicely into the question from Mr Smith — the specialist family violence courts program expansion is actually a funded program. It is the \$12 million that has been allocated. It was committed to as part of the PBU. It was an initiative that was detailed when the PBU report was released. As I said earlier, with respect to this initiative it is about assigning specialist magistrates and prosecutors, security

officers and a family violence register. I want to assure the member and all members of the committee that in fact we have already committed to that program \$12 million. It is being delivered in full.

Mr DIMOPOULOS — Good afternoon, Minister. Can I just also commend you, Rachel. I am proud to be on a committee with someone with that strength of character. I just wanted to ask the minister a question specifically in relation to BP3, page 5, and the Royal Commission and people giving evidence. You have talked fairly expansively about it, but specifically in relation to how the government is supporting stakeholders who are engaging with the commission, could you speak to us a bit more about that?

Ms RICHARDSON — Sure. Thank you for your question. What we have done with the Royal Commission is seek to run in parallel a series of round tables to ensure stakeholder engagement, so we have in place a round table with our peak bodies. We have a round table on prevention of family violence, a round table to address our response to family violence and a round table on perpetrator accountability. I have also established an academic round table, which has had a great many discussions obviously about the Family Violence Index. Those round tables have been very valuable as we put together our whole-of-government response to the Royal Commission.

What we know is that those who are working at the coalface delivering services are often very well placed to talk to you about the challenges and the opportunities for reform, so having these round tables has been extremely valuable to our work and our submission to the Royal Commission. We have tried to include as many people as can fit around the table in the office, in truth, to actually give as many people as possible an opportunity to inform us directly about how our Royal Commission submission should look and feel. Doing it in that way, reflecting the prevention, the response and the perpetrator accountability, is a way in fact that the sector actually talk about these issues. They divide them, and they look at them through that particular frame, so that is why we have done it in that way.

We have had quite a number of organisations through our door. I was just thinking off the top of my head that probably over 100 are engaged in these roundtable discussions. The individuals who have been involved have been incredibly helpful, and we are reflecting their views in our whole-of-government submission.

Mr DIMOPOULOS — If I can just clarify, Chair, some of those stakeholders may be, I imagine, involved directly with the Royal Commission in hearings, but they are also involved in government round tables so that they will have two goes, in a sense.

Ms RICHARDSON — Yes. We are obviously encouraging everybody to make their own submissions to the Royal Commission, but what became clear is that we needed to work in concert with stakeholders because their views are very valuable views and they are at the coalface. We know we have a broken system, so hearing directly from them about their challenges has been very, very useful for the work that we are undertaking with the Royal Commission and the submission that we are preparing for the Royal Commission.

I would just take this opportunity to remind members of Parliament who perhaps would like to make a submission to the Royal Commission on behalf of their communities and to express the unique challenges that they have in their particular constituencies, or any individuals out in the community, any stakeholder organisations, any community groups or any survivors of family violence, that the deadline for written submissions to the Royal Commission is 29 May — Friday week. I would encourage you to put pen to paper, get the work done and bring your views before the Royal Commission next week.

Mr D. O'BRIEN — Minister, on 23 February — I think you referred to this as well — the Premier announced the funding for the Royal Commission as well as \$4 million as an initial investment for support services, given that there would be an increase in demand. I am seeking clarification, I guess. I think that is referred to on page 5 of budget paper 3 under 'Family Violence Fund' — \$2 million. There was also a media release from the government this week, on Tuesday, about \$2 million. Is that 2 of the \$4 million that the Premier announced in February?

Ms RICHARDSON — Yes, it is. The \$4 million is split over the two financial years: \$2 million of it for this financial year and \$2 million for the next financial year. That \$2 million is an initiative that is being provided by the Department of Health and Human Services, with Minister Mikakos and Minister Foley, who are implementing that initiative. We do have a department of health representative here if you would like to ask about those initiatives, but what I understand has happened is that \$1 million has been allocated from Minister Foley's area for crisis response services. It is additional accommodation services, so \$600 000 for Safe Steps,

which I mentioned earlier, 400 000 for other services that provide housing accommodation, and the other \$1 million is for counselling services, and that falls under Minister Mikakos's area of responsibility. That is going to be particularly targeted towards women and children and providing support for them if they are victims of family violence. But yes, on your question with respect to the 4 million, it is over the two financial years.

Mr D. O'BRIEN — The supplementary then is why 2 million was put into the next year and, if I could ask, where both lots of 2 million are going in addition to what you have just outlined — that is, is there money available for groups to apply for, or is it to be allocated directly by government to particular organisations?

Ms RICHARDSON — With respect to the counselling services, there will be 22 additional workers provided from the funding that has been allocated for counselling services. There are 44 counselling service providers across the state. Currently the department is consulting and doing an audit of where the demand is, or where the crisis is with respect to an increase in demand. They will then allocate the funds as a consequence of that.

With respect to the housing initiative, earlier in my presentation you would have seen the \$1 million that is being directed to a range of housing providers and also services that provide crisis accommodation. I understand that the department is working with services for the next financial year's allocation of funding to provide a targeted response out of the \$16 million Family Violence Fund.

Mr D. O'BRIEN — Just to clarify, if I may, Chair?

The CHAIR — Yes.

Mr D. O'BRIEN — Has the \$2 million for 14–15 gone?

Ms RICHARDSON — Yes.

Mr D. O'BRIEN — And the 2 million for next year is what you are talking about now?

Ms RICHARDSON — Yes.

Mr D. O'BRIEN — It is still to be allocated across various different things?

Ms RICHARDSON — Yes. The \$16 million Family Violence Fund has been designed to try to respond to as yet unmet demand, or unforeseen demand. That is why the departments are working with services and with all sorts of agencies to try to track where the funds are best allocated.

Ms SHING — Minister, at the outset I would like to endorse the views that have been expressed around the table this afternoon that this is very difficult and confronting subject matter which requires an enormous degree of stamina to address in a thorough, consistent and forensic way, while looking for the best policy and resource-based outcomes that we can possibly get to tackle what has been variously described as a scourge and an epidemic that I cannot imagine has not touched people directly or indirectly throughout the state.

In that sense I would like to refer you to budget paper 3, page 5, where the total output initiatives outline the \$81.3 million over five years to address family violence. To pick up on the points that have been raised from the other side of the table, I would like to ask how this budget has been designed in relation to not just the areas over which you have sole remit but the entirety of the family violence portfolio to prepare for the recommendations from the Royal Commission — not obviously anticipating the outcomes, but to look to what recommendations may flow from that in February 2016 — and what preparatory work is being done to make allocations which are prudent, which are appropriately directed and which best address this social and community challenge in a way that will reduce its scope to remain as intergenerational as it is.

Within your answer if you could also look at the way in which regional initiatives may form part of that. I know that in my and Mr O'Brien's area this is a very particular social issue which has far-reaching consequences on community participation, involvement and connectedness for, overwhelmingly, women in regional Victoria. If that could be built into any answer and information that you provide to the committee, I would also be grateful.

Ms RICHARDSON — Thank you very much for the question. I know that the member represents a regional constituency, so I well understand why you are concerned about the impact of family violence in

regional areas and why it is important to respond to those communities. I am going to concentrate first on regional and rural communities because you have raised a very critical point. What we know is that the incident rates for rural and regional communities are very much higher. It runs at about 1 in every 1500 here in Melbourne and 1 in every 1000 outside Melbourne, so the rates in rural and regional communities are incredibly high when compared to Melbourne. When we are having a look at the services that are being provided we are very conscious of the need to put funding into Ballarat, for example, and to other services to meet demand pressures in rural and regional communities. But beyond that, in addition to the election commitments that we made, there are a variety of other initiatives that will also support communities in rural and regional Victoria.

For example, in Minister Mikakos's area we have a response for Aboriginal people initiative, which is a 600 000 response for families and children. This will specifically help Aboriginal people who are experiencing or recovering from family violence, and it will be provided directly to Aboriginal-controlled community services organisations. It does provide a mix of intensive case management based on individual need and less intensive case management support for the individual, as required.

There is also, in addition, the funding for Ballarat, as I mentioned, and that is a \$300 000 commitment. Men's family violence services fall into three categories. They fall into voluntary programs that perpetrators may wish to take up, they fall into court-ordered programs and they also fall into the corrections facilities and the programs that are offered there. There is \$1 million that Minister Mikakos is putting into those voluntary programs that are all about supporting men who want, of their own volition, to address their concerning behaviours, which I think is a very important initiative.

Also, if I could just touch on child protection, there is \$3.9 million for child protection and flexible responses, and this is about not only responding but making sure that we can keep children safe first and foremost but also, where appropriate and where they are safe, keep children away from child protection services if at all possible. The other areas where there is additional funding are in the culturally and linguistically diverse family violence response. As I said earlier, it is important that we are consistent in how we tackle family violence but that we do not have a one-size-fits-all response to our consistent objective, which is of course tackling family violence. This \$2 million initiative — \$1 million for this financial year; \$1 million for the next — is all about responding to the specific needs of CALD women and children who are experiencing family violence. It is something that has come up repeatedly in the round table discussions that we have been having, that they are a high-risk group, a high-risk community, and that a great many of our services cannot respond to their needs. That places them at greater risk. I think that is another very important initiative worth highlighting from the family violence package that the budget has put together.

There is also \$2 million for prisons — for men's behaviour change programs within the correctional facility. This is again an additional commitment beyond our election commitments, but it is an important step because we know that if we do not actually change men's behaviour — and we know they are a captive audience in our prison system, so why not take the opportunity to actually tackle the harm that family violence causes in those facilities to make sure that we can make, hopefully, a lasting difference to perpetrators' behaviour.

Ms SHING — Just before you go on, Minister, again, given the subject matter and that we have talked about regional communities and people who may be looking for advice or assistance and the family violence response line, can you confirm that the same number applies for regional Victorians who may wish to access that support and assistance?

Ms RICHARDSON — Yes, I can.

Ms SHING — Yes, so that is 1800 015 188. If anyone is in danger, please call 000, I think was the message that you gave earlier. Just to confirm that that is a statewide initiative.

Ms RICHARDSON — Yes, it is statewide.

Mr MORRIS — Minister, if I can just follow up on Mr O'Brien's earlier question, particularly around the 2 million that was the subject of a media release on Tuesday this week, the day before yesterday — it seems like a much further time back than just a couple of days. Having heard your response there, what I am getting — and certainly it is anecdotal evidence, not hard facts. I am certainly hearing anecdotal evidence that demand for some services is up by 100–150 per cent. While in itself that is certainly not a good thing — not a good thing at all — it is a good thing in that people are seeking assistance. I am just wondering what sort of financial support

there is for those services that are now experiencing that spike as a result of the conversation we are having publicly about this.

Ms RICHARDSON — When I spoke about the \$16 million Family Violence Fund, \$6 million of that is as yet unallocated, and that is all about giving the departments the opportunity to speak to services, to audit where the impact on demand is actually taking place, and then they can provide funds to services that are in need, because we know there is a variance when it comes to demand pressures across the system. We have been very determined to ensure that there is an unallocated amount, in a sense, to give that kind of flexibility so that when we hear from our round table discussions, for example, that particular services are under particular stress, we have the capacity to respond to that stress.

With respect to the \$2 million that has already been allocated for this financial year, \$1 million of that was for crisis support for women and children, so that is where the money — the \$600 000 — has gone, to Safe Steps. An additional 400 000 has been provided to other family violence services for the crisis support, accommodation and rental brokerage programs that they provide. That is organisations like Elizabeth Hoffman House, which I spoke about earlier, Kara House and the like.

I would encourage all members of Parliament, where they have examples of stresses on the system, if I can put it that way, to get in contact with me as soon as possible so that we can address those demand pressures through the \$16 million Family Violence Fund. The departments are doing their own work to keep track of pressures on the system, but there is flexibility built within the Family Violence Fund to address particular stresses across the system, and I would appreciate communication from you about any particular concerns that you may have or may have come to you via your constituency work.

Mr MORRIS — By way of a very brief supplementary, is that 6 million able to be accessed now, from 1 July or whatever?

Ms RICHARDSON — That 6 million is from 15–16. The \$2 million that is currently available is for housing and for counselling. If you have counselling services that are currently under pressure or under strain, let me know because that is the audit that the department is currently undertaking, and those funds are available now to assist those services — the L17 group of service providers, for example.

Ms WARD — I was very happy to see the creation of the Family Violence Index. It has the potential to be something incredibly useful for our community. I have to say that of my Facebook followers a great majority of them also think it is an excellent initiative. It is important, I think, that we have many tools available to us to understand the depth of the violence against women, children and families, and I applaud organisations like Destroy the Joint that continue to keep us updated and reminded of how many women do die at the hands of former or current partners throughout the year. You mentioned the Family Violence Index in your presentation, and it also falls under budget paper 3, page 4. Can you explain to us more about the Family Violence Index, how it will improve the way we respond to and prevent violence, and what sorts of measures can be included?

Ms RICHARDSON — Family violence is quite rightly described as a national crisis or a national emergency. When I became the first minister to tackle family violence, what became increasingly obvious to me was that even though we describe it in those terms we cannot actually describe the full extent of the harm. Crime statistics are very good at telling us about crime and the impact on the police and perhaps even on our courts, but they of course do not tell us about how our hospitals are impacted, how our schools are impacted and how our children's services are impacted.

What became clear to me when I first sat down with government bureaucrats was that, if we were to tackle this harm, we first and foremost needed to know the scale of the problem. The old saying 'You cannot manage what you do not measure' springs to mind. Beyond that, because we know that family violence is going to take some time to tackle, we are going to need generational change. I thought that what was clearly missing was some sort of indicator that would inform us about how we are performing. At the minute we have a range of programs, but in truth the government and the sector cannot tell you the difference they are making to the overall harm. They can tell you the difference they are making in perhaps one or two ways or in terms of small indicators, but they cannot tell you whether or not the programs we are putting in place are actually working.

The Family Violence Index is modelled on other indexes that you would be familiar with — for example, the consumer price index, which takes a basket of goods and then gives us a measure of the cost of living. The

housing affordability index is another measure which gives us a sense of the kinds of programs we need to perhaps put in place to deal with increased costs of housing. There is also a gender inequality index, which the United Nations uses. There are other examples of indexes that we all use in our day-to-day lives and governments in particular use to inform them about what policies they should put in place.

When I went to the women's hospital in particular and was told of the rates of pregnant women who were experiencing family violence — 27 per cent who were currently experiencing family violence — it just confirmed in my mind how important it was to actually have some way to measure the full extent of the harm. The crime statistics will tell us that rates are on the rise, but they cannot tell us, for example, whether that is because of increased reporting or increased violence and to what degree both of those components have an impact on the rates of crime.

That is why the Premier and our government have put together a world first: the Family Violence Index. It will pull together all of the datasets that we possibly have at our disposal here in Victoria to try to come up with a baseline of where we are right now with respect to the harm that is being caused by family violence. Then, as we implement new measures and new policies and when the Royal Commission's recommendations come out next year and have their effect, we will be able to measure whether or not those recommendations and whether the programs that we are putting in place are actually making a difference and achieving our objective, which is ending the harm that is caused by family violence.

As the first Minister for the Prevention of Family Violence, you look to what tools you have in place, and clearly having a mechanism to inform me and the government over the next three years and beyond whether or not we are meeting our objective is a critically important tool and a piece of the puzzle, if you like, that was missing. The reason that we have decided to proceed with the Family Violence Index now and not wait for the Royal Commission is because we want the Family Violence Index to be in place as soon as the Royal Commission recommendations are released. Most importantly, too, we have a national research organisation. Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety is there. It is there for our use to put in place any research efforts that we want to help us in tackling the harm that is family violence. I met with ANROWS and they were very keen to undertake the research that we wanted to have done, and I am hopeful that the index will be in place by the time of the Royal Commission's recommendations so we can start measuring performance.

Can I say, too, with respect to the round tables that we have been having, we have spoken about the index at those round tables and community sector and stakeholder groups have been very supportive of the idea. We have been asking them as well about what datasets they believe should be included in the index, so what would be useful to them as they undertake their work in tackling family violence. We have a tremendous amount of data out there. What we do not do is bring it together into one unique set. It is my hope, too, that if we successfully do this here in Victoria perhaps other jurisdictions around Australia, perhaps other jurisdictions around the world, might take up this initiative in order that it can be a very powerful tool for them, as I am hoping it will be for us, in tackling family violence.

Mr D. O'BRIEN — Minister, my question I guess follows up a little bit on Mr Morris's previous one. You mentioned the Ballarat Centre Against Sexual Assault had received \$4 million in the budget. I was wondering about the other CASAs that I am sure you are aware of around the state — West Heidelberg, Melbourne, Ringwood East, Parkville East, Bentleigh, Footscray, Sebastopol, Geelong West, Morwell, Shepparton, Bendigo, Mildura, Warrnambool and Wangaratta — whether there is any funding available for those CASAs to access?

Ms RICHARDSON — Thank you very much for your question. Yes, it is certainly the case that we have provided additional funding for the Ballarat centre, the CASA there. But as I say, the \$16 million Family Violence Fund does have capacity to deliver additional service support for agencies that may be experiencing an increase in demand. We are currently auditing those services, we are speaking at round table discussions about the kind of impact that the Royal Commission may be having on their services and, as I say, the \$16 million Family Violence Fund does provide us with some capacity to respond to those service demand pressures. So within your constituency or within others, if there are concerns about pressures on the system, I would encourage those agencies to contact me or obviously at our round tables to talk about the kinds of pressures that they are under and how we may be able to alleviate those pressures that they are experiencing.

Dr CARLING-JENKINS — Thank you, Minister. I have empathy for all people who suffer family violence, as I am sure you do as well. This empathy extends to men who experience family violence. I note in budget paper 3 at page 5 there is an allocation to expand men's family violence services to provide additional telephone counselling and intake services.

While I will acknowledge that women are the most vulnerable group, there are many hidden statistics, which you referred to in your presentation. I have had many men share their stories and their reluctance to report and the stigma associated with reporting. I wonder if you could detail for the committee what expanded intake services are available to men who experience family violence and perhaps what work is being done to address this in this space.

Ms RICHARDSON — Thank you very much for your question. The facts are, as you have indicated, that women — and children — are predominantly the victims of family violence. What we know with respect to the differences between men's experience of family violence and women's experience is that the degree of harm for women and children is more often than not very much greater than the degree of harm that male victims of family violence experience. Having said that, though, any episode of family violence is something that we are most concerned about.

Dr CARLING-JENKINS — Absolutely. It is just unacceptable in any form.

Ms RICHARDSON — Unacceptable. What we know, too, though, from women who perhaps commit violence is that it is often in self-defence. There are incidents of harm being inflicted upon men, and when you look at the full picture, the full story, you find that family violence has peppered the relationship and the family home.

So the support for funding that is here is predominantly for men who want to change their behaviour and their approach in the home, also for court-ordered programs for men who have court orders arising from their behaviour and also for correctional facilities as well. That is the investment that has been made here. There are services that are available for men, but they have not been prioritised as part of this funding. Having said that, though, if there is a need, in a sense, to increase the capacity that is there for men services, then I would certainly like to hear it, but we know that there is a very distinct difference between men's and women's experience of violence. That is why the budget reflects those concerns and perhaps not the concerns that you have raised today.

Ms SHING — Further to the comments that have been made in both the presentation and in the course of the asking of and responding to substantive and supplementary questions, I note that there is a gendered approach to addressing the issue of family violence and that that approach is considered to be absolutely appropriate and well directed in the context of national and international research and the data around how and why offences against people occur in the family violence setting. I would like to perhaps invite you to explain further to the committee the way in which family violence in an LGBTI setting will be addressed as part of the government's response to this particular issue, noting that in and of itself those relationships may well depart from the generalised understanding of the way in which family violence occurs and how it is that, through the budget and the explanations in the budget and what has preceded it as far as policy priorities are concerned, these specific issues as they are faced by the LGBTI community will be addressed in the context of also another very serious health, wellbeing and community safety issue.

Ms RICHARDSON — Thank you for your question. On the weekend, when we released the Family Violence Index, Tim Cartwright, our acting police commissioner, spoke about the under-reporting in the LGBTI community. When I spoke about the need for a consistent response but not a one-size-fits-all response, that is to try to not only deal with differences in rural and regional versus Melbourne communities, CALD communities and Aboriginal communities but also recognising that the LGBTI community has a different set of needs and requirements from services.

You may have noted in the terms of reference for the Royal Commission a specific reference to high-risk groups and a call on the Royal Commission to address those groups. The LGBTI community was included in the list of communities that we have particular concerns about because the service response does not necessarily reflect their individual needs.

Ms SHING — That inclusion has been welcomed by various representatives of the LGBTI community absolutely in terms of addressing this issue.

Ms RICHARDSON — I am very pleased to hear that, because we actually met with a range of stakeholders before we finalised the terms of reference, and we spoke to representatives right across the sector and also across these high-risk communities. They said the same thing; they were very pleased to see that their particular needs and requirements were reflected in the terms of reference and that the Royal Commission would turn its attention to their particular needs and requirements.

A one-size-fits-all model can overlook the needs of particular communities. It can turn us blind to perpetrators' behaviour. It can also leave us blind with respect to children and their particular needs. High-risk communities are most certainly a particular concern of the government and will be a particular concern of the Royal Commission. I am looking forward to seeing the recommendations that the Royal Commission releases next year dealing with not just the LGBTI community, but all of the high-risk communities that have those unique and special sets of circumstances and needs. If we are to tackle family violence, the truth is that we need a range of tools at our disposal. As I say, a one-size-fits-all model is just simply not going to do it.

The CHAIR — The talented Mr Smith.

Mr T. SMITH — Thank you, Chair.

Ms SHING — The talented Mr Smith! It is getting late in the day, Chair, obviously.

Mr T. SMITH — Bless you, Chair.

Ms SHING — You have taken leave of your senses.

Ms WARD — I thought the love was just for Mr O'Brien.

Ms SHING — Mr Smith has at last endorsed something that the Chair has said today.

Mr T. SMITH — He is a good man, our Chair.

The CHAIR — I have grown very fond of all of you over the last two weeks.

Ms WARD — He is spreading the love.

Mr T. SMITH — It has been a long week! Minister, budget paper 3, page 7, states that the Victorian systemic review of family violence deaths will be re-established within the Coroners Court death review unit. Just for purposes of clarification, I am not entirely convinced it was actually abolished. When was it abolished?

Ms RICHARDSON — The audit, or the review, that is undertaken by the Coroners Court was actually put in place some time ago, but funding for that review was cut by the previous government, and that had an impact on the audit process. That is why we have decided to reinstate the review. I do not want to get political.

Mr T. SMITH — No, neither do I. That is why I said, 'Just for purposes of clarification'.

Ms RICHARDSON — Yes. It was something that was of concern because the sorts of information you get from those tragic incidents and circumstances do inform government response. It was made very clear to us that the reinstatement of those reviews would be an important tool — an important part of our government response to family violence.

Mr T. SMITH — So it was wound up towards the end of last year? Is there a date? Was it last year?

Ms WARD — Is that your supplementary?

Mr T. SMITH — Yes. Last financial year, was it?

Mr DIMOPOULOS — It was an internal review by the Coroners Court.

Ms RICHARDSON — Okay. In terms of the funding for the Coroners Court review, it is reprioritised. You know that famous phrase around funding: it was never properly funded. So providing the funding in this way will ensure a dedicated stream, if you like, and will make it harder to reprioritise funding.

Dr CARLING-JENKINS — Thank you, Minister. I am going to ask another question on behalf of Ms Pennicuik, who is unable to make it this afternoon. The question refers to budget paper 3, pages 102 to 103, regarding courts and the line item on videoconferencing. The Victorian budget allocates \$8.1 million over 2015–16 to upgrading and expanding the videoconferencing network at the Victorian magistrates courts. The explanatory notes say rightly:

Videoconferencing separates victims from the accused while giving evidence, which is particularly important in cases of family violence.

Likewise the government's media release on 1 May 2015 — I have the full details of that media release here if anyone wants to see that — also emphasises that family violence victims are among the beneficiaries of the videoconferencing upgrade. Can the minister confirm what proportion of the additional conferencing facilities are likely to be used in family violence matters as distinct from matters involving prisoners or remandees, who will be able to appear in court via video link, or other matters not specifically involving family violence?

Ms RICHARDSON — First up can I inform the committee that this is an Attorney-General's initiative. Having said that, though, it is a very important initiative that will no doubt support victims of family violence. As I said earlier, we know that the court experience is often a retraumatising experience, and you would well know and understand, sadly, that being within the vicinity of your abuser is undoubtedly going to have a stressful impact and will then undoubtedly have an impact on your ability to provide evidence, to tell the story and to look for help and the kind of redress that you need. The reason you are at court is obviously to get help.

That is why these kinds of videoconferencing initiatives are critically important in providing safe environments for family violence victims to provide evidence and to not have to confront their abuser. Can I say with respect to sexual assault, where it has been used quite extensively, it is something that we will very much appreciate in the family violence space. I think that with the understandings around family violence, the impact that it has is being understood, but it is not fully understood. So with the adversarial court system, which is of course designed to hear from both parties, if I can put it that way, it is clear to us that we need to have technologies in place that will limit the retraumatisation of the two parties coming before the court and making their case.

I went recently to a review that was being undertaken by the Psychiatrists Guild, and they talked about the way in which the brain changes, for children in particular but even for victims, and how you then respond to future stress in your life. They talked about how victims often, when they are in court, turn into blithering, unresponsive, traumatised in truth witnesses and they are very keen to see these kinds of technologies put in place so that we do not retraumatise but so that the victim can actually put her case in a non-stressful environment. In all of the incidents with respect to family violence, I think technologies will become a very important part of our court response but other government response initiatives as well.

The CHAIR — Dr Carling-Jenkins, on a supplementary question.

Dr CARLING-JENKINS — Thank you, Chair. Ms Pennicuik did not supply a supplementary question to that one.

Ms SHING — Thank you, Minister. We have talked at length about the consumers or recipients of service delivery and programs, both currently and in terms of what the Royal Commission and other budget initiatives are designed to achieve and to improve, both systemically and on a more granular basis. I would like to take you to budget paper 3, page 5, where we have been for the afternoon, and I would like ask you to identify any risks to service delivery that might be included within that page of line items as a consequence of the announcement of the federal budget and what that means for funding.

Ms RICHARDSON — An effective response to family violence is clearly going to require cooperation across jurisdictions, with the federal government and with the state government. There is a national plan that was implemented by the former Labor government and is also being implemented by the Abbott federal government. There have been discussions at COAG about the implementation of components of that plan. But one of the things that we are concerned about is that in working in partnership with the federal government we see the same support for services that we would like to see in Victoria.

In particular there have been concerns raised at our round tables about cuts to legal aid and the like. I think that the federal government is rightly concerned about this issue. It has established an advisory panel with Ken Lay and Rosie Batty, for example. I look forward to working with our federal counterparts to ensure that we talk about national plans and talk about the sorts of steps we need to put in place to tackle family violence but that we do a little more than just talk and also support services, in particular legal services that have previously endured some cuts to their service provision capacity.

I think that this is a tremendous and unique opportunity that we have now, not just in Victoria but across Australia. Rosie Batty becoming the Australian of the Year has captured the nation's attention on this issue. As you know, it has been an issue that for too long has sat in the shadows, so her bravery and her courage were a turning point. In time we will all be able to look back on that as a critical turning point with respect to how nationally we are thinking about this issue.

Can I say too, though, that consistently what comes up in our roundtable discussions and with victims like Rosie Batty and with the community sector are concerns about family law in particular. It is something that I think the federal government will inevitably have to address, and I think it is something that the Royal Commission will no doubt turn its attention to as well, because we would definitely not like to draw the conclusion — and I am not sure that we can, but it certainly has been put to me — that the Family Law Act and the way that is being implemented actually causes harm. It increases the burden upon families who are experiencing family violence. So if there are mechanisms or ways that we can address those concerns through amendments through the Family Law Act, I know for certain that victims groups would be very appreciative of that.

I know too that the federal and state — in a sense — cooperation will be illustrative in those sorts of moves, because I think our Royal Commission will have something to say about it, and they will be important changes that need to be made. But, along the way through, services are in need of more funding, not less. The commonwealth government does have some responsibility in this area. We want to be working shoulder to shoulder with the federal government to make sure that services are provided for. There were some cuts that were made previously that have not yet been restored, so we are keen to work with the federal government to do just that.

Mr MORRIS — Minister, the all-purpose budget paper reference — BP3, page 5 — but obviously a much more general question: can you outline to the committee which local government areas have the highest increase in the rate of family violence over the last 12 months?

Ms RICHARDSON — Sadly, what I can tell you is that all of the LGAs — local government areas — with the highest incidence of family violence are actually outside Melbourne. So the rates are 1 in 1500 here in Melbourne and 1 in 1000 in rural and regional Victoria. That is because of the high incidence of family violence in local government areas in places like Gippsland, for example. Campaspe is another area that has the highest incident rate. In fact it had 4285 reports to the police per 100 000 people, and it sadly has the highest rate. To give you some perspective on that figure, there were 1526 reports across the whole of rural and regional Victoria, and Campaspe comes in at 4285, to give you a sense of the scale of the harm in that community.

Mr MORRIS — Just on that point, is that information able to be provided to the committee — the more detailed information on the highest 20 or something like that?

Ms RICHARDSON — Yes, it will be given to the Chair, I presume.

The CHAIR — Take it on notice, and we will follow it up.

Mr MORRIS — Yes, sorry; I should have said that. I guess the supplementary, to the extent that you are able to respond, is — and I hope the response is intuitive: is the reporting rate matched by the allocation of resources? Where there is a spike, are resources moved — obviously you may have a service in one local government area and a problem next door, but approximately?

Ms RICHARDSON — No, it is a good question. The capacity in the \$16 million Family Violence Fund is to deal with anomalies, if you like, across the system. Where there is increased demand and increased need, we want to be able to draw from that fund to respond to the services that are under pressure. Currently, as you would appreciate, service provision does run on demand pressures. There are communities that obviously have more services than others, and that is why we have put the Family Violence Fund in place — to be able to audit

and keep a track on where those pressures are so that we can fund them accordingly. So there will be differences with respect to communities and the support that they receive, and we are acutely aware of the difference between metro Melbourne and rural and regional Victoria, and the impact on services.

Can I say too with respect to rural and regional Victoria, often the impact and the harm that is experienced in these communities is all the greater because of the lack of services first-up, but also the isolation that some of these smaller towns and communities have. The local policeman plays on the footy team with the abuser, and that can make it harder for victims to come forward. Added to that you have got a lack of services across isolated communities in particular. So we are acutely aware of the differences between rural and regional communities and those within metropolitan Melbourne, and that flexibility that we have in the Family Violence Fund has been specifically designed to address those anomalies, keeping in mind that we appreciate that difference between metro Melbourne and rural and regional Victoria.

Ms WARD — Minister, you have spoken at length regarding the Royal Commission and the terms of reference, which provide practical recommendations for reform. The terms of reference do not, however, cover the reasons for or causes of family violence. Can you please explain to the committee why this is so?

Ms RICHARDSON — What we know is that the drivers of family violence are gender inequality and poor community attitudes towards women and children. In the same way that racist attitudes drive race-related crime, we know that gender inequality and poor gender stereotypes also are the drivers of family violence. This has actually been very well researched around the world and here in Australia. It is not something that needs to be revisited; it is more something that needs to be understood across the community. We did not call on the Royal Commission to reinvestigate this because our view and the view of academics around the world is that this is well established. Countries, for example, that have better rates of gender equality and better attitudes towards women and children also enjoy lower rates of family violence. This is something that has been, again, well established across the academic world.

We have instead called on the Royal Commission to take into consideration those drivers, clearly, but not to reinvestigate them. Instead we have asked it to look at the system from the ground up and come up with a set of practical recommendations that we can then look to implement. I have no doubt that some of those recommendations will be about tackling gender inequality and addressing those poor attitudes towards women and children.

I think the Royal Commission, as we mentioned earlier, has a very tight time frame, and we do not need it to be relitigating matters that have already been well established. That link between gender inequality and poor attitudes towards women has been well and truly established. As I say, we just need it now to be better understood across the community.

The CHAIR — We will now move on to the women's portfolio.

Witnesses withdrew.