

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

2021–22 Budget Estimates

Melbourne—Friday, 18 June 2021

MEMBERS

Ms Lizzie Blandthorn—Chair

Mr Richard Riordan—Deputy Chair

Mr Sam Hibbins

Mr David Limbrick

Mr Gary Maas

Mr James Newbury

Mr Danny O’Brien

Ms Pauline Richards

Mr Tim Richardson

Ms Nina Taylor

WITNESSES

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

Mr Ben Rimmer, Acting Secretary,

Ms Eleri Butler, Chief Executive Officer, Family Safety Victoria,

Ms Brigid Monagle, Deputy Secretary, Fairer Victoria, and

Mr Andrew Minack, Deputy Secretary, Corporate and Delivery Services, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing.

The CHAIR: Welcome back, Minister. We reopen this hearing of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, this time for the consideration of your family violence portfolio. We invite you again to make a brief opening statement of 5 minutes, and this will be followed by questions from the committee. Thank you.

Ms WILLIAMS: Thank you, Chair. And thank you all again for your work.

Before I begin, please let me acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we are gathered and pay my respects to their elders past, present and emerging and any other elders who may be here with us today.

Brigid Monagle is going to do the clicking for me for this presentation, so thank you, Brigid.

Family violence is and remains a leading risk to the health, safety and wellbeing of women in our state and indeed our nation. One in three Australian women have experienced physical violence since the age of 15, 10 Australian women are hospitalised every day for injuries resulting from assault by a partner, family violence remains the leading contributor to death, disability and illness for women aged 15 to 45 and Victoria Police respond to an incident of family violence every 6 minutes.

In 2015 the Andrews government said, 'Enough'. We initiated a world-first royal commission into family violence, and when the commission handed down its 227 recommendations we committed to implementing every single one. We have backed in our commitment with more than \$3.5 billion of investment and have set ourselves an ambitious 10-year plan to rebuild the family violence system. Our total investment in family violence reform is more than all of the other Australian states combined and still well ahead of the commonwealth.

Five years in we have acquitted 167 recommendations from the royal commission, with the remaining 60 well underway. We have rolled out eight support and safety hubs—now known as the Orange Door network—with primary sites in Ballarat, Bendigo, Frankston, Geelong, Heidelberg, Mildura, Morwell and Shepparton, with the remaining to be operational by the end of next year.

We have continued to roll out information-sharing reforms so information can be shared among professionals—whether that be in justice, police, courts, family violence or child protection services and all of those areas—to get a better holistic assessment of perpetrator risk. We have continued to implement critical justice reforms to ensure that victims are seen and heard and perpetrators are held to account.

The royal commission told us unequivocally that family violence is a gendered issue. Seventy-five per cent of victims of family violence are women and 95 per cent of victims, both male and female, will experience violence from a male partner. That is why in this budget we are investing a further \$521.6 million to progress gender equality and end family violence, because we cannot do one without the other. Ending family violence means addressing the structural inequalities that leave women worse off on every measure. It means addressing the attitudes and behaviours that lead to violence, and it means providing a responsive, inclusive and effective response system that works to break the cycle of violence.

This reform is a whole-of-government effort. Of the \$522 million figure, \$354 million is dedicated directly towards preventing and responding to family violence. This includes \$94 million of immediate service delivery,

\$110 million of system enablers and an additional \$2.3 million in primary prevention efforts, building on the \$22.05 million already allocated in 2021–22.

I will now take you through some more detail about each of those initiatives. The budget includes \$94 million to improve responses for victim-survivors of family violence and sexual assault, including \$48.6 million to support victim-survivors of family violence and sexual assault, as I have outlined; \$44.1 million for responses for children and young people impacted by family violence and sexual assault, including adolescents who use family violence, and in providing specialist therapeutic interventions for children and young people; and \$1.3 million for a pets and refuges program to support victim-survivors who need assistance with the care of pets to safely leave violent situations, and we do this because we know that can be a barrier to many people leaving a violent relationship.

The budget also includes \$18.2 million to hold perpetrators to account. This builds on our record investment in perpetrator accountability to deliver a system of perpetrator interventions, including men's behaviour change programs, post-program follow-up, case management, perpetrator brokerage funds to keep victim-survivors safe and culturally safe responses for Aboriginal people using violence.

We know that in order to embed the family violence reform we must build strong systems and structures to underpin it, structures to enable agencies to share information and manage risk and structures to ensure we have a supported specialist family violence workforce. This budget includes \$110 million to continue the transformation of the system enablers, including for continued implementation of the family violence multi-agency risk assessment and management framework, or MARAM as we know it, and funding to support the game-changing central information point, or CIP as we often refer to it. We are also building the family violence workforce pipeline with a dedicated family violence graduate-support program to support family violence agencies to take on and upskill new graduates.

Finally, this budget invests an additional \$2.3 million in primary prevention.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. Deputy Chair.

Mr RIORDAN: Thank you, Chair. Good morning, Minister.

Ms WILLIAMS: Good morning. How are you?

Mr RIORDAN: I would like to just move my questions to the royal commission follow-up, please.

Ms WILLIAMS: Sure.

Mr RIORDAN: Last year fewer family violence victims received a refuge response, according to budget paper 3 on page 207. The 'Number of clients assisted to address and prevent homelessness due to family violence' was lower and the average wait time for family violence victims to access priority public housing has blown out to almost 11 months. Recommendation 14 of the Royal Commission into Family Violence is to 'Increase the number and range of crisis and emergency accommodation'. How did the delay in implementing this recommendation impact on the terrible response for women and children seeking refuge from violence last year in a particularly stressful year?

Ms WILLIAMS: Thank you for your question. Bear with me.

Mr RIORDAN: So just for your reference there, Minister. You had a target of 54 000. It was only 42 800 nights of refuge in a year where it is very well known these things were on an increase.

Ms WILLIAMS: Thank you for your question, Mr Riordan. In terms of summarising your concern around the importance of housing for victims of family violence, which I think is effectively where your questions go to—

Mr RIORDAN: Well, my question specifically relates to the dramatic shortfall last year in providing support in that area.

Ms WILLIAMS: Look, housing is absolutely a challenge for family violence victims. It is very much at the centre of why we made the commitment last year for the \$5.3 billion for social housing that was spearheaded

by my colleague Richard Wynne. Refuges are another component of the crisis accommodation that we provide but need to be seen in terms of a broader package of support options. So when you refer to outcomes or access to refuge accommodation, it is also worth noting that that is one of a suite of initiatives that we provide in terms of providing housing options for people. So you have got refuges on one hand—and on the back of the royal commission we have committed to the construction of 19 core and cluster refuges, which we have now expanded to 20 following an announcement in this budget of \$9.1 million to go to an additional refuge in Wimmera South West region, an Aboriginal refuge—but we also do flexible support packages and brokerage funding as well, which may not be showing up in this, as you have framed the question, because that goes to providing accommodation options and funding accommodation-related expenditure as well.

Mr RIORDAN: So when you have a budget for 54 000 nights, I think it is, and you have only done 42 000, does that mean there was a whole heap of accommodation sitting idle or you budgeted for accommodation you did not have?

Ms WILLIAMS: When you talk about accommodation, are you referring specifically to refuge accommodation?

Mr RIORDAN: I am just referring to what you have referred to it as. You said you had budgeted 54 000 nights, so I am assuming you have got the accommodation at 54 but you have only done 42.

Ms WILLIAMS: Yes. Well, I imagine what you are referring to, if you are looking at the previous year, would be some of the impacts of COVID, particularly on refuges, and particularly with a focus on communal refuges, so obviously with the impacts of COVID and the risk of transmission—

Mr RIORDAN: So there were beds sitting empty last year?

Ms WILLIAMS: in communal refuges. Our investment into refuges has quite deliberately a focus on core and cluster models. To explain the difference—it is actually pertinent to your question, Mr Riordan—between those two models and why communal refuges would have been more heavily impacted by COVID is because communal refuges, as the name suggests, involve areas of communal use, which obviously, in terms of a public health risk, is quite high.

There are a number of reasons why we invest in core and cluster models. They are preferred because they provide independent living units for families, with services onsite. So in this kind of public health environment they can obviously continue running, and we continue to fund accommodation options that are safer from a public health perspective through brokerage and flexible support packages. But that figure that you are referring to will have been an impact of COVID, in the sense that the communal refuges would not have been safe from a public health perspective at that time. I am happy to pass on to see if Eleri Butler would have been—

Mr RIORDAN: It was safer just to leave them at home.

Ms WILLIAMS: Well, if you had listened to part of my response around other alternatives, you would have heard that that is exactly what I did not say. In fact we provided a boost that allowed for additional accommodation options during COVID to try and counter that very problem that you have referred to with communal refuges.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. Ms Richards.

Ms RICHARDS: Thank you, Minister. Thank you, officials, for your time here this morning. Minister, I will take you to budget paper 3, page 46, because it outlines an \$18.2 million commitment to perpetrator accountability. So in the years since the Royal Commission into Family Violence there has been a growing acceptance that in order to reduce that impact family violence has on our community we need to work with those who use violence. So I am interested in having an understanding and perhaps some detail about what this investment will provide.

Ms WILLIAMS: Thank you, Ms Richards, for your question, and I know this is an issue that is very close to your heart and one that we have had great cause to talk about as you represent your local constituents too. As you rightly point out, it is now broadly accepted within the community that in order to make a meaningful difference to the safety and wellbeing of victim-survivors we must direct our attention and direct our efforts

toward those who use violence. There was actually a point in time where that was probably more contentious than it is today, but I think there is a growing understanding that, to be blunt, we need to work with perpetrators to keep victims safe. It really is that simple.

So since the Royal Commission into Family Violence there has been I think a real shift in that public discussion around violence, and the mainstream narrative has definitely moved away, and increasingly so, from asking, ‘Why doesn’t she leave?’ to ‘Why doesn’t he stop?’, and I think that is a really positive development in this conversation largely driven by the royal commission itself and the elevation of that discussion not only within government corridors but also within the community. This is a really critical step in the path to family violence reform and to stopping violence at the start. The royal commission told us, and I want to quote from it, that, quote:

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

Efforts to keep victims safe must be strengthened through a consistent and rigorous approach to perpetrator accountability. Bringing perpetrators into view and assisting them to change behaviours is essential to reducing family violence.

We know that effective and long-term perpetrator interventions will be one of the most powerful strategies for driving down the presence of family violence in our community, alongside critical primary prevention initiatives to change the attitudes that we know lead to gendered violence.

Since the Royal Commission into Family Violence, the range of perpetrator interventions supported by the Victorian government has expanded significantly. We have strengthened and broadened the intervention system by working together with agencies and services that interact with people who use violence. In response to the royal commission, in 2016 we established the expert advisory committee on perpetrator interventions, and the committee considered how to increase the accountability of perpetrators and shift the burden away from victim-survivors. And their final report recommendations are very much informing our whole-of-system approach to perpetrator accountability through our family violence rolling action plan. Since then the Victorian government has continued to deliver significant investment in perpetrator interventions.

In 2017–18 we provided \$49.5 million over four years to boost access to men’s behaviour change programs and to develop and trial new interventions. In 2019 the budget provided \$85 million over four years and \$22.3 million ongoing to maintain access to community-based interventions for people who use violence. The 2021–22 budget builds on these commitments by investing \$18.2 million for the provision of men’s behaviour change programs, perpetrator brokerage, culturally safe responses for Aboriginal people using violence, the extension of some of those perpetrator trials I referenced and the provision of accommodation-based services as well. And that is important because if we can minimise the disruption for women and particularly children by allowing them to stay at home and stay within close proximity to their school networks and other similar networks, obviously the outcome for women and children is much better if it is safe to do that, so providing that accommodation for perpetrators is very, very important.

This will continue to build a perpetrator intervention system that ensures that perpetrators are identified and engage with services—kept in view of the system, as we often refer to that—and that the risks posed by a perpetrator are monitored and managed by the system. We also want to ensure that interventions are timely, coordinated and tailored to the context of the perpetrators and the victim-survivors and that the interventions are more effective through being informed by a growing evidence base.

The choice of perpetrators to use violence continues to be a significant threat, sadly, to the health, safety and wellbeing of Victorians, and at this point in the reform the system is increasingly shifting its focus to perpetrators as a source of family violence and to building that web of accountability around them. It is worth noting—and I think I did last year too—that we are world leaders in developing this evidence base, and it will be for global benefit.

Ms RICHARDS: Terrific. Thank you very much, Minister.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Richards. Mr Hibbins.

Mr HIBBINS: Thanks, Chair. Thanks, Minister and your team, for appearing this morning. I am after a couple of figures, actually. We had a chat about multicultural services the other day. Page 46 sets out the new

funding for family violence services. Can I get the figure that is specifically for family violence services for multicultural communities?

Ms WILLIAMS: Sure. By way of framing, as I have outlined, the cumulative investment in responding to the Royal Commission into Family Violence has now been over \$3.5 billion, and in this budget we will deliver an additional \$354 million towards building a Victoria free from violence. Last budget we invested \$9.7 million to prevent family violence, working with multicultural communities specifically, and these grants have just closed. I will be making some announcements shortly as to those recipients. I am more than happy, once that is public, Sam, to reach out to you and make sure you are aware of that work and the sorts of initiatives it is focused on.

We are working to secure women's immediate and longer term safety also through enduring behaviour change and working closely with multicultural communities to better target our strategies and programs to those communities, which is something that has very much been highlighted to us by those communities—and the need to perhaps approach those conversations slightly differently sometimes. We are working closely with the Family Violence Steering Committee, the Victim Survivors Advisory Council and the multicultural communities family violence working group, who are experts in working with those communities, and we are also providing an additional \$200 000 to the Multicultural Centre for Women's Health to ensure that women from diverse communities can receive that much-needed in-language support.

Through the COVID-19 funding boost provided in May last year it is also worth noting that there was \$20.2 million allocated to 116 family violence and sexual assault services across the state to meet the increase in demand during the pandemic, including funding to multicultural organisations within that packet of funding to help organisations adapt their services and keep their staff safe while supporting—

Mr HIBBINS: Is there a specific figure for multicultural services within that?

Ms WILLIAMS: We would have to get you the breakdown by organisation—but also noting that some organisations are multicultural specific; others still work with multicultural communities but they will not be branded that way, effectively, so it can be a bit nebulous to pull out all of it. So it would be a bit of a blunt instrument in that many of our—though I hate the term 'mainstream'—mainstream organisations also have components and operations within them that work exclusively or target different multicultural communities as well. So the funding that we allocate them they will then decide to dedicate to that purpose, but that is not necessarily something that would appear in our breakdowns.

Mr HIBBINS: Is the funding that you have discussed all time limited, or is there separate, recurrent funding each year?

Ms WILLIAMS: It would depend on the particular funding stream. Much of it—for example, if it is related to particular prevention projects or trials—will be time limited. But say for some of those, where the funding is for the organisations that are rolling out services, as usual elements will be structured to be more ongoing, other elements will be time limited depending on the purposes of that funding.

I also want to highlight, though, that this year's budget also includes \$97 million towards the continued implementation of MARAM—that was that multi-agency risk assessment management framework—and phase 2 includes rolling out MARAM to prescribed multicultural agencies as well who are working with victim-survivors of family violence. So, to explain the significance of that and why I wanted to highlight that, MARAM is going to be critical to making sure that we effectively boost the capability and capacity of our universal service system and any service where there is likely to be a touchpoint for victim-survivors, to make sure that they are well equipped and skilled to recognise family violence and refer accordingly. We know that most victim-survivors of family violence do not go straight to a specialist service; they are more likely to go in through a universal service or through any number of other community services that they might access, and therefore that is a golden opportunity for us to be able to make sure that we are using that to get them access to help when they need it. So rolling out MARAM to those multicultural agencies is going to be a really important opportunity for us to reach into communities and provide that sort of training and support for the workforce within those organisations to be able to provide that assistance that we know is really important.

I highlight that, to make that previous point, it is not just as straightforward as direct funding to multicultural organisations. We want this embedded across our whole system—that focus, that intersectional lens.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Mr O'Brien.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Thank you, Chair. Minister, I want to keep going on with perpetrator accountability. Budget paper 3, page 208, has some data there that shows there were nearly 9000 calls last year from men to the statewide telephone helpline regarding family violence but only 2800 men were actually able to access a men's behaviour change program, about a third less than targeted. As you said to Ms Richards, you have got money allocated in this year's budget, but it is heavily front-ended: \$12.7 million this year, and then down to \$1.7 million in the out years. Why are you only providing—

Ms WILLIAMS: Sorry, can I just get you to repeat that last bit? I just missed the start of your—

Mr D O'BRIEN: As Ms Richards pointed out, on page 46 you have got that \$18 million that is heavily front-ended. You have got \$12.8 million in the first year, but in the out years it cuts way back down to \$1.7 million, \$1.8 million. So why are you only providing one year of enhanced funding to address men's behaviour change programs?

Ms WILLIAMS: It goes to the point I was actually making in the tail end of my presentation around the fact that with men's behaviour change programs and perpetrator interventions globally the evidence base is very thin. So much of the work that we are doing here in Victoria is to build our understanding and build our evidence base around that suite of initiatives that we fund to get that better understanding about what is working and how they work together. I do not think it is a case of 'One program is the silver bullet and that's the one we've got to invest in'. I think it is about a suite of initiatives. But as we invest we are very much gathering the data and assessing and evaluating those programs in order to determine our investment the following year—because it is so undervalued and under-researched as an area.

To demonstrate that, among some of the programs that we draw on and fund here, which are models that are used around the world, one particular area that has been regarded as a world leader is Scotland and the Caledonian model of men's perpetrator intervention. When I was there a couple of years ago and talking to their team, trying to get a better understanding from the founders of that model around what work they had done to evaluate it and what benefits it was delivering, while they had anecdotal evidence of the benefits of that, when I said, 'So what has your research shown you about the effectiveness of this program?', they smiled at me and said, 'We haven't been funded to do that. This is why we are so excited about what you're doing, because you're effectively working to build that evidence base through the investment that you're making into trialling and building that evidence base'. It goes to making the point, Mr O'Brien, that we need to be nimble in how we fund. It looks front-ended because effectively what we are doing while we are doing that is working with the organisations that are rolling this out, doing very robust evaluations, and then that determines what our investment will be in those back years. We will need to be nimble so we can ensure that we are responsibly allocating money to initiatives that are proving their outcomes.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Okay. But we either think men's behaviour change programs work or they do not—because we are putting more money into them this year. Let me ask the question. You are increasing the number of men participating by 400, so 10 per cent, when we had about a 33 per cent increase in demand last year. How much of that \$12.8 million is actually going to men's behaviour change and how much into research, analysis and assessment?

Ms WILLIAMS: Well, all of those programs get evaluated and assessed along the way. Eleri, you might be able to add some more detail in terms of what the evaluation component of much of that perpetrator targeted funding goes to. But in terms of your first point, before I do pass onto Eleri on that—

Mr D O'BRIEN: Well, I am interested in an answer to the question: how much of the money is actually going to additional places?

Ms WILLIAMS: I appreciate that, Mr O'Brien, and I will get to explaining the breakdown of how the actual service versus valuation works. But in terms of the way you framed that—as they either work or they do not—it is not that simple. That is precisely why we are building the evidence base, because it may be that certain interventions are really effective at a particular time or part of a person's journey and then they need to be supplemented or complemented by another type of intervention.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Well, Minister, we are funding more of them so presumably we assume that they work.

Ms WILLIAMS: We are funding more of them and different types and trialling different models to build that better understanding about what an intervention over a life cycle needs to look like, so that is why it is really—

Mr D O'BRIEN: My time is running out. Can I get an answer to the question: how much of the money actually goes to new places for men's behaviour change programs?

Ms BUTLER: In terms of the 2021–22 budget, there is \$7 million over four years that goes to men's behaviour change programs and then there is recurring funding as well. That builds on previous investments from previous years budgets, so the men's behaviour change program's investment is over a four-year period.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Okay, so \$7 million out of that—

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr O'Brien. Your time has expired. Ms Richards.

Ms RICHARDS: Thank you, Minister. Mr O'Brien, I am continuing on your area of interest as well, so I am also going to unpack a little bit more some of the insights you are providing around perpetrator accountability. In budget paper 3, page 46, I am interested in having some understanding about the perpetrator accommodation work. I understand that standard practice has historically been of course to remove the women and children from the home to protect their safety, and we know that this is an incredibly disruptive intervention. Can you provide some further detail about what the investment in this budget will do to progress this developing model of perpetrator accountability, where perpetrators are provided accommodation? And perhaps that does help Mr O'Brien as well with some of that understanding of the context in this important area of family violence prevention.

Ms WILLIAMS: Thank you very much for your question. It is a nice segue from what we were discussing before around the change in thinking when we think about accommodation services and even when we think about family violence in terms of shifting that burden from the victim-survivor to a greater focus on the perpetrator. To that end, there is always a greater focus on the perpetrator in order to keep the victim safe and in order to minimise disruption in some cases to the victim, particularly where there are children involved. It is really vital that our family violence response supports victim-survivors and changes perpetrator behaviour and attitudes to stop the use of their violence. It is a fundamental threshold point in our understanding and commitment to our reform. When effective interventions are targeted to perpetrators, we know that significant harm but also cost to the victim-survivors and the community are avoided, so that is very much why we have delivered through this budget \$18.2 million to deliver a system of perpetrator interventions, which includes funding for the provision of accommodation-based perpetrator services as well.

The Perpetrator Accommodation and Support Service, or PASS as it is known, was established in 2020. It enables perpetrators who pose a serious risk of family violence to be removed from the home where this increases the safety of the victim-survivor. The program provides an average of 14 days of emergency accommodation as well as brokerage, brief intervention supports and links to wraparound services for perpetrators to begin to engage in behaviour change. The program was established for up to 300 perpetrators to access initially, with a longer term accommodation model currently being piloted. So this program will provide housing for up to six months and wraparound client support such as interventions, case management, brokerage and family safety contact.

The PASS program seeks to provide intervention support for perpetrators in crisis accommodation to maintain engagement, assess wider needs and develop ongoing safety and accountability plans as well, which includes activities like, for example, providing family safety contact for victim-survivors of perpetrators accessing longer term accommodation, linking the perpetrators to perpetrator interventions and additional support services to address other health, mental health or AOD issues. We know that they are often complex cases and there are a number of issues that need to be unpacked and unpicked in order to sometimes get somebody to a point where they can meaningfully engage with a men's behaviour change service, for example—some of that sort of preparatory work to getting somebody to that point. It also includes brokerage to purchase products or services that engage, stabilise and link perpetrators to programs that address their use of violence, keep perpetrators engaged and in view of the service system to manage risk, prevent further violence, support behaviour change and prevent further involvement in the justice system.

That is actually an important point and does to some extent go to some of the comments Mr O'Brien was making, because while we get a sense of the suite of initiatives that are required for perpetrator interventions and how that looks over somebody's life cycle, it is important to note that the actual engagement in a perpetrator program full stop is, even aside from all of those other questions, a huge benefit because while somebody is engaged with the service system, they are in view, they are effectively able to be monitored. In terms of assessing risk it puts the system in a much better position to be able to assess risk by having some level of engagement with that person, so there is a benefit to the engagement as a threshold point. Then obviously beyond that we do a body of work to make sure that we are building a better understanding, but also within the activities I was just listing, building evidence is a huge part of that as well to help understand what works and what does not.

Ms RICHARDS: Thanks, Minister.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Richards. Mr Limbrick.

Mr LIMBRICK: Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Minister and team, today. In budget paper 3, page 207, there are a number of KPIs that are related to family violence. From my reading of those figures, there is one in particular, number of calls responded to by the family violence victim-survivor crisis service, that was higher than anticipated last year, and some of the other notes on some of the other figures, because they are lower, seem to indicate that there were problems with service delivery because of the pandemic response and the lockdowns. Would it be a fair assessment to say that the pandemic response increased demand for these services but also reduced ability to deliver on some of these services?

Ms WILLIAMS: I think it definitely presented challenges to service delivery for some of those. So when the pandemic first hit and obviously decisions were made in the earlier part of last year to go into lockdown, you will have noted very early on, in fact I think it was April, that I stood up with the Premier and we made a very early announcement around additional funding for family violence services. We had already had the benefit of looking at some of the data out of Europe about what was happening with family violence reporting—particularly one of the most compelling cases was France, I believe—and so we were fully expecting and we were very upfront around the fact that this was going to prove a challenge. It was going to prove a challenge because people were locked down in their homes potentially with an abuser, and many of our services would be accustomed to operating face to face, hence that cash injection, for want of a better term, early on to enable our services to operate remotely, which they have done, and also though on top of that, which has been one of the silver linings in what is a very dark cloud, to innovate, to basically create new ways of being to access services.

While, for example, some programs that are really dependent on face-to-face interaction, like some of those group work perpetrator programs, could not obviously happen that way, phone-based service delivery and online service delivery really lifted and were facilitated by us in that over \$40 million of additional funding that we announced last year. So online service delivery boosted, but in addition to that, Safe Steps also launched their web chat portal as an additional way for people to access services. The really interesting part about that, which we are now learning from now that that has been running for, what, almost a year, I guess, is that when we talk about building a system, whether it be making our universal services more accessible to victim-survivors and making sure that we can hold them and refer in any setting, so that 'no wrong door' idea—

After a period of time of watching the web chat function that Safe Steps developed and evaluating how that is being used, what we have seen is that their feedback to us was it has given people an opportunity to have a chat at a really early stage in their experience. So, for example, rather than engage with the web chat the way that we would have them engage on a phone line or even in a face-to-face consultation, they had more people accessing them to check whether behaviour that they were experiencing was right or not. So it was an early piece that was conversations that were going to, 'Hey, I'm noticing something not right in my relationship' or 'Is this normal or is this something I should be worried about?'. The strength of that and the feedback we have got back from Safe Steps is that that is potentially a much earlier intervention than what they would be typically dealing with. So there have been definite lessons and developments and innovations through this period of time. No doubt there have been challenges in the way services have had to be delivered, but our services remained operational during that time. They changed the way they operated—we facilitated that change—but more than that, they were able to innovate and offer new ways of being reached, which has then led to at this point in time what Safe

Steps tell us is potentially people accessing that information and that support earlier. So we are obviously keen to build on that innovation and on those lessons that we have learned over that period of time.

Ms MONAGLE: And if I could just add to that, Mr Limbrick, the family violence reform implementation monitor in her latest report actually outlined the success of all the pragmatic responses and the improvement that has had on service delivery, and that will be taken into the future as well.

Mr LIMBRICK: Thanks.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Ms Taylor.

Ms TAYLOR: Thank you, Minister and department officials. As part of the collective shift in focus towards those who use violence in the home, can I refer you to budget paper 3, page 46, which is outlining the \$44.145 million in funding over four years for statewide expansion of the adolescent family violence program. Can you provide some detail on what this investment will deliver?

Ms WILLIAMS: Bear with me.

Ms MONAGLE: While the minister finds the page, I might just refer to part of that—while not related specifically to that budget item, sorry. There is ongoing funding for Respectful Relationships and mandatory consent education throughout, so that absolutely provides that foundation for adolescents and young children as well in terms of understanding consent and also how to have a respectful relationship but also where to access support as well. So that provides a fundamental way of supporting kids in schools to learn that. And then on the specific report—

Ms WILLIAMS: Great. Thank you. Brigid's addition is important when we are talking about behaviour change and cultures. In terms of the question that you ask, Ms Taylor, around adolescent violence in the home, this is obviously something that has really grown in prominence in recent years and grown in understanding and is being more clearly recognised, I guess, as a form of family violence. We know that adolescents who use violence in the home are a really distinct group where the approach to intervention is not the same as it would be for an adult perpetrator for a range of reasons, which hopefully I will get the opportunity to touch on. Young people who use violence against a family member, for example, are often the victims of violence themselves, and given young people's need for care and protection services, responding to adolescent family violence really does require a targeted and specialist approach.

The wellbeing of a young person who is using violence should be a prime consideration. Diversionary and therapeutic responses are considered preferable to punitive interventions available. In fact we know that the fear of a punitive intervention is what often prevents, for example, parents reporting violence that they might be experiencing from a child. So we need to be mindful of that, otherwise basically we will be in a position where parents do not want to report because they are fearing a purely punitive approach and we are not assisting because we are not opening the door to mechanisms and opportunities that may have them addressing that situation. So we need to make sure that this is done effectively in collaboration with the family and taking into account the nuance and the types of relationships that are involved in that violence.

We know that, sadly, 42 per cent of children and young people involved with the youth justice system have been witness to family violence. This is just to give you a snapshot of what young people who end up with poor outcomes—what often drives that. If we are to make any inroads towards ending family violence, we must ensure timely and effective interventions for children and young people at the first sign of their concerning behaviours. Adolescent family violence is a really complex issue. For most families, as I have said, a justice response is to be avoided at all costs, so we are having to find other ways of assisting and supporting those families. Yet family incidents recorded by police where an adolescent has been identified as using family violence have increased by 11.8 per cent over the five years to 30 June 2019. There is a big caveat on that: that does not necessarily mean that the rates of that type of violence have increased, but it means the reporting has. As I will say ad nauseam about the family violence reform agenda more broadly, increased rates of reporting are actually a really good thing, particularly when we know that underpinning that whole royal commission narrative was that the issue of family violence was one that was hidden behind closed doors and chronically under-reported. So now what we are starting to see is that reporting rate increase as people's confidence in the system grows and as the public discussion around violence really lifts. And that has also applied to reporting around incidents of adolescent family violence as well, which I think is a positive development all things

considered, because if we know about it, we can then intervene to assist. We also know that 80 per cent of young people recorded as an aggressor when police attended family violence went on to have future contact with the justice system, with 52 per cent recorded as aggressors at subsequent family violence incidents. This tells us essentially that early intervention is critical.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Mr Newbury.

Mr NEWBURY: Thank you. There are a couple of important issues I would like to raise with you, but can I just ask for clarity on a discussion that was had earlier with another committee member? There was a discussion around a decision being made during the pandemic for health reasons to keep some victims and their families in the home rather than moving them into community care. You may be aware of figures by the independent Crime Statistics Agency yesterday that show that there are more than 31 additional family violence offences occurring each and every day. So I am just trying to understand whether or not that decision to keep people in the home in some circumstances rather than moving them into community care has actually led to increased occurrences.

Ms WILLIAMS: Thank you, Mr Newbury, for your question. I would refute the assumption that has been made there that people were being kept in the home. That is not what was happening at all, and I want to be really, really clear on that. While some community refuges could not operate for public health reasons, our boost to funding last year and a number of other mechanisms that we have available to us were still in operation that enabled those in crisis to leave their homes; it just looked different than entering a communal refuge.

I will get to what those other options are, but as I have already outlined, through our redevelopment and build of 20 new refuges we are now very much committed to a core and cluster model. The old style of communal refuges is pretty much regarded as undesirable for a whole range of reasons, particularly for families, because you have got, say, a woman with a number of children with another woman with a number of children and everybody obviously experiencing high levels of trauma having to operate in an environment where they are navigating each other. That is not always the best in terms of therapeutic outcomes and trauma-informed outcomes, hence the core and cluster model and the favouring of something that allows particularly family units to live in independent units with services on site, so they get their privacy, they get their ability to run their own home and to do all the things that you and I would take for granted in our own homes—and I know you have got children, so all the things that you would want to be doing in the privacy of your own home with your children and without that sort of external noise, particularly where trauma is concerned.

In addition to that what we also have is some funding streams, flexible support packages and brokerage, which can be effectively expended on accommodation options, and of course we had things like emergency hotel accommodation for people experiencing family violence, which we were very vocal about last year in the middle of COVID. That was available to those who were in crisis. And beyond emergency hotel accommodation for that period of time things like brokerage and FSPs can also be spent on accommodation-related options, so for some it might be the head start they need to get into private rental accommodation, for example. Eleri might want to add to what that can be spent on, things like FSPs, but my understanding is things like bonds and the like—

Mr NEWBURY: I am happy to take that on notice if you would like to take that on notice. You mentioned earlier, Minister—

The CHAIR: Sorry, Mr Newbury, if someone is prepared to answer the question here at the table it is not for you to decide whether—

Mr NEWBURY: I did not ask that question.

The CHAIR: Well—

Ms WILLIAMS: Well, it does go in the broader suite. What I am effectively trying to challenge, Mr Newbury, is the claim that we were forcing people to stay in their homes.

Mr NEWBURY: I did not use those words.

Ms WILLIAMS: Well, you talked about confining people to their homes rather than accessing community care.

Mr NEWBURY: I just clarified the earlier testimony.

Ms WILLIAMS: Yes. I just wanted to make it clear that that is not what we were asking people to do, and it certainly would not have been desirable by your measure or mine, which is why we did not.

Mr NEWBURY: That is why I clarified it to start with.

Ms WILLIAMS: Great. Thank you.

Mr NEWBURY: You also said earlier that looking at the international evidence you were really concerned about what was happening—you mentioned France—as something that specifically struck you as a concern. I think when we look at both the things that have been reported in the budget and the most recent data to the end of March it is at a crisis point. I think the figures are showing it is really, really bad and there is a crisis happening. Are you concerned that the lockdowns led to that?

Ms WILLIAMS: No. I think the sadder part of that whole narrative, Mr Newbury, is that the crisis was there. The crisis predated the royal commission, the crisis postdated the royal commission and the crisis predated lockdowns. What lockdowns have done is magnify an issue that has already been bubbling under the surface, and that is what we are seeing coming out.

Mr NEWBURY: So it is happening more?

Ms WILLIAMS: No. It is more visible. This is like the distinction I was making between reporting rates and actual rates. You know, police-reporting rates will tell us what has been reported. It does not actually mean that there is a rise in family violence; it means that there is a rise in the reporting of family violence, which might seem perverse, but it is actually a positive thing if people are reaching out for help.

Mr NEWBURY: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Ms Taylor.

Ms TAYLOR: Thank you. I think it would be useful to explore more behind the rationale for building the evidence base, so if I can refer you to budget paper 3, page 46, the output description says:

Funding is provided to ... contribute to an increasing evidence base about what works to change behaviour and prevent violence.

Can you please outline how this funding will increase the evidence base about changing behaviour?

Ms WILLIAMS: Where?

Ms TAYLOR: Budget paper 3, page 46.

Ms WILLIAMS: Budget paper 3, page 46, and is this still drawing on your adolescent family violence question or is this just the broader evidence base?

Ms TAYLOR: Yes—

Ms WILLIAMS: Okay, so it is a broader question.

Ms TAYLOR: building the evidence base, changing behaviour and how that will assist.

Ms WILLIAMS: Okay. Sure. Thank you for your question. As I have outlined a number of times in relation to different elements of the reform, the building of the evidence base is incredibly important to informing our work into the future. It also acknowledges obviously that globally there has been a real shortage of monitoring and evidence around many aspects of family violence-related services and behaviour change and that a great strength of the royal commission implementation here has been that we have been given the opportunity, with significant investment attached, to really build that evidence base to work out what can change behaviour and

prevent violence. Understanding when and how to work with perpetrators to facilitate change is critical to designing service responses that best meet that need and serve our objectives.

The royal commission recommended—I think it is recommendations 87 and 88 that go to this—and also the expert advisory panel on perpetrator interventions recommended that the government fund evaluation studies to establish longer term effectiveness and assist in improving program design in the long term. One of the greatest gaps, I think, in our current knowledge base is the understanding of behaviour change over time and the journey to recovery for both perpetrators and victims. I am a glass half full kind of person, and I think this is an amazing opportunity for us to contribute to that knowledge base in a way that does not only allow us to provide or do better prevention and response work here in Victoria but also allows us to inform that work not only in other states but indeed in other nations. I have often been given, in this forum, cause to reflect on the fact that the world is watching us. We say the words world-leading and sometimes we say them flippantly, but the fact remains with what we are doing here in Victoria, for much of our reform, there is not a blueprint and there is not a template, which means that we are building the evidence base that potentially can inform change globally. It is really complex, this work of building an evidence base. It requires significant ethics and an operational consideration, but it really is the missing piece to building the evidence base to truly understand what works in terms of that longer term piece of building the evidence base. But it is so critical to understanding the value created by our investment in perpetrator interventions, and that is why we are committed to it. It has long been something, as I said, that we have grappled with not only here in Victoria but globally, and by virtue of the fact that a lot of our work is, as I said, quite literally world first, you know, we have this golden opportunity to build and inform.

So right from the beginning of implementing the royal commission recommendations, we undertook that we would be led by evidence-based best practice, and that is why we have continued to evaluate and monitor our programs as we go, which goes to the point I was making to Mr O'Brien earlier around why some things look the way they do in the budget papers. And this really goes to the heart of responsible investment, particularly in relation to perpetrator interventions, so that we have got a better understanding of what our investment is delivering and therefore what we need to invest more in—where the gaps are and how to fill those gaps.

So this investment that we have made, you know, improves the system's understanding of how to stop perpetrators' use of violence and to sustain positive behaviour change in the long term. It assists in filling the gap in the Australian and international evidence by taking that longitudinal view that I have outlined as so important and that has been so lacking in other jurisdictions around the world, and it assists with the design and delivery of more effective service responses for perpetrators to increase safety of victim-survivors and prevent violence—also to be based on this whole-of-Victorian-government theory of change for perpetrator accountability and also aligned with our family violence outcomes framework, the analysis of existing data and evidence to identify key data measures, and data and measures of impact for that ongoing process as well. I could keep going, but this is critical work to our reform that will continue to make us a world leader long into the future.

Ms TAYLOR: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much, Minister. That concludes the time we have set aside for consideration of the family violence portfolio with you this morning. The committee will follow up on any questions taken on notice in writing, and responses will be required within 10 working days of the committee's request. The committee will now take a short break before moving to consideration with you of the women's portfolio.

Witnesses withdrew.

