

# **“A Whole-of-Government Approach to Family Violence Reform”**

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**Family Violence Symposium 2012  
Wellington, NZ  
28 May 2012**

**School of Population Health Seminar  
Auckland, NZ  
30 May 2012**

## Introduction

Good morning everyone and thank you for the kind introduction. My name is Marion Frere and I am currently the Director of Innovation and Strategy with the Department of Justice in Victoria, Australia.

Over the past 10 years, we have seen a number of important changes to the way we understand and respond to family violence in Victoria. Collectively, these have resulted in a sustained effort to build an integrated response by departments, agencies and service providers working across and outside of government.

This process of reform has not been quick, nor has it been simple or linear. I am sure that every one of you in this room understands the complexity of the challenge we face, but a range of measures suggest that the reforms have been very successful.

The Family Violence Reforms are a good example of innovation in the public sector in dealing with a complex and multi-sectoral problem.

Today, I want to step you through this reform process. I want to draw out for you a range of proposals that I hope will generate much discussion over the course of the symposium on:

- What worked and why? and
- What were the challenges and how were they dealt with?

## *A bit about me*

I would like to start with some brief comments about me as I feel it is important that I situate myself and my background in relation to the topics I am going to cover here this morning.

I have been in my current role for almost one year and run a small research unit that is focussed on innovation and system thinking across the Justice portfolios –including police, courts and corrections.

Prior to this, I worked in the School of Population Health at the University of Melbourne, where I conducted research on the prevention of violence against women.

Of most relevance to this presentation is that at the University I was part of a research team funded by the Australia Research Council that partnered with the Victorian Government over five years of the reform process to review key reform areas.

My particular focus was on the governance aspects of the reform, particularly achieving whole-of-government reform.

Therefore in talking about the history of the reform, I will draw largely on the learnings generated through this university/government research partnership.

In talking about current challenges and current activity, I will be drawing from my recent experiences in government.

## *A new government in Victoria*

Another important contextual point for this presentation is that in November 2010, a new Liberal government was instated in Victoria.

The new government remains committed to addressing violence against women and their children and in January 2012, an Action Plan Consultation Framework was released to strong response from across the sector.

Most importantly, the framework remains committed to a whole-of-government approach, with integrated support to women and their children across community services, especially child protection and children, youth and family services, mental and physical health services, housing services, police, the courts and corrections.

While family violence is central to the action plan, it also contains links to other policy areas, including:

- The Victorian Homelessness Action Plan.
- The Report on the inquiry into Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children.
- The National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children 2010-2022.
- And systems strengthening, including risk management, risk assessment, and the Victoria Police Enhanced Service Delivery Model.

This morning however, I am mainly focussed on the reforms that took place between 2005 and 2010, a period during which we saw a fundamental shake up of the thinking and the systems that underpin our approach to family violence in Victoria.

And I think it is fair to say the Victoria is now on the way to defining what the next stage of the whole-of-government response to family violence will look like in detail.

## *The structure of my presentation*

In this presentation, I want to tell the story of the reform: what happened and why it worked. My goal is to show how the principles and processes of the whole-of-government approach to collaborative and co-operative service delivery were applied to the serious social issue of family violence in Victoria.

I will look at the reasoning behind the adoption of a whole-of-government approach, what it was intended to achieve, the processes and activities that took place and stakeholders' views about the outcomes and impact of this approach.

My focus is on the 'high-level' issues associated with integrated responses: political and agency leadership, co-ordination of policy settings and priorities, the establishment of inter-agency communication networks and accountability systems, and the allocation of financial and human resources.

I have divided the presentation into four sections:

- Building the case for action on family violence
- Establishing a common philosophical and policy framework
- Pioneering leadership and governance models
- Achieving system wide integration

Please note that I will make the text of this presentation available to you all, so do not feel compelled to take notes.

Following this presentation, I will be running a number of workshops during the course of the day, which will provide us with an opportunity to explore in detail some of what I will cover in this presentation.

I have structured the workshops to be very active, drawing on the experience in Victoria to explore ways in which learnings might be applied in New Zealand.

## Building the case for action on family violence

### *The pre-reform service context*

Let me start by painting a picture of the family violence landscape in Victoria prior to 2000.

First, within the community and in many areas of service delivery, family violence continued to be regarded as a personal or private matter.

There was little recognition of it in law and while hospitals, mental health and drug and alcohol services, police and the courts dealt with large numbers of victims and perpetrators of family violence, they were regarded as part of 'normal business' – not as a distinct social problem requiring an appropriate targeted response.

The development of specialised family violence services – such as establishing refuges, support groups and counselling services for victims – was mainly the province of the community sector.

Second, there was no family violence service system or unifying, cohesive policy framework in existence prior to the beginning of the reform process.

Instead, there were disparate services, some working in strong local partnerships but others that were not. Some were funded by government for their own particular programs and others that were not.

There remained a profound gulf between police and legal responses on the one hand, and human service responses on the other. And even within these sectors, there were substantial gaps in service responses.

## *The beginnings of reform*

So, what happened? What were the early factors that made the development of the reforms possible?

In order to understand why a whole-of-government approach might be relevant to family violence reform, we need to begin by considering what it is about family violence that makes it problematic as a public policy issue.

A number of factors provided the impetus for this new whole-of-government approach.

I am going to take you through these step by step.

It is important to do this to see the sequencing of events, and to get a sense of how all the pieces of the puzzle form a whole.

What I am presenting is the story of what happened. Once we have this clear, we can start to unpack the underlying themes – what worked and why, challenges and opportunities.

- Firstly, and significantly, integrated system models operating internationally were already proving to be effective in addressing family violence.
- In Victoria, activity was happening on a number of fronts simultaneously. These activities were strongly linked, with significant cross-over of personnel and a strong emphasis on communication across departments, and across government and non-government sectors.
- The first Inter-Departmental Committee on violence against women was established in 1999, driven by the Office of Women's Policy. The initial focus of this committee was the development of the Women's Safety Strategy 2002-2007, a five year plan to guide coordinated action across government to reduce violence against women.
- The establishment in 2002 of the Family Violence Statewide Advisory Committee (FVSAC) as a government and non-government partnership to advise on building an effective, integrated multi-agency response to family violence in Victoria. The Committee's early work focused on building a shared understanding of family violence, the need for standardised responses and management of risk to women and their children by the system and providing advice about service models that would support police, courts and specialist services to operate together as an effective and integrated system.
- The release of the Reforming the Family Violence System in Victoria (2005) report, developed by the Family Violence Statewide Advisory Committee, providing advice to Government on directions for family violence reform. Key elements included: a guiding set of principles; a focus on integration across the three main systems (police, justice and the family violence service system), and developing common practices and processes to ensure consistent responses by individual agencies.

- The release of Victoria Police's Violence against Women Strategy 2002-2008, by the former Chief Commissioner Christine Nixon identified violence against women as a strategic priority for police and provided strong impetus for integration throughout the emerging family violence system. This strategy was also the basis for the development of the Victoria Police Code of Practice for the Investigation of Family Violence (2004), which provides the framework for police when responding to family violence. The Code of Practice has had a dramatic effect on significantly improving response for victims of family violence. Building on these reforms, Living Free from Violence – Upholding the Rights, the next iteration of the Victoria Police Violence against Women Strategy for 2009-2014, was subsequently released.
- The development of the Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Strategy in 2002 was a community led partnership approach between Indigenous communities and Government. After the Indigenous Family Violence Taskforce delivered its report to Government, the Indigenous Family Violence Partnership Forum (IFVPPF) was established in 2005. The Indigenous Family Violence Ten Year Plan Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families was launched in June 2008. The development of the 10 Year Plan was as a community led partnership with government and is the first of its kind on Indigenous family violence in Australia. The Indigenous Family Violence Partnership Forum continues to embed this process and provide advice and leadership on driving reform in the area of Indigenous family violence. Reforms centre around prevention and education of the community resulting in changing the culture of family violence within Aboriginal communities across Victoria. This was highlighted as best-practice in the recent Child Protection Inquiry.
- Finally – the official beginning of the reform. 2005 saw the allocation of \$35.1 million as part of the Government's A Fairer Victoria initiative to build a strong and cohesive response to family violence. Investment continued through subsequent budgets, totally over \$100m by 2010.
- Finally (and very significantly) in 2006 the Victorian Law Reform Commission Review of Family Violence Law Report was tabled in Parliament. After substantial consultation, this led to the introduction of the Family Violence Protection Act 2008. Key features of the Act include a preamble that sets out the nature of family violence, a definition of family violence, a wide definition of family and details on protection and response.

The reforms also built on a strong commitment to a research and evidence base.

- The Cost of Domestic Violence to the Australian Economy, estimated that the total annual cost of violence against women by their intimate partners was \$8.1 billion (Access Economics 2004).
- Meanwhile, VicHealth undertook research into the health consequences of family violence, published as The Health Costs of Violence: Measuring the burden of disease of intimate partner violence. This research showed that intimate partner violence is the highest contributor to the disease burden in Victorian women aged 15 to 44 years (VicHealth 2004).

These last two pieces of research provided incontrovertible evidence as to the health and economic consequences caused by family violence to Victorians. This evidence provided critical impetus to support the push for change.

## *Why whole-of-government?*

So, why whole-of-government?

What was it that was happening in Victoria in relation to family violence that made it ripe for a whole-of-government response?

- Low reporting rates to police.
- Low rates of service usage.
- A fragmented nature of the service response.
- Growing awareness of the multiple and interacting impacts of family violence.

What were the elements of a whole-of-government approach that made it seem like the right way to go?

Family violence – as you all well know – is a long-standing, serious and complex public policy issue.

Such problems require a reassessment of some of the traditional ways of working and solving problems. They challenge our governance structures, our skills and our organisational capacity.

Complex problems cannot be solved by breaking them apart; they can only be addressed by looking at the whole system. They require a participative approach to create a shared view of the issue, thus opening up the possibility of concerted action.

The Victorian Government recognised a need to raise the issue of family violence to one of central social and government concern and to develop a system-wide or whole-of-government approach to address it.

Whole-of-government refers to policy development, program management or service delivery approaches that emphasise shared goals, collaborative decision-making and priority-setting, information sharing and co-operative or partnership-based operations.

It was first introduced in the UK (under the term 'joined-up government') in the early 1990s as part of the 'Third Way' project of social democratic modernisation and renewal (Lee & Woodward, 2002)

The goals of whole-of-government include eliminating inconsistent or conflicting policies, making better use of resources, creating synergies between stakeholders and offering citizens seamless service delivery regardless of entry point (Management Advisory Committee of the Australian Public Service Commission, 2004.)

According to the literature, other important conditions or resources necessary to support whole-of-government include a supportive management culture, the development of skills in communication and relationship management, common financial, information and communications technologies and appropriate accountability frameworks.

Whole-of-government can also be understood in terms of the processes and conditions that it is intended to rectify. It has been argued that whole-of-government is a reaction to the structural devolution, fragmentation, lack of coordination and emphasis on output (rather than outcome) based performance.

Whole-of-government seeks to rectify these deficiencies by engaging agencies in the pursuit of broad-based goals, collaborative decision making and integrated service delivery processes.

This theory resonates strongly with the real life experiences we had in Victoria.

In 2008, my colleagues and I at the University of Melbourne conducted interviews with senior officials who were involved in the reforms (Ross et al 2011)

I want to share some of their insights with you about “why whole-of-government?”

One of the strongest themes in the accounts of those involved in the establishment of the reform process was that existing services responses were fragmented and uncoordinated, with the result that victims of family violence were unable to access the services they needed. As one interviewee put it:

“We had a lot of service providers but no service system.... It was as far away from what you could call a system as it could be.”

Service gaps were particularly problematic across justice and human services (that is, between police and the courts on the one hand, and housing, income support and family and children’s services on the other) and there were few mechanisms to assist victims entering the system at one point to access services provided by other sectors.

The three primary service delivery agencies (Victoria Police, Department of Human Services and Department of Justice), and I quote another interviewee here, “didn’t talk together and basically looked at the world through their own lens rather than from the lens of the service system.”

So one of the central goals in the reform process was to replace a network of service provision arrangements operating more or less independently from one another with an integrated service system so that, and again I quote:

“when a family violence incident is reported it’s reported to one system rather than an agency or a worker or any particular organisational program. It’s reported to a system and that system is trying to be strong enough to use all of its might to support that report and to prevent anything from occurring again.”

## Establishing a common philosophical and policy framework

To have a system, you need a common philosophical and policy framework.

In the Victorian public policy context, understandings of gender based structural inequality have played a key role in shaping the family violence reform efforts.



In particular, work by VicHealth, Victoria's health promotion agency, on a framework to prevent violence has been very influential (Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, 2007).

Indigenous perspectives represent another distinctive set of ideas about the nature, causes and appropriate responses to family violence (Cripps & McGlade, 2008).

One of the features of complex social problems that constrains the development and application of solutions is that there is often disagreement about the causes of the problem and the best way to tackle them.

The structural fragmentation in the family violence sector also involves a great deal of philosophical and organisational cultural variation in the way that family violence is understood, and the way that responses to it are framed within organisational cultures.

Family violence services lack the kind of central ideology that characterises more established service areas (such as health or policing), largely because agencies and services understand and approach family violence from a variety of philosophical perspectives (feminist, welfarist, clinical or legal).

These perspectives both inform and are supported by the values, norms, beliefs and expectations that guide employees' behaviour in the course of their work.

Police, refuge workers and counsellors in programs for men who use violence tend to hold divergent views about what causes family violence and what actions are the most appropriate ways to respond to it.

The diversity of approaches was well acknowledged. In our interviews, people talked about 'tribes with different cultures' and as speaking different languages. To take one quote:

'...there's a sort of culture and philosophy that sits behind the language you use,...people think they're talking about the same thing but they're not at all'.

If one of the starting points for systems integration is that agencies 'decide on and articulate common goals and agree on ways to pursue these goals' (Domestic Violence and Incest Resource Centre, 2004, p 11.) then the reform process must incorporate ways to establish a common set of philosophical and bureaucratic values on which these goals can be based.

They are 'philosophical threshold issues' and 'critical debates' about definitions, the roles of the institutions and ways of responding.

The whole-of-government approach to reform provided a basis for addressing these philosophical and cultural differences by engaging participants in a collaborative process that required the development of common goals and approaches in an environment where there was a clear political and organisational commitment to reform.

A critical part of the reform process in this respect was the involvement of representatives from the service sector who were able to contribute knowledge based on direct experience with service delivery.

An important element in this process of negotiating values and goals is that it involves change at both an organisational and a personal level. In the words of one person in our study, this meant 'un-attaching them from how they think the system should look so you can then co-create and build a new system'.

This un-attaching involved changing both 'the way they operate professionally' and 'their personal values system'. In this sense, one of the key features of the whole-of-government process was that it was a social process in which participants worked together over an extended period and

'become committed not only to what they're trying to achieve but also to each other in terms of finding solutions across government.'

The personal and social processes involved in negotiating values and goals were acknowledged. The reform process was understood as a shared enterprise where trust and strong personal relationships were important in resolving philosophical and policy differences.

A number reflected on how the process of negotiating reform was also a process of building personal relationships.

'... they had to come from very different places and it's actually a really good model; that they spent time together and actually became, numbers of them, confirmed friends really around trying to... understand each other's perspective on the world.'

This process of developing a common philosophical and policy framework, was fundamental to the creation of a number of the key documents and action plans I described earlier as part of the story of how the reform began.

## Pioneering leadership and governance models

I would now like to turn to my third theme, that of pioneering leadership and governance models.

I mentioned previously that a clear political and organisational commitment to reform was one of the key elements in defining the whole-of-government approach.

Without clear strong – very strong - support from the top, innovation gets stifled. The role of ministers and senior levels of the bureaucracy are vital in setting aspirational outcomes and supporting their achievement.

Consistent ministerial and executive leadership within departments and agencies has been a critical enabler of the family violence reform.

Given the complexity of family violence, it required a new and holistic approach that in turn necessitated innovative leadership and governance arrangements to ensure a multi-sectoral response.

Whole-of-government was described as a "useful message for people within government, whether that is ministers or bureaucrat" .

The notion of whole-of-government demonstrated political ownership and consensus and provided a basis for establishing the coordinated resource allocation service

delivery and accountability processes necessary to make integrated reform work. The direct engagement of Ministers and Departmental heads in the policy coordination process demonstrated that the project had broad-based support and counteracted the potential for conflict or competition from other issues.

The demonstration of political consensus was particularly valued by officers within agencies:

‘The way the Ministers worked was a good message to all of us. That was the point. .... It was really important how that group of Ministers worked and that commitment – it was a government priority, not just a Ministerial priority.’

Another new and again holistic element in the whole-of-government approach to family violence reform was the engagement of NGO service agencies in the reform process.

The establishment of the Statewide Steering Committee, made up of representatives of Victorian Family Violence peak bodies and resource centres worked together over an extended period to find a better way to respond to family violence. They continue to meet.

In addition to leadership from Ministers, senior bureaucrats and sector representatives, one additional feature that worked for Victoria was role of the Department for Victorian Communities (DVC) (subsequently the Department of Planning and Community Development (DPCD) as a lead agency for the reform process.

This department hosted – and provided high level support to - the Family Violence Coordination Unit.

The role of DVC/DPCD was central because it had a clear mandate to drive the reform process unencumbered by pre-existing interests or agency connections as a direct service provider on the issue of family violence.

This meant that it was able to be an ‘honest broker’ with ‘no agenda other than to get a good whole-of-government outcome’ as well as taking a ‘helicopter view’ of the process.

### *Structuring governance arrangements to support integration*

This political leadership was supported by governance structures that enabled system integration. These governance structures are maintained by a Family Violence Reform Coordination Unit in DPCD.

The foundation of the whole-of-government approach meant new consultative and decision making structures needed to be developed at state, regional and (in some areas) sub-regional levels. These involved joint representation by different government service sectors, levels of government, functional specialisations (policy and operations) and the linkage of central government and community based agencies. The new structures included:

- The Family Violence Ministers Group.
- The Family Violence Interdepartmental Committee (FV IDC).
- The Statewide Advisory Committee to Reduce Family Violence.
- Integrated Family Violence Committees at regional levels, with links to the Regional Indigenous Family Violence Action Group.
- Regional or Sub-Regional Integrated Family Violence Coordination (or Leadership) positions with responsibility for developing cross-sector, cross-agency partnerships.

## Achieving system wide integration

At this point, we really need to ask why make all this whole-of-government effort?

What is the goal of the reform?

The central goal of the new approach is to develop an integrated system that involves better collaboration between the three main entry points into it: specialist family violence services; legal and statutory bodies (such as police, courts, correctional services and child protection services); and universal services (such as education, healthcare, mental health, drug and alcohol, legal, family and disability services).

The idea is that those affected by family violence (victims and perpetrators alike, regardless of gender or age) enter the service system at any point and are referred and supported appropriately within an 'integrated whole' that brings together government and community service providers.

To achieve integration, the 2005 Report of the Statewide Steering Committee to Reduce Family Violence, suggested that agencies need to:

'...decide on and articulate common goals and agree on ways to pursue those goals. Integration of services is more than co-ordinated service delivery – it is a whole new service. Co-location of agencies, agreed protocols and codes of practice, joint service delivery, agencies reconstituting or realigning their core business to confront the challenges posed by a broadened conception of the problem: these are the key indicators of an integrated response.' (DVIRC cited in Statewide Steering Committee to Reduce Family Violence 2005)

### *Unifying a package of policies under a primary organising principle*

The reforms started at the crisis or response end and located the safety of women and their children as a central objective. There was a need to strengthen the police and justice system response to family violence, through new operational and legislative changes. There was also a need for an integrated response with specific services providing victim support and counselling and mainstream social services, such as housing.

The reforms have involved a range of new policies, programs, legislation and operational codes including:

- The new Family Violence Protection Act 2008.
- The Victoria Police Code of Practice for the Investigation of Family Violence (2004).
- Providing new housing and crisis support options for women and children, as well as new crisis accommodation for men and increased funding for men's voluntary behaviour change programs.
- Providing new specialist family violence services at Magistrates' Courts, establishing the Family Violence Court Division, supporting family violence counselling programs and new specialist family violence lawyers, and establishing court directed men's behaviour change programs.
- The development of an Indigenous Family Violence 10-year Plan.
- A Family Violence Risk Assessment and Risk Management Framework – with substantial state-wide, cross-sector workforce development.
- State Coroner's Systematic Review of Family-Violence Related Deaths.

Two key parts of this unifying package of reform are worth highlighting:

- The development of whole-of-government budget proposals, and
- The development of common practices and processes across the system.

### *Development of whole-of-government budget proposals to support the reform*

One common barrier to innovation is that funding sources are distributed across different departmental budgets and planning horizons favour the short term.

The Family Violence Reform broke the mould with a whole-of-government budget bid in 2005-06 with long-term time frames. Two years of working together on the Family Violence Inter Departmental Committee enabled this capacity and trust to be built between departments to ensure this process was effective.

### *Developing common practices and processes*

Secondly, in addition to building strong and shared philosophical and policy frameworks, much effort was placed on developing consistent approaches across agencies.

This was vital for two reasons:

- First, for horizontal integration of the system, particularly at critical intersections between agencies; and
- Second, for ensuring that the reforms were consistently implemented on the ground through changed practice.

Frontline staff from police to case managers needed to have a shared understanding about family violence and the practices to prevent it. These included developing a consistent definition of family violence, common risk assessment and risk management frameworks and complementary codes of practice.

The development of a multi-sector risk assessment framework for family violence was one of the most critical elements of this system's reform and service delivery.

This initiative (which continues to be rolled out– most recently in Corrections) aims to strengthen and build the workforce capacity across the integrated service system, and the health and education sectors embedding and extending the risk assessment and risk management training.

## Conclusion

By way of conclusion, I would like to draw out some of the challenges of whole-of-government reform that can form a useful starting point for the discussions to follow today.

Whole-of-government programs can create significant difficulties in accountability, and monitoring and feedback processes may be more problematic. Complex lines of accountability are a feature of whole-of-government projects, with individuals having dual accountability both for their individual organisations and for the joined-up arrangements.

Some of the key challenges we faced in Victoria included:

- Systemic reform involves significant cultural change, and requires intensive focus on change management and partnership development. This is hard, long term work. And I hope I have pointed you to some of the elements of success in my presentation.
- Increased support for the embedding and conversion of practice changes into action on the ground relies on capacity in frontline staff. Many of these are lone workers or working in small teams. Significant practice changes require continuous building on workforce development and capability.
- Improving data collection and information sharing is also a challenging and resource intensive task. It also building the system capacity to track outcomes across the system. In Victoria we have the Family Violence Data Base (the 10 year trend analysis was released last week) which is an important compilation of key data from across the system.

Our greatest learnings in overcoming these challenges to deliver a true, successful whole-of-government approach come from the insights offered by IDC representatives on the process of developing the reforms:

- It was enormously rewarding to be able to make a difference by tackling a major social issue of importance to the community, and see some of the key policy and practice changes that are being embedded to improve women's and children's safety.
- Working effectively with people across government and non-government requires a shared commitment to placing the safety of women and children on the mainstream agenda.
- A key aspect of the success these whole-of-government violence against women reforms requires these elements embedded, and on ensuring a shared understanding of reform outcomes are included in specific departmental initiatives and programs.
- Sustaining the effort over a period of several years takes tenacity and persistence.

Thank you.

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