

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the 2026–27 Budget Estimates

Melbourne – Thursday 21 May 2026

MEMBERS

Sarah Connolly – Chair

John Pesutto – Deputy Chair

Jade Benham

Michael Galea

Mathew Hilakari

Lauren Kathage

Aiv Puglielli

Richard Riordan

Meng Heang Tak

WITNESSES

Melissa Horne MP, Minister for Prevention of Family Violence; and

Peta McCammon, Secretary,

Melanie Heenan, Deputy Secretary, Family Safety Victoria,

Amber Griffiths, Executive Director, Family and Sexual Violence Programs,

Fran O'Toole, Executive Director, Operations, and

Jo Pride, Executive Director, Policy, Prevention and Impact, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing.

The CHAIR: I declare open this hearing of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee. I ask that mobile telephones please be turned to silent.

On behalf of the Parliament, the committee is conducting this Inquiry into the 2026–27 Budget Estimates. The committee's aim is to scrutinise public administration and finance to improve outcomes for the Victorian community.

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

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

I welcome the Minister for Family Violence, the Honourable Melissa Horne, as well as officials from DFFH. Minister, I invite you to make an opening presentation of no more than 5 minutes, after which time the committee will ask you questions. Your time starts now.

Visual presentation.

Melissa HORNE: Thank you very much, Chair, and good evening to you all. Thank you for the opportunity to present today on the prevention of family violence portfolio. I would like to start by acknowledging the lived experience and powerful advocacy of victim-survivors of family violence and sexual assault. It is for them that we undertake this work.

The prevention of family violence portfolio leads Victoria's vital work to prevent and respond to family and sexual violence across the state. This includes working upstream to stop violence before it starts through primary prevention strategies to change the attitudes and behaviours leading to violence. It is making it easier for those experiencing family violence or seeking parenting and child wellbeing support to access the support they need through the statewide Orange Door network. It is connecting Victorians of all ages and backgrounds who experience family or sexual violence to services that support their safety, their recovery and their healing. It is working with those who use violence to hold them accountable and to change their behaviour. This portfolio is also committed to Aboriginal self-determination to support truth and treaty in Victoria.

Next slide, please. In May 2024 the Victorian government announced the strengthening women's safety package to accelerate efforts to drive down family, sexual and gender-based violence. The slide we have got before us outlines the key initiatives, and I would like to draw your attention to a few of them. Respect Ballarat is our nation-leading saturation model, which floods the Ballarat community with programs, initiatives and messaging to prevent family, sexual and gendered violence and the attitudes that drive them. It is backed by \$9.8 million worth of funding. We have also got the Alexis family violence response model, embedding specialist family violence workers within Victoria Police family violence investigation units that are focused on dealing with high-risk repeat perpetrators of family violence. There is a boost to Aboriginal sexual assault services to ensure more First Nations people who experience sexual violence can access culturally safe, holistic, healing-focused services. There is also the justice navigator pilot, which I just recently announced with my federal counterparts, providing practical specialist support to victim-survivors of sexual violence as they navigate the justice system so they understand their rights and their entitlements.

Here is a quick snapshot of some of the programs that are being delivered statewide. There continues to be a high demand for the Orange Door, our accessible entry point to services and support. Of the 185,000 referrals in 2025, 30 per cent were self-referrals. That is up from 13 per cent in 2018–19, and that shows that attitudes are really changing, awareness is increasing and more victim-survivors feel confident seeking help. Over 20,000 victim-survivors of sexual assault received support from specialist sexual assault services in 2024–25. In 2025–26, 3500 children and young people were supported with tailored therapy to heal and recover from trauma. Twenty-nine community-led projects were also supported to prevent and respond to family violence through the Aboriginal Community Initiatives Fund, and in 2025–26 we supported nearly 900 families with more than 50,000 nights of refuge accommodation, ensuring a safe and secure environment during the most frightening time of their lives.

We keep perpetrators in sight and accountable, with over 5000 participating in men's behaviour change programs in 2024–25, and we have supported 80 primary prevention projects, engaging Victorians in the places they live, work, learn and socialise. The 2026–27 Victorian budget has invested \$100 million through the prevention of family violence portfolio. It includes \$74.4 million over two years to respond to family violence, through \$3.5 million to expand the personal safety initiative, continued funding for the core and clustered refuges and crisis accommodation and continuing critical support for victim-survivors through case management and projects to support children and young people recovering from trauma. Chair, there is also funding of \$23.2 million over two years to continue the central information point, which plays a critical role in family violence risk assessment and safety planning for practitioners statewide.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. We are going to go to Ms Benham.

Jade BENHAM: Thank you, Chair. Evening, Minister, I note that you are, what, the sixth minister in four years in this portfolio – fifth. Okay. Good luck. I do want to talk about prevention first. You and I have spoken at length about what may be able to happen in this space in a practical sense and in a short amount of time. Table 7 shows that the funding for family violence service delivery and primary prevention – this is 'Department Performance Statement', page 37 – as a proportion, the amount allocated to primary prevention has gone down. In 2025–26 prevention funding accounted for 3.1 per cent of the overall pie, but this year it is slightly less at 2.9 per cent. Why was the decision to invest proportionately less in primary prevention when there is demand that is clearly there?

Melissa HORNE: You are right, Ms Benham, and I really thank you for the frank conversations that we have had about this. One of the things that I have come to realise, having had the portfolio for four weeks, is that there is so much more to do. Whilst people say we are leading the way in some metrics on a global scale with some of the things that we are doing, there is so much more to do, and it continues to grow. In relation, though, to that primary prevention of family violence metric, Mel or Peta, are you best to talk to the committee about that?

Peta McCAMMON: Yes. In terms of the numbers, notwithstanding the calculation – I accept the calculation around the ratio – I would say, though, in real terms we have not seen a reduction in the output.

Jade BENHAM: Not in the overall, no. I accept that.

Peta McCAMMON: Part of that percentage change probably reflects also some of the growth in the service response, but I do not challenge that the proportion has changed marginally. The minister spoke about Respect Ballarat through the women's safety package, which from our point of view is, as the minister said, a nation-leading way in terms of prevention and particularly place-based prevention. Maybe Ms Heenan can give you some more detail.

Jade BENHAM: I am just looking for the formula as to why that little drop in primary prevention as opposed to –

Peta McCAMMON: Yes. What I can see is driving that change, given that the primary prevention as a nominal figure has not changed – the percentage is because the service delivery has grown.

Jade BENHAM: Has grown. Okay. So in the overall budget, how much of that funding was carried over from last year?

Peta McCAMMON: I think we might have that.

Jade BENHAM: And then how does that compare to the last two years?

Melissa HORNE: I am going to have to defer that to people that work in the –

Jade BENHAM: You are excused, Minister.

Peta McCAMMON: I am just checking if we have that. If not, I am happy for us to take that on notice in terms of what that looks like. Yes.

Jade BENHAM: Yes. Great. Thank you. And in that, can we also get the two-year comparison and just a response as to whether that is service delivery or whether that is the primary prevention space? That would be fantastic. I am just looking for some data.

Peta McCAMMON: Yes.

Jade BENHAM: I want to touch on personal safety devices too as a prevention tool. In the last 12 months how many devices were distributed through the government or agencies?

Peta McCAMMON: I know we have that. Have you found it?

Melanie HEENAN: Yes. Ms Benham, I can talk with you about the number of personal safety devices that were provided through the flexible support packages. So that will be where there has been some important case management work done first, because the personal safety initiative and duress alarms, for example, are a non-crisis response. So it is, I guess, in that context. There were 1161 personal safety devices supported through the flexible support package program, but that does not include the personal safety devices that would have been purchased through the Orange Door's crisis brokerage, which is not as easy to obtain, because the way the data is collected in the client relationship management system is that it sits under crisis brokerage. So it could be one of the things that is purchased through crisis brokerage, but there are multiple practical items.

Jade BENHAM: I accept that, but that is the total number of the personal safety devices?

Melanie HEENAN: Through the case management process, yes.

Jade BENHAM: Okay. Great. How many of those are monitored, and do we have data on what periods they are monitored for?

Melanie HEENAN: I am not sure –

Jade BENHAM: I am happy to take that on notice.

Melanie HEENAN: but I can definitely talk with you about the fact that it is, again, one of the areas that, I guess, victim-survivors are looking for with their case manager. They are often looking for other kinds of technology to assist them outside of personal safety devices as well these days. So closed-circuit television, dash cams, tech sweeps – those types of initiatives are in some ways starting to be more important to the full kind of safety planning that case managers will be doing.

Jade BENHAM: I understand that. Again, I am just looking for some data on how many were monitored for what period of time. If you can supply that to the committee, that would be greatly appreciated.

Melanie HEENAN: I will certainly see if we can.

Jade BENHAM: Great. Thank you. With those personal devices, once they are no longer being used, are they discarded or are they reused?

Melanie HEENAN: I do not know the answer to that either, Ms Benham, I am sorry –

Jade BENHAM: Could you find out?

Melanie HEENAN: but we could definitely find out.

Jade BENHAM: Great. Thank you. Terrific. I want to talk about L17s, if we can, and the identity periods. When the new version was implemented, what were the key changes? The L17 is the form that police –

Peta McCAMMON: Yes. I am not sure whether we would be able to answer that, given it is a police form.

Melanie HEENAN: I am not aware of what specific changes have been made to the L17 form. In terms of a system sense my understanding is that the L17s that we obviously get through – thousands of L17s – to the Orange Door, as do other services, Safe Steps et cetera, but I am not aware of the very specific changes that have been made.

Jade BENHAM: Not aware of any changes?

Melanie HEENAN: No.

Jade BENHAM: It was changed in the last two years apparently, and no-one has seen a new version. Is it possible to get a copy of what the form looks like?

Melanie HEENAN: That would need to come through Victoria Police.

Jade BENHAM: Okay. I will be back with more.

Melanie HEENAN: Okay.

The CHAIR: Mr Galea.

Michael GALEA: Thank you, Chair. Good evening, Minister, Secretary and Ms Heenan. Thank you for joining us tonight on what is of course a very deeply important subject. I actually want to ask a question in a similar vein to Ms Benham, and that goes to ‘Output initiatives’ under budget paper 3, page 37 and specifically page 40, and the personal safety initiative as part of the broader output initiative of the ‘Family violence response’, seeing the various different elements of funding supported, including the operation of core and cluster refuges and short-term supported crisis accommodation; the continuation and expansion of that safety initiative; specialist supports, including case management for victim-survivors; therapeutic interventions for children and young people; and emergency crisis support packages and flexible support packages for the victim-survivors. Also noting, as it does say in the budget papers there, this does form, rightly so, part of the early intervention investment framework, which is a very important part of the state’s budgeting that was brought in some years ago, under the previous Treasurer as well.

Specifically with the personal safety initiative responses and in terms of the practical detail of what that looks like, for example, I was recently at a launch of some new housing for family violence victim-survivors in the broader south-east of my electorate – I will not go into location details for obvious reasons – and in that very new accommodation that was provided and supported by a great local service, in this case Wayss, we saw the integration of those features into the design of everything from the window sizes and locations to ensure maximum security for the individuals inside it. But obviously we cannot all just magically switch these services overnight, this infrastructure overnight, to provide that same level of support. The insidious thing with family violence is that it is so often put on the victim-survivors, especially children, to be in a relocated or moved situation. Initiatives like this are just simply so important because they do provide that stability, which goes to the connection that victim-survivors can have with their work, with their social life, with their family and with those essential support structures in the most difficult time of their life when they are already going to be struggling if they lose them as well. That just compounds and only indeed compounds again if you are a child in that situation, which unfortunately so many victim-survivors of family violence are.

We have spoken about in some way – and indeed you have gone through it with Ms Benham as well – not just continuing the initiative on a statewide basis but expanding as well the personal safety initiative responses. When we talk about those security upgrades, I am really keen to know what specifically we are talking about, what sorts of things this will go towards investing in, and also how that in turn will then ensure that those family violence victim-survivors can actually maintain those connections, which are not only of course essential for their ongoing support to get through the process but also for how they can move beyond that process, hopefully, as well. So, Minister, can you talk to me about how this specific budget initiative under the

family violence response output in terms of the personal safety initiative responses will help to do that for more victim-survivors of family violence?

Melissa HORNE: Thank you very much, Mr Galea. At the outset we are investing \$3.5 million in personal safety initiatives over the next two years. One of the things that I have really understood in coming into this portfolio is the multilayered approach that we really need to take to be able to support victim-survivors, but also to address perpetrators as well. The personal safety initiative only works when men –predominantly men – want to undertake behavioural change, and they can. It was a conversation that Ms Benham and I had where the vast majority of women who have experienced family violence want to flee the home. But then I talk to organisations such as No to Violence, which is a men’s behavioural change organisation that very much want to be able to say, ‘Well, what we need to do is educate the man to be able to take them out of out of the family home so that women and children can remain there and continue along their daily lives.’ But as Mel outlined, there have been a number of personal safety initiatives that have been actually implemented. But again, much of this needs to be appropriate for the cultural circumstance as well. Particularly working with Aboriginal stakeholders, for example, it needs to actually be culturally appropriate and culturally safe for Aboriginal stakeholders there. Is there anything you would like to add to that, Mel?

Melanie HEENAN: I think you have covered a lot of ground, Minister. I think probably just to circle back on this personal safety initiative being so critical to offer that safety at home for victim-survivors and families that are able to stay safely at home and the connections they then have with their case manager, who will then have contact with personal safety initiative coordinators to really look at what is the very nuanced, tailored plan that is needed in these circumstances. I mean, it even goes to things like whether or not trees should be taken down if there is easy access to the home. CCTV is critical because, importantly, for people who are accessing personal safety initiatives, they need to have an intervention order already in place. These are additional mitigations of risk, and comfort and confidence around safety, that come through this initiative so that families can stay at home.

Michael GALEA: Thank you, Ms Heenan. Indeed that is obviously the ideal, but in some circumstances, as you referred to, Minister, it is not achievable. For those, especially women and children, who are having to go into emergency accommodation when that is the only safe option – I am probably going to run out of time to ask this question, I apologise. Maybe this can be picked up later. Funding has also been provided for those crisis services – flexible support packages. I am keen to know the different options available for victim-survivors in those scenarios, if we get the time.

The CHAIR: Thank you. We are going to go to Ms Benham.

Jade BENHAM: Just on the L17s. I have just had a look online quickly, and it looks like you can log in now using your Microsoft login. Does that raise any red flags?

Melanie HEENAN: To a blank L17 form? I would definitely want to have a look at that. Again, it will be Victoria Police on that front. I have had a note, Ms Benham, that the change to the L17 form that we are aware of in terms of the update was replacing Child FIRST as a category with the Orange Door, but we are not aware of any other changes to the form.

Jade BENHAM: Yes. Okay. With regard to L17s, how many were completed for the last reporting period?

Melanie HEENAN: L17s that came into the Orange Door or in terms of literally the number of family violence incidents?

Jade BENHAM: Literally the number, yes. In the past it has been edging towards 100,000.

Melanie HEENAN: Yes. Again, I can relay those figures to you. Obviously it is Victoria Police data that I am relying on and the Crime Statistics Agency reports them in the family violence database. Sorry, I am just finding my –

Peta McCAMMON: I will just check, Mel. I have got B5, table 1. I will just confirm that I have got the number of family incidents recorded by police in 2025 as 103,529.

Melanie HEENAN: Correct.

Jade BENHAM: And how many of those you collect the data for are identified as high risk and responded to within two or three days?

Melanie HEENAN: In terms of the L17s that would come through to us, so that is the full number of family violence incidents as reported by police, Victoria Police will then send L17s through to the Orange Door. They are about perhaps just under 50 per cent of the referral pathways we have now. In terms of all of the referrals that come into the Orange Door, around 50 per cent will be from Victoria Police.

Jade BENHAM: We are just looking for – and I am happy to take this on notice – a breakdown of response times for all L17s showing how many were responded to within a day or two to three days. The metrics, I believe, are a day, two to three, four to seven days, eight to 14, and then longer than 14 days. Is that something you can provide to the committee?

Melanie HEENAN: In terms of the Orange Door, in terms of Victoria Police's response to an L17 or management of an L17, that might take the kind of metrics that you are looking at there. The kind of performance targets we have with the Orange Door are that we will be responding – obviously when an L17 comes through, a screening, identification and triage team across the Orange Doors will be assessing that L17 within 24 hours or as it is received.

Jade BENHAM: Have you got those metrics? They were provided last year.

Melanie HEENAN: I can give you the – they will be point-in-time metrics, I guess, because the SITs, the screening, identification and triage teams, which are taking in L17s across what is a significant network of services now, have a metric of being able to do MARAM, multi-agency risk assessment and management, assessments within seven days. But there will always be screening and prioritisation done by those screening, identification and triage teams as soon as they receive the L17s.

Jade BENHAM: Within 24 hours is the KPI?

Melanie HEENAN: The KPI is the assessments; that is the performance metric that we have. In terms of our operating model, we attempt to be looking at L17s, noting that TOD, Orange Door, is a business-hours service, so Safe Steps would be the other option if it is coming through as an L17 outside of business hours.

Jade BENHAM: Speaking of those, how many L17s were about incidents that occurred after hours? Have you got that data?

Melanie HEENAN: We certainly know the numbers of calls coming through to Safe Steps, but I do not have in front of me the L17s.

Jade BENHAM: What is the number of calls?

Melanie HEENAN: Sixty thousand a year.

Jade BENHAM: Sixty thousand calls out of hours.

Melanie HEENAN: Sixty thousand calls coming through to Safe Steps. It may not be out of hours because some victim-survivors will contact Safe Steps during business hours, but Safe Steps would generally be referring to the Orange Door if it is during business hours.

Jade BENHAM: Again, we are just looking for some data to identify trends and things. The L17 data has been provided for the last couple of years with those breakdowns. Are you able to see what you can find on notice to see if we can get that breakdown of a day, two to three days, four to seven days, eight to 14 days and greater than 14 days?

Melanie HEENAN: We can certainly provide the data, and I can look at what we have provided in the past. I guess what I am suggesting, though, is that the performance measure is about those assessments being done, because that is the critical aspect of the service delivery, being able to do a solid risk assessment of –

Jade BENHAM: Within 24 hours.

Melanie HEENAN: Within seven days is the metric, but that does not –

Jade BENHAM: Seven days is a long time.

Melanie HEENAN: That is not the period through which the screening, identification and triage teams will be doing the work they need to do, and they are prioritising all the time. They will be trying to get back or to pass an L17 referral to the assessment and planning teams as soon as they have done their screening, and they will be prioritising who they are getting back to by virtue of the risk assessments that they are doing.

Jade BENHAM: Without giving away what is on the L17, there is a way to triage with regard to risk, whether a case is high risk, very high risk et cetera?

Melanie HEENAN: There is a way of screening, identification and triage teams to be able to assess risk and to prioritise according to what they – they will not have spoken to the person yet, so they will not be able to do the deeper risk assessments that will allow them to really assess risk. That happens with the assessment and planning teams.

Jade BENHAM: Can you also then provide with the other information that you are going to provide to the committee how many were presented as being high risk?

Melanie HEENAN: I may be able to source how many were assessed as what is referred to in the operating model as tier 1, which is the highest risk. Again, it really is about being able to do that deeper risk assessment so that a more appropriate response can be provided.

Jade BENHAM: How many are not dealt with within seven days?

Melanie HEENAN: I cannot tell you that sitting here.

Jade BENHAM: But you can provide it.

Melanie HEENAN: Sorry, I can say that we achieved the metric that we have, so the performance target that we have. I can come back to you.

Jade BENHAM: Great. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Ms Kathage.

Lauren KATHAGE: Thank you, Chair, Minister and officials. I am very lucky to represent a diverse community with many different cultures, which are doing a great job of building a new life in a new area. There are some challenges that come with that. There are a lot of people who cannot drive, for example, or get around easily, some language barriers and visa pressures – partner visa and visa security issues. The Member for Mill Park, the Member for Thomastown and I held the multicultural family violence round table, and we were really pleased to have support from Orange Door and our local mental health hub, along with all our different multicultural and faith communities who came along. We had a really great discussion about family violence. One of the great groups we had there was Didi Bahini Samaj Victoria, which is the Nepalese women's empowerment group. Some things that came up in that conversation for me personally, as a personal reflection, were that the informal community-based networks and the fantastic systems that are in place need a bit of a conduit sometimes between them and that to be an effective family violence worker in a multicultural community does not require a social work degree. Sometimes I think that can be a barrier to getting recognition and support for the work that you do. But we know that there are lots of supports available from the government for victim-survivors, including crisis accommodation, refuges, case management, therapeutic supports for children and young people and those flexible support packages. Are you able to explain how multicultural and multifaith women are supported to access the services, particularly when they are facing the sorts of challenges that I just spoke about?

Melissa HORNE: Thanks, Ms Kathage. Look, without a doubt this has got its unique challenges as well. I think within the first week of being in the portfolio I attended a global conference that was here in Melbourne called Women Deliver. Part of the panel were two women who were representing Muslim women's support outreach, and what they were saying was absolutely frightening in the fact that Muslim women who are experiencing family violence now actually feel safer to stay in their home than they do to go out into the

community because of systemic racism that we are seeing, which was truly heartbreaking. This was echoed by a number of groups that I subsequently met with – inTouch, who provide a specific bespoke service. Who else did I meet with – Wellsprings for Women and the Australian Muslim Women’s Centre for Human Rights. So you are right, it is about language barriers, it is about having visa insecurity. There is that social isolation that you talk of, whether it is just about being in a community where you cannot drive or being in a community where you do not necessarily know how to navigate services. One of the things that we do through the Orange Door – and I went to a couple of them, one down in Dandenong, which as you can appreciate, has got a high percentage of people from different culturally diverse backgrounds, and also one up in Ballarat – is have a triage service and have a bespoke service too for women that provides that online service in more than 50 different languages. So there is the ability to seek help. It is just then being able to socialise that information so that that could be there.

One of the things, though, that we have been doing since 2019–20, particularly for people who may be here on a temporary visa, for example – they are not Australian citizens, they do not necessarily have access to Medicare services or things like – is we have been able to provide \$504,000 every year to be able to provide those bespoke services to those women and children that are fleeing family violence.

Lauren KATHAGE: That is really great to hear. Thank you for that, Minister. I am glad it is something that is front of mind for you. It means a lot to me. Similarly, LGBTIQ+ Victorians can also face unique barriers specific to them when experiencing family and sexual violence: discrimination, social stigma, concerns about accessing inclusive services, not knowing what you are going to find when you turn up to a service. Can you outline how the government is ensuring that family and sexual violence response services and supports are safe, that they are inclusive and that they are responsive to the needs of LGBTIQ+ communities?

Melissa HORNE: You are right, and there is a unique circumstance that is happening there, too, with that cohort of victim-survivors, and being able to provide a bespoke and sensitive sort of service to them that meets their needs is absolutely paramount. We provide ongoing funding to organisations called Switchboard Victoria, Thorne Harbour Health and Drummond Street Services. Thorne Harbour Health I have met with before, and they are particularly interested in this space. One of the things actually they were speaking about is the way that perpetrators are evolving the use of technology to be able to continue to commit family or sexual violence in a way that I think we need to be able to adapt our service provision to be able to support LGBTIQ+ victim-survivors there as well.

Lauren KATHAGE: Thank you.

Melissa HORNE: Anything you want to add there, Mel?

Melanie HEENAN: Just that there is going to be some further investment in some prevention-focused work for the community. I think it is just days away, but it will be a really important investment that really looks at preventing violence against LGBTIQ+ communities, particularly at this point where communities have been facing terrible instances of increasing violence and vilification.

Lauren KATHAGE: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Going back to Ms Benham.

Jade BENHAM: You surprise me again. The ‘Department Performance Statement’, page 51 – performance measures on that page show the average waiting time for long-term social housing for those who have received priority access housing or a priority transfer allocation. In last year’s budget paper the same measure – you assume it is the same measure – included the words ‘due to family violence’. Can you confirm that it is the same measure and that it still relates to family violence?

Peta McCAMMON: I will just double-check which – sorry, Minister, if that is okay.

Melissa HORNE: Go for it.

Peta McCAMMON: I will just double-check whether you are referring to the housing. What page number was that?

Jade BENHAM: 51.

Peta McCAMMON: 51. You referred there to the wait time for social housing.

Jade BENHAM: Yes. But that line item that is four down says 'Timeliness'. Last year it said: 'Average waiting time for long-term social housing for clients who have received a priority access housing or priority transfer allocation due to family violence.' In this year's budget paper the 'due to family violence' has been removed. I just want to make sure that that is the same measure we are talking about.

Peta McCAMMON: Given it sits within the housing portfolio, it is probably better for when the housing minister is here. I just feel it is really difficult to answer here with the minister for family violence when it is actually the responsibility of the minister for housing.

Jade BENHAM: So there is no oversight?

Peta McCAMMON: I would not dispute that a driver of social housing demand is family violence. I do not dispute that. Whether the change in the wording – I guess from my point of view as the Secretary this measure is still measuring the timeliness around social housing, and we know a key driver of demand for social housing is family violence. But there is not a change in the way that the social housing portfolio is counting that, if that makes sense.

Jade BENHAM: Yes.

Peta McCAMMON: I just feel a little bit uncomfortable veering into the minister for housing's portfolio, but I want to be helpful.

Jade BENHAM: Can you just clarify? Again, I am happy to take that on notice.

Peta McCAMMON: Yes.

Jade BENHAM: Just looking at wait times, the average wait time last year was 17.2 months, which is a long time. This year it is expected to be 18.1, so it is getting longer. Why the delays?

Peta McCAMMON: Again, this is a measure that is the responsibility of the minister for housing, in terms of which I think we did traverse some of this in the housing hearing. I am happy, though, to provide the committee information around other accommodation options that sit with –

Jade BENHAM: I am getting to that.

Peta McCAMMON: Okay. All right.

Jade BENHAM: Eighteen months is a long, long time. How many families – parents, children, victim-survivors – have spent more than a week in a motel?

Melanie HEENAN: I can give you the information, Ms Benham, on any given night how many households do stay in a motel.

Jade BENHAM: Yes.

Melanie HEENAN: We do not have the duration of that stay in motels. That is because victim-survivors and families can stay in motels for very different amounts of time. It could be two days while CCTV is being installed at their home through a personal safety initiative. It could be that they are waiting for a refuge placement. It could be that they are getting a tech sweep so that they can then go into a refuge.

Jade BENHAM: But you would know if there have been stays of a week, more than two weeks et cetera. Can I have those metrics, please?

Melanie HEENAN: I do not have them with me.

Jade BENHAM: Okay. But you can provide that?

Melanie HEENAN: If we can provide it, we will provide it.

Jade BENHAM: Okay, great. Do you know the longest period a parent with a child has stayed in a motel?

Melanie HEENAN: I do not.

Jade BENHAM: You do not collect that data?

Melanie HEENAN: I do not have it with me in terms of the duration of stays at motels. They are –

Richard Riordan interjected.

Melanie HEENAN: I am sorry?

Richard RIORDAN: I just said it could be a very long time.

Melanie HEENAN: My understanding is that on average they would be much more fleeting periods of time – and by ‘fleeting’ I am saying weeks, certainly not months in most circumstances. There might be some outlying circumstances where a family may need to stay in a motel for a longer period, but there will be extenuating circumstances around that or some very particular circumstances. It could be about waiting to get into a refuge. It could be –

Jade BENHAM: It would have raised a red flag, though, if there was a long period of time. Someone would know the longest period of time a parent and child have stayed in a motel.

Melanie HEENAN: I think, Ms Benham, what would be happening, though, because we in Victoria have the family violence crisis response model – so that is where family violence case management is providing face-to-face support for people, for victim-survivors and families in motels – case managers would be working very, very closely with a family if there are circumstances –

Jade BENHAM: No doubt – case managers have a hugely tough job. We are just trying to get to what the issue is with housing and how long women in particular and children are having to stay in motels, particularly in rural areas where the lack of housing is profound. And if it is a matter of different departments and different agencies working in silos and not communicating what is going on there – we are just trying to get some data to have a broader look at the situation.

Melanie HEENAN: I understand, Ms Benham. I think probably, though, that the segue for a family that is experiencing family violence would not be from hotels into social housing. Refuges and some of the shorter term accommodation options that are available as emergency accommodation –

Jade BENHAM: Sometimes motels are the only option. We know that.

Melanie HEENAN: Oh, it may well be, but it is rarer to have a family that would go from a motel stay into social housing. It is not impossible.

Jade BENHAM: Where would they go, from a motel?

Melanie HEENAN: From a motel? Well, it could be that it is because there is work being done to keep the family safe at home.

Jade BENHAM: What if they do not want to go home?

Melanie HEENAN: Then a refuge would generally be the place that would be the most appropriate if the family is willing to go into protective hiding, because refuge is a very particular form of emergency accommodation.

Jade BENHAM: So if they are out in a regional area and they do not want to return home, because obviously the perpetrator knows where that is, and they do not want to go to a refuge, what is the option?

Melanie HEENAN: There would be other short-term accommodation options that a case manager would be doing everything they could to look at an option that would be tailored or nuanced to the particular circumstances for families. There is no question that the challenges in relation to social housing and being able to exit family violence victims into housing are significant.

Jade BENHAM: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you. I will go to Mr Tak.

Meng Heang TAK: Thank you, Chair, Minister and Secretary. Through you, Minister, I refer to budget paper 3, pages 37 and 40, the ‘Central information point’. It is the key of Victoria’s family violence response system, which helps frontline workers access critical information to better assess and manage risks, and this also includes the risk-relevant information about people using family violence from Victoria Police, corrections, the Magistrates Court and child protection. So through you, Minister, to the Secretary or Ms Heenan, can you explain the role the central information point plays in keeping victim-survivors safe and holding the perpetrators to account?

Melissa HORNE: Thank you very much, Mr Tak. Without a doubt, there was a significant funding commitment in this year’s and next year’s budget to the central information point. In stuffing my head full of content in this portfolio over the last few weeks, it was raised with me what the central information point does, and I said, ‘Oh, I’ll need to go and have a look at that and see what it does.’ And it is a bespoke system that has been built by DFFH in order to help frontline workers be able to access that critical information to be able to better assess and manage risk. And very much so this is a portfolio that is so based around risk management and being able to do that assessment, so this is part of that response mechanism, and it is a flagship out of the royal commission 10 years ago into family violence.

This is a nation-leading model that is about preventing family violence. What it does is effectively it scrapes data from a range of different sources about people using family violence. It might pull stuff from Victoria Police and, as Ms Benham was saying, pull information about the L17s. It will pull information from Corrections Victoria and it will pull information from the Magistrates Court and the Children’s Court and child protection to be able to mash it up into a single report so that when a case manager is trying to make that risk assessment they can actually get all this data into one point. It sounds simple, but it is actually incredibly complex. Being able to pull that all together – I think there are 60-odd members of the workforce able to do that at any one time, and they have got some clear metrics around how quickly they provide that information as well. It depends on that level of risk that they can see. That actually really helps those frontline workers to say things like, ‘Well, hang on. Here is what the L17 report says. We know that someone has got firearms in their house. Here is where there’s been multiple reports of things.’ Talking to the team down there, they are so proud of the work that they have been able to do to build this system. How quickly they can respond to those complex cases is really good to continue to invest in over this budget and the next.

Meng Heang TAK: Thank you. Did you have anything further to add?

Peta McCAMMON: I might just add, to build on what the minister was saying, that in terms of the evaluations of the work, in 2023 there was a survey of 297 frontline family violence workers that found that 82 per cent said the CIP report prevented family violence incidents and facilitated earlier intervention, 79 per cent said they assessed the victim-survivor to be at a higher risk level based on the CIP report and 100 per cent said the CIP report helped them to better understand the person using violence’s family violence history and current risk. There was also a 2023 independent evaluation of the CIP program that found that CIP generates economic benefits for government and communities by averting cases of family violence through higher quality risk assessments, averting cases of family violence through the rehabilitation of people using family violence and additional processing of family violence cases through a reduction in the request backlog. The economic benefits equated to avoided costs of between \$3.70 and \$5.70 across justice, housing, health and child protection portfolios for every dollar invested in the CIP.

Meng Heang TAK: Thank you. Minister, again through you, the central information points also provide frontline workers with critical risk relevant information to support safety, planning and decision-making, which you have already touched on a little bit. Minister, could you explain how information obtained through the central information points supports practitioners to inform MARAM’s risk assessment and better response to family violence risk?

Melissa HORNE: Thank you again. It is one of those things that absolutely provides that multifaceted view on what the perpetrator looks like and what the risk is as well. It fits very comfortably as well with our nation-leading work with the MARAM assessments, the multi-agency risk management profiles, which actually pull

together all the data. Again, this is something that has come out of the royal commission and is nation leading. With the MARAM risk reporting and the assessment process that goes on, we have had that in place now for a considerable period of time, but we are not stopping there. We are now actually also applying that to children rather than just having a look at the victim-survivor, because the more data that you can actually determine and make those assessments about what the risk is, the more data you can actually approach to keep people safe. When we are moving into an online way of abusing people, it is important to keep up.

Meng Heang TAK: Thank you, Minister.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Tak. Mr Puglielli.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you, Chair. Good evening, Minister and officials. Looking at the 'Department Performance Statement', page 43, 'Primary prevention of family violence', the target for participation in funded primary prevention programs has dropped by more than 10,000 people, yet we are seeing family violence incidents in 2025 were the second highest on record. Victim reports of sexual offences increased by 15.9 per cent. Can I ask: given that we continue to see these shocking figures and we continue to see an increase in women and their children dying at the hands of their partners, can the department tell us what it expects this drop of the participation target represents in what we are seeing of those family violence incident rates?

Melissa HORNE: Just so I am clear, it is in the primary prevention of family violence measures.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Page 43.

Melissa HORNE: Page 43, yes. Primary prevention programs.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: It is the top of that second step.

Melissa HORNE: It is this one, Mel.

Melanie HEENAN: Yes, thank you. I can speak to that, Minister. I think probably the most material change there, Mr Puglielli, will be that the supporting affirmative consent program of work was integrated into the Respectful Relationships education and non-education contexts. That was always to be a time-limited program of work because it was supporting a legislative change around a more communicative model of consent. So there were the 13 programs that SASVic – Sexual Assault Services Victoria, the peak body – was involved in kind of building a consortia almost of the kinds of programs that could run through supporting affirmative consent, but it was time limited. So that will be, I think, one of the most material impacts on completion of programs, because there were a number of different, quite specific modules, I guess, that were built around supporting affirmative consent. That would be the explanation, I think, for the large part.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Okay. So time limited and we have reached the end of that time that was allocated.

Melanie HEENAN: Correct.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Why haven't they been continued?

Melanie HEENAN: Why haven't they been continued? It was because the materials were built and there was always to be, as with most legislative change, a period through which –and I think it was extended by a year beyond what the original intent was – the education piece was to be embedded into existing modules and existing education contexts rather than have a very specific focus on affirmative consent. But my understanding is that SASVic and none of the providers had expected that that would continue. They certainly did some good work, and we have been trying to ensure that we gather that work and make sure that it is integrated into the other education settings that primary prevention work is happening. And definitely in the Respectful Relationships curriculum, affirmative consent is now going to be built in to the work that they do with young people.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Okay. Thank you. Thank you for that explanation. I will move on. Can the department tell us how many victim-survivors are turned away, placed on waiting lists or receive no ongoing service after initial contact because family violence services are unable to meet demand? Is that a data set that is recorded by the department?

Melanie HEENAN: It is not, Mr Puglielli. I do not think anybody would be turned away. So I guess that is the absolute extraordinary outcome of having a network now of Orange Doors that now have 18 primary sites, 19 access points and 35 outposts. It is an extraordinary network and web of entry points for victim-survivors of family violence, but also for families with child wellbeing or developmental concerns. There is an absolute no wrong door policy in that context around the Orange Door, and that is, I guess, the beauty of what the royal commission did when they set that flagship recommendation around an integrated model of intake, is that there would not be a turn away opportunity because of demand or because they were full. There is no such thing as closing the door.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you. The 'Department Performance Statement', page 42, states that 40 per cent of victim-survivors seeking a refuge response did not receive this support. Is that due to a lack of capacity?

Melanie HEENAN: I can answer that too, Minister. It is definitely a reflection of knowing that we have not got full supply, but we set it at 60 per cent because there is an eligibility and prioritisation process that occurs with refuges. Safe Steps holds the family violence accommodation register and it also, along with refuge providers, works to a refuge eligibility and prioritisation framework. It may be that even though a case manager is thinking that a refuge might be the best option, it may not be once they explore it further, i.e. the family may say, 'We are not prepared to go into protective hiding and come out of our community. What else could you do for me?' But there is no question that we need more refuges in the system and we have those builds to come. It is almost counterintuitive to set a performance measure at 60 per cent, so I understand why it draws attention.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: You have talked about things not being at full supply. Is there some projection that the department can share about how much more funding would be required to reach full supply? How far away are we from there?

Melissa HORNE: I think that is still in hypotheticals to a certain extent, isn't it, because what we are seeing as well is an increase in demand. We are seeing an increase in perpetration that is going on. So I do not know if that is necessarily a helpful thing. What we can talk about, though, is the refuges that we have built and that are continuing to be underway.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Okay. Thank you. Are you able to tell the committee what the current average wait times for placement into a family violence refuge in Victoria are, and is that able to be disaggregated between metropolitan and regional?

Melanie HEENAN: I do not believe it will be able to be provided, Mr Puglielli. I understand why you would be asking that question. It is because there are so many different accommodation options too, so when you say wait times, it may be and in fact it would be that if somebody is in a motel, they are waiting for a refuge, potentially – it could be a whole range of other reasons that they are being accommodated in a motel – but it is because of those very diverse range of reasons that it would be difficult to get that.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you. We are going to go to Mr Hilakari.

Mathew HILAKARI: Thank you, Minister and officials, for your attendance this evening. Minister and Ms Heenan particularly, I thank you for exploring those topics around refuges a moment ago and this entire session. I think one of the important things that we do at PAEC is to try and delve a little bit behind the numbers, and that answer then particularly gave this committee some insight, so I hope that appears in the final report.

Minister, I have got a question on slide 4 of your presentation around the strengthening women's safety package. It is a multi-department effort, as listed on the slide there. And for those people at home, that is across DFFH and DJCS co-led initiatives, as well as five initiatives by DJCS and a couple of initiatives led by the Department of Education. There is real breadth of effort, and it shows that government-wide effort in this area. Minister, I am hoping you can talk to how some of these initiatives have worked to address the underlying drivers of family and sexual violence that we are seeking to address through this budget and previous budgets.

Melissa HORNE: Thank you very much. As you can appreciate, the women's safety package is a suite of initiatives that we are really proud of being able to do and being able to attack it from a multifaceted sort of

response. One of the examples in which we have committed \$9.8 million, and recently I announced \$3.7 million as part of that total, up in Ballarat is the Respect Ballarat saturation model. Now, I am still learning a lot of the specific language around this, but it is actually a model that does not appear anywhere else in the world. It is a model where the entire community comes together to be able to say, 'How do we tackle family violence?' It was born out of the hideous loss of three women's lives in 2024: Samantha Murphy, Rebecca Young and Hannah McGuire. And I met Hannah McGuire's parents up in Ballarat actually. This is one part of the women's safety package that has a look at 'Well, what can we actually do to provide education packages for parenting?' One of the groups that had received funding for trialling an event, a program, up in Ballarat was baby makes safe. They had gone out and they had scoured the world for a program that does something like that, and they picked up a model from the UK that had – and I cannot remember it off the top of my head – the most astonishing metrics of behavioural change. They have picked that up and are going to start implementing that in Ballarat.

Mathew HILAKARI: So we can be both at the one time – leading the world in Ballarat in that sort of effort but then also looking into those services that we know work. I think that really speaks well to our willingness to go out there, find those great things that work, pick them up and then bring them forward at home. Minister, I can see at this point in time you are coughing. Ms Heenan, are you happy to talk a little bit more about some of those other efforts in Ballarat?

Melanie HEENAN: Of course. In Ballarat, yes, I think the Ballarat saturation model, or Respect Ballarat as it has come to be known, is going to be testing some incredible initiatives, including the one that the minister has referenced. It will focus on priority groups within that community, and the whole community is getting around this initiative. It is extraordinary, and as the minister said, something that the community is really proud of. We are very privileged to be able to see a full investment of a saturation model given what it will mean for the community to be all engaged in the different work that will be happening across community sports, across early intervention – children and young people – and in workplaces. Everyone is very interested in and recognising what the potential for this program is, so we are very, very excited about that work. There is a lot of other prevention work that is also important, not solely just in the Ballarat context but through the women's safety package as well.

Mathew HILAKARI: I know, of course. Absolutely. On Ballarat itself, when do we start to see some of the metrics and results come through, or are they already coming through as a bit of an ongoing assessment of that?

Melanie HEENAN: Thank you. Respect Victoria, who is leading the initiative, is doing an evaluation. It will be the first of its kind, so in some ways they are needing to evaluate almost the process of doing it –

Mathew HILAKARI: You are writing the evaluation as well.

Melanie HEENAN: Yes, and it is a tough ask to be able to get the level of sensitive measures of change. But they are really pressing as hard as they can into every crevice they can to be able to measure from a from-what-to-what scenario in Respect Ballarat, because it is the kind of initiative that other communities will be interested in having a go at I think in time. It will be really important at both a process and an impact level to look at what has been able to be achieved with Respect Ballarat. As the minister says, with the grants and the programs being developed now and rolling out, and most of the programs are tried and tested so we know they work, some of them are newer, so there is an opportunity to test them through the process. But we have got the opportunity to load up this community and really see what the outcomes are in relation to both attitudes and behaviours. I think it is probably a steep ask to see reductions. In fact probably what we will see is people being more confident to come forward and get support.

Mathew HILAKARI: Great. That is fantastic. Minister, in terms of boosting response and recovery services for women, children and young people, I am just hoping you could talk to some of the efforts and activities in that space as well.

Melissa HORNE: Of the recovery things? Well, there are a multitude of things happening there as well. Thank you, Mr Hilakari. Some of it is a lot about behavioural change. Some of it is also about access to legal services. There is an enormous amount of work going on in that space to be able to support women and children in particular navigating their way through that system.

Mathew HILAKARI: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Minister and officials, thank you very much for appearing before the committee this evening. The committee will follow up on any questions taken on notice in writing, and responses are required within five working days of committee's request.

The committee will take a short break before beginning its consideration of the portfolio of ports and freight at 7:15 pm. I declare this hearing adjourned.

Witnesses withdrew.