

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee
Inquiry into Gender Responsive Budgeting
DFFH Secretary – 11 October 2021

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS TAKEN ON NOTICE

Witnesses:

- Sandy Pitcher, Secretary, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing
- Brigid Monagle, Deputy Secretary Fairer Victoria, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing
- Jo Pride, Executive Director Office for Women & Office for the Prevention of Family Violence, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing

QUESTION 1

Family violence data trends

Mrs McARTHUR: Thank you, Chair. Just to follow further on data and outcomes, did I hear you correctly, Ms Pitcher, when you said that the violence against women had decreased, because we know that in recent times it has actually gone up 6.7 per cent? So can you just clarify whether your efforts in reducing violence against women have produced viable outcomes or whether they have not?

Ms PITCHER: Look, I did not mention any data on violence against women, so apologies if there was a sense that I had represented that data. In terms of the work on family violence in Victoria—and members of the committee would be very aware of the strong efforts over the past five years since the royal commission, coming on the back of many, many other years of hard work in the space—there has been a real focus, and I certainly support it, on measuring and understanding where gender violence occurs and how we respond to it. And at its core what we know is that gender responsive budgeting and a focus on gender equality is one of the key drivers in terms of turning around levels of family violence but also having a greater understanding across our community about the impacts of violence and violence against women and how that can really systematically affect women in so many facets of their life, including their participation in the labour market, and that violence against women actually is now understood in a way it has never been previously—the way that violence against women can really impact women’s participation in the labour force, their income when in the labour force and their ability to participate fully in the labour market. So all of those areas are very vital in the discussion about family violence.

Mrs McARTHUR: Well, can I just ask: have the figures gone up or down?

Ms PITCHER: Are you asking about family violence?

Mrs McARTHUR: Yes.

Ms PITCHER: I have not brought all of my figures on family violence to this committee, but I am happy to take some questions on notice.

Source: Unverified transcript, PAEC Inquiry into Gender Responsive Budgeting, pages 6-7.

RESPONSE

- Over the last four years, the Victorian Government has invested more than \$3 billion to lay the foundation for a Victoria free from family violence.
- Over the long-term, substantial and sustained investment is expected to see a reduction in the factors that drive and reinforce violence and see population level prevalence rates begin to fall. In the short-term to medium-term, however, we can expect to see an increase in the reporting of family violence incidents and service uptake. Moreover, the significant challenges faced by families during the pandemic have exacerbated the risk of family violence.
- The number of family violence incidents recorded by Victoria Police increased from 88,205 in 2019/20 to 93,440 in 2020/21 – an increase of 5.9 per cent. This represents an increase of 6.2 per cent in the incident rate to 1,399.1 per 100,000 people. Further information is at Table 1.

Table 1 – family incidents recorded and family incident rate per 100,000 population, Jan 2016 to Dec 2020

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	Year on year % change
Number of FV incidents	76,477	76,093	82,649	88,205	93,440	5.9%
Rate per 100,000 population	1,209.8	1,177.5	1,252.8	1,317.1	1,399.1	6.2%

Source: CSA Family Violence Data Portal

- Increases in the reporting of family violence incidents may be a result of strengthened community education, an increase in people seeking help, greater access to family violence services and targeted police intervention.
- The bushfires at the beginning of 2020 and then COVID-19 have created additional challenges for the Victorian community: increased anxiety, social isolation, financial stress. Evidence in Victoria and internationally suggests that these factors increase the incidence and the severity of family violence.
- Movements in recorded crime data may also be impacted by changes in legislation and operational police practice. In response to COVID-19, Victoria Police undertook Operation Ribbon from April 2020 to December 2020, where specialist detectives reached out to Victorians perceived to be at greater risk of family violence due to the impacts of COVID-19 and associated public health measures, including restricted movement.
- Victim survivors, including children can now access more timely and responsive assistance, tailored to their own individual circumstances, needs and experiences of family violence. The system is more responsive to the breadth of people’s diverse experiences and the unique barriers and challenges they face.
 - In 2019-20 over 37,400 victim survivors received specialist homelessness family violence services provided through 64,181 periods of support (Table 2). This is a significant increase on the levels of support provided prior the Royal Commission.
 - Family violence services and sexual assault services reported increasingly complex service delivery during COVID-19 restrictions.

Table 2 – number of unique clients presenting to a specialist family violence homelessness service in a financial year, July 2015 to June 2020

	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Unique clients	29,794	32,710	37,378	36,053	37,412
Support period	46,621	52,466	61,700	58,144	64,181

Source: CSA Family Violence Data Portal

QUESTION 2

Performance measures for gender responsive budgeting unit

Mr D O'BRIEN: Okay. Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Secretary. Can I just sort of go back to really Mr Maas's question about targets, which I think you answered with the importance of targets and the importance of measurement and everything. But what I am really interested to know is what the vision of success actually is. What does success look like in getting gender responsive budgeting right from a government perspective, noting that dealing with all the issues of gender inequality is not entirely within the realms of government control? I just wanted to know what the KPIs are for the money that is going into the Treasury unit and everything else that we are doing—what it actually will deliver us when we say whether it has worked or not.

Ms PITCHER: Thanks for your question. It is actually a really great one, and I will let Treasury answer some of the parts for them. But certainly from my perspective, because we are sort of in the establishment stage, it is exactly the right time to be thinking and making sure that we are really clear about our measurement, our evaluation techniques, setting the baseline and understanding how we are going to establish and measure our baseline and measure that future progress. All of the best evaluations are when you can actually set those things up right from the start. So it is certainly not complete, but it is one of the things that is very much in active consideration now about how we best set those baselines and measure that progress.

Certainly from my point of view, and certainly from the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing's, we would really love to see all of the aspects of the decision-making process be part of those KPI measures. It is how do we check on the development of our policies as they are coming through? What data and what sense of statistics are we looking at across all of the ranges of policy impacts? Are we gender disaggregating on issues that would not otherwise always be seen as a gender issue? I think it is measuring individual decisions but overall impacts. It is taking both the individual focus as well as the systemic focus, and we can do that across a range of policy areas.

I think it is an excellent question. It is certainly not what we have fully resolved yet, but certainly one of the areas that is captured, because it is in the *Gender Equality Act*, is ensuring that we have 100 per cent success rate of the workplace gender audits and monitoring against the gender equality action plans that are captured as a requirement in the legislation. Our aspirations are bigger than just compliance with that act, but that is certainly one of the measures, and the data that we get certainly from the first baseline I think will help us really home in on the future actions and what the support needs to be for both workplaces but for policy settings. So it is a bigger—

Mr D O'BRIEN: Can I just follow up, Secretary? Have there been any discussions with the Treasury unit or across government about performance measures in the budget papers?

Ms PITCHER: I believe there has, and I believe that we are looking to have the performance of this unit reflected in the budget papers, but perhaps I should take that on notice to clarify more accurately.

Source: Unverified transcript, PAEC Inquiry into Gender Responsive Budgeting, pages 7-8.

RESPONSE

- The 2021-22 Budget did not include specific performance measures for Gender Responsive Budgeting. However there have been discussions regarding assessing the impact of the budget overall on different genders and establishing a baseline against which to measure progress. The Department of Treasury and Finance is leading these discussions.