

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY LEGAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into capturing data on family violence perpetrators in Victoria

Melbourne—Monday 5 August 2024

MEMBERS

Ella George – Chair

Annabelle Cleeland – Deputy Chair

Chris Couzens

Chris Crewther

Cindy McLeish

Meng Heang Tak

Jackson Taylor

WITNESSES

Rasha Abbas, Chief Executive Officer, and

Felicity Fast, Executive Manager, Government, Corporate Relations and Growth, inTouch;

Vivienne Nguyen, Chairperson, Victorian Multicultural Commission; and

Sameera Fieldgrass, Practice Leader, Sector and Community Partnerships, Centre for Multicultural Youth.

The CHAIR: Good afternoon. My name is Ella George, and I am the Chair of the Legislative Assembly's Legal and Social Issues Committee. We will now resume a public hearing of the Committee's Inquiry into Capturing Data on Family Violence Perpetrators in Victoria.

I am joined today by my colleagues the Member for Bayswater Jackson Taylor, the Member for Geelong Christine Couzens, the Deputy Chair and Member for Euroa Annabelle Cleeland and the Member for Mornington Chris Crewther. Meng Heang Tak, the Member for Clarinda, will be joining us shortly.

Thank you to our witnesses who have appeared before our inquiry so far today, and thank you to the witnesses that we are about to hear from. We recognise that evidence to this inquiry may be distressing and urge people to reach out for support. You can contact Lifeline on 13 11 14, 1800RESPECT or the Blue Knot helpline on 1300 657 380.

All evidence being given today is being recorded by Hansard and broadcast live. While all evidence taken by the Committee is protected by parliamentary privilege, comments repeated outside this hearing may not be protected by this privilege. Witnesses will be provided with a proof version of today's transcript to check, together with any questions taken on notice. Verified transcripts, responses to questions taken on notice and other documents provided during the hearing will be published on the Committee's website.

I now am very pleased to welcome Sameera Fieldgrass from the Centre for Multicultural Youth; Vivienne Nguyen, the Chairperson of the Victorian Multicultural Commission; and Rasha Abbas from inTouch multicultural centre. Thank you very much for joining us today. I invite you to make a statement of around 10 minutes long. This will be followed by questions from members. Thank you.

Vivienne NGUYEN: Good afternoon, Chair, and thank you very much for giving us the opportunity to present today. I would like to begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which we are gathered and pay my respect to their elders past and present. I acknowledge any Aboriginal elders who are joining us here this afternoon.

I express my appreciation to the Victorian government and the Legal and Social Issues Committee for the work that you are undertaking. I will make a few points, and I will point to our respective members, from inTouch, Rasha, and from CMY, Sameera, for further comments in our opening 10-minute remarks.

Today we want to support funding models and resources allocation to embed the role of multicultural and ethnospecific organisations in the continuum of service delivery from education, awareness, prevention, early intervention, specialist, crisis and enduring recovery in the portfolio or policy area of family violence. We request embedding lived experience and expertise in policy design, systems thinking, implementation and ongoing evaluation. We support more funding and investment in data collection, storage and sharing. We support a consistent approach to data collection, particularly for culturally and linguistically diverse people, systems implementation and enforcement of a national family violence framework, definitions and models to support consistent data collection and sharing across jurisdictions, noting that nuance is required and noting that there are risks around data and around cybersecurity.

We recognise the impact of insufficient data on those in need and the insufficient or lack of ongoing funding allocation to providers. We know data is critical to resource allocation, and limited data on the cultural, linguistic and racial background of the family or domestic or sexual violence perpetrators impacts on service system design, delivery and funding decisions for multicultural communities. We need to capture the data that can be used. Agencies need to have the training and resources required to effectively identify and capture demographic data in a nuanced way. We know that the vicious cycle continues, as it has for many years, and is reaching a critical point when insufficient data is available, making it very difficult for government to invest.

I know that Rasha from inTouch can provide further information, but she tells us that at least one-third of clients from InTouch are misidentified. We will also offer opportunities to improve data collection processes and practices from our representatives later in this presentation. We support agencies collecting family violence data on perpetration by enhancing cultural awareness training to assist in accurate identification and collection of relevant information to address the risk of bias.

We believe attention must be given to young people via reviews of screening and early identification of young people who are using violence and information sharing across services working with this cohort to improve early intervention and prevention, and from CMY Sameera can provide further information. Perhaps I will hand it over to you, Rasha, for any other comments you would like to make before we hand it back to the Committee.

Rasha ABBAS: Thank you, everyone. I think we wanted to open it for questions. We have obviously a lot of detail under each of those categories. Rather than saying anything, we will just respond to your questions I think.

The CHAIR: Great. Thank you very much. The first question I have is probably one for you, Rasha. Vivienne mentioned in the opening statement that one-third of your clients at inTouch are misidentified. I am wondering if you could expand on that, please.

Rasha ABBAS: Yes, I will. I actually would like to start by acknowledging the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders people as the First Nations and the first inhabitants of this nation and the Wurundjeri people who are the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet. I pay my respects to elders past and present.

I also want to acknowledge the countless women who have experienced family violence, in particular women from migrant and refugee backgrounds. We recognise the courageous path that they have travelled to rebuild their lives and we honour their stories, which continue to inspire and drive our work.

Misidentification is a significant issue for us. One-third of inTouch clients have been misidentified. It takes several forms. The issue with it is not only are they misidentified but even when we recognise that they have been misidentified, it takes a long time for the system to actually correct it, which means that they do end up with significant issues—losing access to their children, complexity of court systems et cetera. I asked the team to give me an example. I will actually read that example because it brings it to life. In this case the husband went to the police station and stated that our client, the wife, had threatened to kill herself and the child, a four-year-old child. He made allegations that our client had committed family violence. Our client says that it was the husband who actually committed the family violence. Police then applied an IVO to protect the husband and child from our client, who was mis-ID'd. Police came to the house at 9 pm and took her out at night. Our client was separated from her child, and she was taken to a refuge. Child protection was involved, but it was difficult to get access to the child. Contact was facilitated by child protection, but only on very few occasions for very short periods of time. The client does not speak English and found it hard to access legal services. She was referred to a duty lawyer, but what she needed was a lawyer who could make an application to vary the IVO and also to make an application to the Family Court and Federal Court of Australia. Making an application to the Family Court requires an intensive legal support process. It takes a long time. I know that the lawyers we have at inTouch take a significant amount of time to do those applications. The duty lawyer services were not able to do that; they do not have that time. Even the court and the police recognised that it was a misidentification. It still took a very long time to rectify, and that meant that she was separated from her child for an extended period of time.

The systems do not talk to each other. MARAM is not updated, the police system is not updated and the court system—I spoke to a magistrate. She said to me it was very difficult because she recognised that the client was misidentified but until the systems are updated their hands are tied. It is a significant issue and has significant consequences. A lot of it has to do with also how we then can capture the data and help some of those services recognise these things to start with so that when they are attending, when they have these things happening, they can actually query more and understand a bit more to avoid that issue. That data capture at the start is a critical one to get right.

The CHAIR: Okay, thank you. Would anybody else like to add to the theme of misidentification while we are on this topic?

Vivienne NGUYEN: I just want to draw attention to the data collection by the Victoria Police under the PUV and the classification that refers to 'ethnic appearance'. I think we could do a lot better with capturing the data, because it is very difficult to identify a person of ethnic appearance and what that means. There are, we believe, some opportunities to improve the existing systems to help with data capture at the moment and to enable different agencies to have access to the data to support them, particularly those agencies that are in the

communities that have the understanding, the connections and the relationships but need the training to be able to be at a certain level where they can access the data to support the likes of inTouch in providing support to the women. There are some of those very basic elements that we believe, from the Victorian Multicultural Commission's perspective, the various data systems that are currently in place can really be improved on with those little improvements, not necessarily requiring a great deal of investment but giving a fair bit of efficiency in the system.

The CHAIR: Thank you.

Rasha ABBAS: I think the only other thing maybe to add is that the language barrier is significant, and we must recognise what is required there because we have had several cases where they, for example, relied on the perpetrator, the husband, to translate instead of having translation services, so even that level of basic stuff in terms of being able to capture the data correctly and ensuring that you have accurate representation.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Annabelle.

Annabelle CLEELAND: Further to your comments just then, Vivienne, about the data collection in the process, what do you see as those practical measures? How would you see a database working, and what services would contribute and have access to that? How would they be used?

Vivienne NGUYEN: I think there are a number of avenues that we could look at. There are at the moment different databases that the Victorian Government, through Family Safety Victoria, provides. There is also training that Family Safety Victoria, or the government, provides as well. A couple of things first: I think it is good for the providers, so the people in the system, to know what databases are available and who can access them. There are at the moment very limited organisations that can access the database from Victoria Police, for example. Unless you are connected to Orange Door, you might not be able to access the data. There are many community organisations that are in the service continuum of family, domestic and sexual violence, but they (1) are not funded and (2) are not part of the system. Therefore by the time they have the sufficient data to be able to do anything with it, the victims—mostly the women, the children—have already been suffering by a long distance. We think that there are opportunities for the key providers or the system to know where the databases are, who is collecting what and who can currently access them. Have some level of consistency around the definitions, the services, so that we can understand what terminology applies to what situations. We think that providing support and resources for training, so that staff and people know and understand and can access and share the data accurately and in a timely way, is also important. They are just the three key basic elements that I think can be done that will improve a great deal in terms of the efficiency and the timeliness of data and can actually help the women and the children.

Annabelle CLEELAND: Thank you. Can we have a supplement that is related to the same question?

The CHAIR: Yes.

Annabelle CLEELAND: Do you access or share data currently?

Vivienne NGUYEN: The Victorian Multicultural Commission does not provide programs. What we advocate for are some consistent datasets around data collection. We advocate for the sharing of information. We advocate for multicultural and ethnospecific organisations to be part of the service delivery. Many of them do amazing work, but so much is on a voluntary basis and, sadly, based on the survivors. The women who survive the situations come back to the system and support other women. We think that is very unjust and really needs to be addressed. In fact we had a forum with the minister for family violence back in March, and the women who took part in this research were from back in 2014, when the issue was around volunteering and doing work by the survivors in the multicultural and faith communities. It felt like nothing has changed from 2014 to 2024. We have asked for that to be reviewed, because we hear that all the time. We think that there should be some more evidence-based approaches to the funding models in this portfolio, particularly in the early intervention and the education. And as you look at the male perpetrator and the attitudes and so on, a lot of that could be done in the earlier part of the continuum, before they become victims.

Rasha ABBAS: I think, maybe to add to Vivienne's point about data capture, in terms of the consistency and the standardisation at a national level we do see a lot of clients that move between different states, and we have a major issue around just that standardisation. We do recommend following the ABS—the bureau of

statistics—framework. But also to capture it in a standardised way and capture it in a way that is more usable and does not stop at the ‘Who are you? Where did it happen?’ but actually the how and why—so a lot more of that information that actually allows us to go deeper. So standardising what we capture and extending it so we have more insights into what we are capturing and making sure that it is not captured in a way that ends up with any racial, cultural, religious profiling and in a way that can impact how the services can be biased in their approach—it is multipronged.

Finally, I am a technologist in my background, so I am guilty of that, but it is about how we capture the data in a way that is actually usable. I stepped into this sector, and the jaw drops often when I sit with the caseworkers because the data is not structured. It is messy. It is actually really hard to use. There is a lot of opportunity if we are starting to digitise a lot of the processes, and there is a huge opportunity to digitise the processes. You then start capturing the data from the start in a way that is a lot more usable. We can interrogate it, we can use it and we can share it in a more insightful way. So I do not think it is more data; it is a more clever way of how you capture and use the data.

Annabelle CLEELAND: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Christine.

Chris COUZENS: Thank you all for coming along today. We really appreciate your time and your written submission as well. My question is probably more for Sameera. What does better screening and early identification for young people who are using violence actually look like, and what are your thoughts on that?

Sameera FIELDGRASS: Thank you. I too would like to acknowledge that we are meeting on sacred lands today, the land of the Wurundjeri people, and I want to acknowledge that sovereignty was never ceded. These always were and always will remain Aboriginal lands. Thank you for your question. I think one of the things Rasha and Viv have pointed out is, for us as a multicultural youth organisation, what we are often finding is there are sets of data for children, there are sets of data for women victim-survivors and young people are often missing in that link. When the MARAM came out, a fabulous tool, we all breathed a sigh of fresh air because it was about information sharing at its best amongst organisations. What we found on the ground was that information was not being shared to organisations like us who do not meet that requirement at a tier 1 specialist service. So when we spoke in our submission about the collection of early information on families, for example, if a family is known to the child protection system—is known to a tier 1 specialist service—that information is being filtered down, like Rasha said, in a relevant way. Obviously we recognise there is some information we would not be privy to, but where there is risk identified, particularly around young people as victim-survivors in their own right and for our work as well where young people are starting to enact harm within the home, that information could be shared with NGOs and youth-based organisations such as ourselves.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Chris.

Chris CREWETHER: Thank you, Chair. Thank you for your evidence and your time today. I asked a few questions relating to the Orange Door with SAS Vic, who spoke earlier, and others. Do you have a close working relationship with Orange Door, and can you elaborate on your liaison, interactions and cooperation with them? Are there any areas for improvement, particularly as it relates to the CALD communities?

Rasha ABBAS: I am happy to start. We do a lot of work with the Orange Door. A significant portion of our referrals come from the Orange Door. I think there are a lot of great things about it and there is always room for improvement. I think there is a good partnership in terms of that request for information. So we submit information. Unfortunately, like Sameera said, information is not shared with us. We do not have access to things like CIP, for example, which is quite critical for us to have. But we have to submit a request for information, and with the Orange Door there is a lot more consistency, I think, in getting it. With other services we do not, which we can come back to later.

There is, though, still an issue where the amount of work required is significant. We have found sometimes that some of those services, including the Orange Door, will advise the victims or the perpetrators to come directly to InTouch to actually become self-referred, which is not the preference obviously. When we go to systems and data sharing, a lot of the information is shared in the form of PDFs or in data that is actually not usable, which is a whole waste of the system—the team would actually have to re-enter the whole information again. So things like a shared MARAM—they have done the MARAM and it is high quality. They are specialists. It

comes to us and we have to redo a lot of the work or enter it manually. So a concept of a shared MARAM that the services can all access would go a long way to help but that is kind of one of the issues when we have different systems.

The Orange Door have a different system that they are using. We use SHIP in terms of our casework or IRIS for our perpetrator programs. Those systems do not talk to each other, and it is crazy in 2024 how much they are completely isolated. There is no API capability. They are really, really isolated. They are all welcome to come and visit inTouch and sit with some of the caseworkers to see the amount of manual work that we do that is not value-added. It is time that they should be spending with the clients, and it is a really painful thing to see.

There is a lot of work with the Orange Door. The other thing is early or better referral pathways, I would say. Often the people who know about us can refer those clients to the specialists, like the language and culture services. We can help them more, and the earlier the better. Sometimes that is not recognised or understood early enough, so we have the clients referred to us too late in the process, after there have been some more issues with child protection or with certain agreements where the client might have agreed to something that is actually not in their interest. So I think better referral partnerships and pathways would be an opportunity for improvement as well, but the systems would be a huge one to improve on.

Sameera FIELDGRASS: Chris, I can add to what you said as well. I feel that for us at CMY there are two major blocks to that data. I feel where we do work with the Orange Door they are fabulous, and I think information sharing works really well to manage risk and to safeguard. However, like Rasha said, by the point a referral has got to the Orange Door it is often at crisis level, and that it is only for the referrals that do go to the Orange Door. I know when we are doing groundwork with our communities, our young people and our families would never in a million years access a service like the Orange Door because of the stigma, the shame that comes with that, let alone knowing that they are a service that can help. Like Rasha said, if that information was available to communities earlier and they were aware of what that entails and they could possibly come through an organisation where they have built those great relationships and trust that that information can be shared, I feel that would bridge the gap between what is lost in data with services like the Orange Door and ours.

I feel there is also the question of, like Rasha said, how that data is being captured. We said in our submission that when you are reducing children, young people and families to decimal points and very narrow definitions of what data is, you are missing some of that nuance with our multicultural families. There is a lot of stuff around language. There is a lot of stuff around how multicultural communities define what family violence is. We found during a lot of our research that when we were using terms like 'family violence perpetrators' it was lost on our communities. However, if we switched the language and spoke about harm and safety, you would get a lot more richer data. So I feel that comes back down to training of our ground staff and around that communication system between how tier 1 services are asking questions and how we on the ground ask questions as well.

Vivienne NGUYEN: Our interaction with Orange Door is slightly different in the sense that we advocate for the communities who are in need of family violence support to go to Orange Door. However, the way that the services are introduced to the multicultural and faith communities is often through a media release and without further support for the community members who are able to understand what it is. For some people an Orange Door is literally an orange door. They do not see an orange colour; they do not know where that is. So there is a bit more work that we believe should come through when an Orange Door is introduced into a particular geographic area.

And further to the points that both Sameera and Rasha have mentioned, it does bring shame to people. Even if they know that it is a service that they can access, they may choose to go to a community organisation before they can then be referred to an Orange Door specialist service. That is why one of our core advocacy points is about making sure that the service system includes organisations that can provide the referral or the training or the education to be able to support the client so the people who need the support do come through in slightly nuanced ways instead of just 'If I need family violence support, I go straight to an Orange Door'. It does not work like that in the multicultural and faith communities. And that is one of our core advocacies, to make sure that (1) the communities are aware of who Orange Door is and what they do and (2) if there are other nuanced ways that communities can access Orange Door through, for example, other community organisations who at the moment are not part of the funding models. And they should be.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Heang.

Meng Heang TAK: Thank you, Chair. To the chair of VMC, I guess I go to your points about a community organisation. In your submission VMC believes that there is a bigger role for multicultural service providers in education, prevention, early intervention, referral and also the specialist services as complementary to the mainstream service providers. Can you tell us more about that?

Vivienne NGUYEN: Thank you for the question. A core remit of the Victorian Multicultural Commission is to work with multicultural and multifaith service providers and community organisations. We do believe that with the increasing diversity of the Victorian population—and I would love to be proven wrong—it is very difficult and almost impossible for the government to be able to know everything about a particular community. So if you then take the next level, where government outsources certain functions and certain responsibilities and services to larger organisations, even with that cascading approach, community organisations still play a critical role—because they know their members, they have the trusted relationships and they communicate with each other in many nuanced ways that are not very easy for the system to be able to tap into. We saw that very clearly during the pandemic, where the community organisations played a critical role in informing, transferring and making sure that the communities (1) understood the messages and (2) followed the instructions from the messages from the government. So in that respect we believe communities need to be empowered to be able to make it their responsibility to educate each other, to inform and to prevent cases of domestic, family and sexual violence from occurring. When they do occur, then we have got the likes of inTouch, who we believe are also under-resourced to be able to do the work that they do. Just on the point of their clients being misidentified and the amount of work that flows on from there, the workforce do not actually gain qualifications—they go in and join an organisation and just do the reports and the data massaging and all of those sorts of things. That is a very big administrative burden. It prevents them from being able to work with their clients.

We believe that if we could take a better approach, a greater level of investment and priority in educating, raising awareness and preventing community members, people, from actually finding themselves in a family violence situation, that would be a much greater return on investment, in our opinion. It is not like it needs to be tested. It has already been tested, the role of the community organisations. We saw that in the pandemic. Perhaps we might need to systemise that and do a bit more work to make sure which work organisations you are going to fund and why. We understand that because there are many organisations it is hard for government to be able to work out, ‘Are we going to fund this organisation or that organisation? Oh, by the way, they’re from the same community, so how come they’re getting this and not other organisations?’ I get the complexity, but I think there is a real need for that to take place, because that will take, over the long term, a huge burden off the government, the system, from having to deal with the crisis. We can do a lot more with empowerment and early prevention and intervention.

Meng Heang TAK: Thank you, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Jackson.

Jackson TAYLOR: Thank you, Chair, and thank you all for coming today and for answering our questions. In the VMC submission it notes that current data collection focuses on intimate partner contexts in culturally and racially marginalised communities, and it then says family violence can be commonly perpetrated and experienced by related family members. What do you see as the issue with data collection, and how would you help to resolve some of the issues that you have identified?

Vivienne NGUYEN: When we talk about the nuanced raising of data collection, sometimes it can be that a woman lives in an extended family, and there might be a whole range of nuances that come with that. It is not just as straightforward a case as recording the actual perpetrator. There might be some other issues surrounding that that prevent a woman from being able to disclose full information. We think that is a bit of a nuanced way, which straight data collection might not be able to capture, and that is where again there is another point around having a workforce and organisations that have that cultural understanding to be able to help inform the qualitative aspects of the data collection. So that is what we think is helpful. Precisely how we would solve that for that problem, I do not have an answer for, but I think, as a starting point, getting the different systems to be able to talk to each other is one important thing, and I would imagine from a data point of view, Rasha, that it would not be that particularly difficult given the technological advancements that we have in 2024. So I think

the first thing is that would be a really important thing. The second thing is: how do we interpret the data that can help us? There is a fair bit of nuancing that is required in that—whether that then requires a more diverse workforce, allowing people who actually understand it to be able to be part of that discussion, and understanding and interpreting of the data to be able to work through the solution. I do not have the solution, unfortunately, Jackson, but I would love to be able to see the government invest in understanding that better.

Rasha ABBAS: Can I maybe build on Vivienne's points, because these are cases we see all the time. I just want to start by saying, because we are talking about the multicultural side of things, family violence is not specific to the racial or cultural points that we are discussing. It is just that for problem-solving, really understanding the nuance and understanding what we are dealing with is key to having effective solutions. And within the context of your question, it is the fact that often due to cultural or social reasons a lot of those women might be coming to the country new; they actually have no other connections in the country. They come and live in the parents' houses, so often we find that there is a level of complexity to the case that is requiring that cultural understanding.

Our caseworkers understand those contexts, and they probe and ask those questions and then recognise that actually it is not just the husband, it is actually the mother-in-law, it is the father-in-law, it is the brother-in-law. There is a lot more actually involved in a case. And just through training, through awareness, through understanding, through probing and actually understanding those cases, we often end up having to profile the case with multiple perpetrators and make sure that different caseworkers are involved to support, and it is literally just that awareness and being able to probe and ask those questions and recognise the complexity of it.

Jackson TAYLOR: Thank you, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Heang, you had another question?

Meng Heang TAK: Yes, just a supplementary question to any one of the witnesses. In terms of the multicultural communities, what opportunities exist for data to be collected informally from multicultural communities and young people in relation to family violence?

Sameera FIELDGRASS: Goodness—we do get the data, but I feel when we feed it back, it is so limited what we are being asked to collect that what we are sharing is not relevant in those instances. I think one of the things that jumped out to me is, like Rasha said at the beginning, all of our services, whether you are a specialist service, whether you are a grassroots organisation, have ways of collecting data, but when we are not speaking to one another we are doing our families a disservice. I can use the example that often when we are dealing with multicultural communities, who often have trauma histories, we are asking them to repeat their stories not just once but several times across organisations, so I feel that is one of the blocks.

So for me it is those informal conversations you could have if we were committed to sharing that data, if that makes sense. I feel often when it is a tick-box exercise—if a family is presenting for intake, for example, they might be asked certain questions. 'Are you experiencing family violence?' If it does not tick that box, that information is lost, whereas the likes of Rasha's organisation or our organisation are getting that data, but we are not being asked what we are collecting. So yes, I feel more robust conversations between organisations would allow for some of that nuance.

Rasha ABBAS: I think it is how it is captured. When I read the case notes that the caseworkers create, it is so rich in this why and how and that insight that we actually need, but it is buried in case notes. When you talk about data and actually trying to pick patterns so we can actually solve for these things properly, it is so hard to do it in case notes. Having said that, now with artificial intelligence you actually can, which is probably a separate point that I would make, as we are doing some of these reviews recognising some of the newer capabilities that are being introduced. So let us think a little bit ahead and make sure that when we are doing some of those changes in regulation we actually take into account some of that newer capability—that we should be able to actually pull a lot of that casework, run AI over it and identify some of the patterns. But at the moment within the limited capability that we have and how we do it, it is really hard, because it is buried in those case notes and it is very hard to actually identify. It is the same with the MARAM. The MARAM is also buried in those notes, and it is very hard to identify some of those patterns. So a bit more work is required so that we can design for capturing that data differently, because that will allow us to actually start thinking about it in a more systemic way rather than individual case by case.

The CHAIR: Thank you.

Meng Heang TAK: All right. Thank you. Thank you, Chair.

The CHAIR: Christine.

Chris COUZENS: I just want to ask a question around the men's behavioural programs. Is there a specific one in your communities, and if so, how is it working? And where do you see those improvements that are needed?

Rasha ABBAS: We run a men's behavioural change program. We call it Motivation for Change, and we run it in language and in culture. At the moment we run them mainly for Afghans and South Asians. The South Asian one is run in English and in—sorry, what was the language, Felicity?

Felicity FAST: Just give me a second.

Rasha ABBAS: It is in their language, but we run it in English as well. The Afghan one is in Dari, so it is specific to their language. That is really important, because to the point made earlier, for example, with Indian culture there is reference to family violence and it is understood as a concept, but for Afghans it actually is not there. The language used and how you do the training have to introduce some of those concepts for them. In those men's behavioural change programs the men involved cannot access mainstream services because they do not have the language, so there is a language barrier, and culturally they need those concepts introduced to them. Without those specialised in-language, in-culture programs, those men would miss out or would not be able to have the right intervention to support them. We would love to run it for a lot more cohorts because we can see that it is effective. We have close to, depending on the cohort, a 90% completion rate, which is unheard of in those programs. Largely because they are part of a group of men like them, they almost feel a sense of mentorship with each other and actually support each other. It is also both group work and casework, so there is more of that one-on-one work that is done with them. Because of what they feel, because of stigma or worry about how they are perceived, they might not share it in the group. They actually share it in that individual casework, and because of that we have that deeper level of work and that ability to change.

It is a 20-week program, so it is quite extensive. Having said that, I do not think it can stop at the 20 weeks. What we are missing is that ability to continue to do work with the men. I would love for us to actually continue that casework, to say, 'What happened a month after you left us, what happened in three months and what happened in six months and even a year?' I would love to go back and review what happened with six years worth of those programs, so you could give me funding to do that. That is what we need. I need that depth of insight for us to see what works. What happens to them five years later? Is it effective?

Then the other thing at the front of it is we are not given the data, because we are not a mandated program. I am doing a risk assessment to start with, and I want to make sure that the men who are picked to be part of the program actually have the aptitude for change and that this program will be used, because we do not have a lot of capacity, for the men who will benefit from it the most. Yet I am only able to get the information, the data about them, if I sign them up. I need to get it before I sign them up so I am doing the risk assessment properly and making sure that the men who are then onboarded as part of the program will be the ones that will benefit from it the most.

Chris COUZENS: And those two groups are primarily because of resourcing?

Rasha ABBAS: No. In terms of the groups we see the most, we have Indians as the top cohort and then Vietnamese, Chinese and Afghans. They have been selected based on the highest level—the men that choose to use violence.

Chris COUZENS: That need.

Rasha ABBAS: Yes.

Chris COUZENS: Okay, great. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Chris.

Sameera FIELDGRASS: Could I add to what Rasha said?

The CHAIR: Please.

Sameera FIELDGRASS: There is something quite important that we put in our submission about that longitudinal capturing of data. Whilst we do not work with adult perpetrators of violence, we are working with the early end where young people are starting to enact harm in the home. As we know, you cannot treat young people as you do adult perpetrators, so whilst there might be significant risk there are also a lot of trauma histories, and you need to work with those young people in a specific way. What we are finding in that adolescent family violence space—there is some great work being done in a therapeutic way by way of groups and supporting those young people, but like Rasha said, we only work on funding streams of one to two years. If we are to track possible future perpetrators of harm, it is so vital that we get that long-term funding to be able to track at six months, a year, possibly three years. I know that is a great piece of work, but if you are starting early and services are talking to one another, it then feeds into those tier 1 services supporting those young people and families longer term.

The CHAIR: So just to confirm, Sameera, you have been funded to complete a longitudinal evaluation—is that right? Or you are seeking funding?

Sameera FIELDGRASS: We would love to have it, because often our programs work on one- to two-year cycles, and whilst you can do some great therapeutic work with the children, the young people and the families in that context, when our funding streams end after two years we do not know where that data goes. And if that young person is then fed into a mainstream service, if our work has ended, there is no onus on them to share or no statutory mandate on them to share that information with us, so after those two years we lose track of that young person.

Rasha ABBAS: Just to back Sameera, those young boys are potentially the men we see come to us later, so the more work we can do there, the more it saves our whole society. It is money well spent.

Vivienne NGUYEN: My point on that, if I may, is that the community organisations that do the work never receive core funding to do this sort of work. What ends up looking like a really good initiative with a very promising pilot with really good outcomes ends in two years time or in a year's time. Then that investment does not really go anywhere else, so you have lost that investment right at the outset without anything further. So we are absolutely advocating for core funding for community organisations in particular to be able to support these sorts of nuancing and preventing rather than having to deal with them at crisis levels.

The CHAIR: Are you aware of any other longitudinal evaluations that consider those long-term check-ins with people who have been using violence?

Sameera FIELDGRASS: Not that we know of.

Rasha ABBAS: There is one happening at the moment, just being initiated with ANROWS, I think, because we are having discussions. I think there is one –

Felicity FAST: At Melbourne Uni.

Rasha ABBAS: Yes.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Annabelle.

Annabelle CLEELAND: Rasha, you said to start with that you have lots of notes on everything. Is there anything that you wanted to give to our Secretariat or mention now that we may not have asked you? And that goes to everyone: is there anything you really want to make sure you reiterated or got on the record today?

Sameera FIELDGRASS: There is probably a whole range of things.

Vivienne NGUYEN: Well, since you have asked, there are really only a couple of points at our end. We fundamentally believe that family, domestic and sexual violence really require the whole of the community to be able to support the education, the prevention, the early intervention and then the crisis response so that the enduring result can actually occur so that the women do not have to re-represent again and again and again, as

we have seen. I would really urge the government to take a bit of a stocktake and look at some of the initiatives that have really worked well in the past. We know, for example, the Moroccan Soup Bar supports women to be financially independent, and we understand that none of them return to their original traumatic situation. Where there are really good initiatives that have long-term positive implications, why couldn't we look at some of those? Initiatives that are driven by communities will undoubtedly generate the support and the empowerment for other women or other organisations, other communities, to be able to do the same. I am not suggesting that mainstream—however we define mainstream—organisations do not work, but there is always that deeper connection with some of the cultural nuances, some of the traditions of the cultures. The countries from which we come do not necessarily have the same, I guess, expectations of family, domestic and sexual violence, so having communities be able to have the ongoing funding to be able to do those initiatives—they actually prevent women from returning to the system. So I would really urge the Committee to really look at those initiatives that actually do work—have the longitudinal results—but also consider the funding models to encourage greater collaboration from different organisations.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Just to finish, one thing we have spoken a bit about today and something that has come through in other submissions is family violence that is not reported. Sameera, in particular you were reflecting on some of those barriers for women from multicultural backgrounds to go to an Orange Door and to report family violence. I guess just a general question: is there a way we can do better to collect data across multicultural communities about family violence that is not reported, say through an Orange Door or into the justice system?

Rasha ABBAS: I think yes from my perspective, because you need to understand, first of all, the full journey. We are doing some work now with settlement services, for example—being able to capture some of that data early, because as part of that initial migration journey the labelling might not be 'family violence' but as you start talking to them and understanding, it is family violence. So introducing some of that awareness and understanding and actually starting to capture it would be really important. We know because of the stigma, particularly for multicultural communities, it is significantly under-reported—so being able to, again, work with some of those smaller community organisations. I fully back Viv around making sure that we leverage those smaller community organisations. The problem is sometimes they are not fully trained or aware and actually can, not provide information, but they might not be able to answer the questions or the guide the right way—so being able to invest in uplifting their capabilities so that they can provide the right information. But also then that would provide us a richer capture of information. Again, it is not necessarily labelled family violence, but it is all the symptoms of it. Coercive control would be one significant one that is misunderstood or not understood, and it is a huge early indication of a significant homicide level of family violence. Just being able to recognise all these things and understand them and talk about them would make a huge difference.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Would anybody like to add anything else to that? Great. In that case we will wrap up today's hearing there. Thank you so much for appearing before us today and for your contribution to the inquiry. We are really grateful for the submissions that you have made but also the informative discussions that we have had today.

The Committee will now take a short break before our next witness.

Witnesses withdrew.