



Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service Co-operative Ltd.

Head Office:
6 Alexandra Parade,
P.O. Box 218
Fitzroy, Victoria 3065
Phone: (03) 9419 3888 (24 Hrs)
Fax: (03) 9419 6024
Toll Free: 1800 064 865

FAMILY VIOLENCE INITIATIVES BOOKLET

Indigenous Family Violence Regional Action Groups

Indigenous Family Violence Regional Action Groups were formed to raise awareness and develop local solutions to issues surrounding Indigenous Australian family violence. The Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Strategy is a community-led strategy that coincides with a whole-of-Government response to issues identified by the Indigenous Family Violence Task Force.

To assist the community-led approach, ten Indigenous Family Violence Strategy Support Workers (Workers), and a State Co-ordinator are employed by the Department of Human Services. The Workers facilitate linkages and partnerships to ensure that community-led actions are developed at a local level in partnership with Government and non Government agencies. The Indigenous Family Violence Action Groups inform the Worker, who in turn informs the DHS and vice versa.

To successfully engage local Indigenous communities in the development of responses to family violence the Government established an Indigenous Family Violence Strategy Initiatives Fund (\$650,000 annually). The fund supports the development of local solutions identified by community groups to prevent, reduce and respond to local issues of family violence.

The Office of Women's Policy

The purpose of the Office of Women's Policy (OWP) is to work across Government with other agencies and Departments to devise specific policies for women and ensure other policy making is inclusive of women's needs. The vision of the OWP is to monitor and identify emerging issues for women in Victoria and turn women's needs into Government actions.

The OWP is located within the recently established Department for Victorian Communities - People and Community Advocacy Division (Division). The OWP became a co-sponsoring lead agency of the Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Strategy in March 2003 in collaboration with the Department of Human Services and AAV. Since the release of the Victorian Indigenous Task Force Final Report to Government in December 2003, the OWP has sought to ensure that the safety and security of women and children and the principles of the Women's Safety Strategy are inclusive of responses developed by community and Government.

The OWP co-ordinates the Victorian Indigenous Women Going Places Ministerial Advisory Committee (IWGP MAC). In 2005 the IWGP MAC will focus their efforts in

participating in the newly established Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Partnership Forum.

Aboriginal Affairs Victoria

The establishment of the Partnership Forum was recommended by the Indigenous Family Violence Task Force (Task Force). The Victorian Government in its response to the Task Force established a Partnership Forum to oversee the development and implementation of a ten year Partnership Agreement between the Victorian Government and Indigenous communities to address family violence. One aim of the Partnership Forum is to utilize and feed into existing processes, such as Indigenous Family Violence Regional Action Groups.

The membership of the Partnership Forum also includes senior representatives of Government.

The Partnership Forum will provide a forum for ongoing, high level dialogue between Government Departments and Indigenous Australians about family violence. The Partnership Forum will take carriage of the issues raised in the Task Force as Victorians enter stage three of the Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Strategy (development and implementation of the Indigenous Family Violence Plan).

Elizabeth Hoffman House

Elizabeth Hoffman House (EHH) is a community-controlled organisation operated by an elected Committee of Management. EHH is the only refuge in Victoria with the primary function of providing emergency shelter for Indigenous Australian women and their children in need of care due to family violence. EHH provides crisis accommodation to Indigenous Australian women and children who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. EHH provides a range of supportive accommodation services and programs that are sympathetic to the needs of the users of the service. EHH provides a counseling service and housing assistance.

EHH provides an Outreach Support Service in metropolitan Melbourne that assists Indigenous Australian women to access support services in the areas of family violence and related issues. EHH provides an Outreach Service to women in the women's prison (Dame Phyllis Frost Centre). Staff at Elizabeth Hoffman House attend Court with Indigenous Australian women in a supportive role.

Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association Limited

The Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association Limited (VACSAL) is involved in a project with No to Violence Incorporated (NTV) which attempts to meet the needs of Indigenous Australian men in the context of family violence. VACSAL and NTV are working together to provide training and support to Victoria's Indigenous Australian community. The aim of the project is to enable Indigenous Australians to

build integrated system approaches to ending male family violence through a culturally appropriate Indigenous Men's Behaviour Change Program and telephone counselling service (NTV, incorporating Men's Referral Service).

Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service Co-operative Limited

The Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service Co-operative Limited (VALS) provides free legal and legal related services to Indigenous Australians. VALS is an Indigenous Australian community organization with an elected Board of Directors. VALS contains a Legal Practice Unit made up of criminal, family and civil law solicitors. VALS contains a Research Planning and Development Unit and Client Support Unit.

Many family law matters, and those involving child protection, involve family violence issues. VALS provides information to people applying for Intervention Orders and does not usually act in these matters. VALS does act in matters involving a breach of an Intervention Order.

In March 2005 VALS drafted a submission in response to the Victorian Law Reform Commission Review of Family Violence Laws Consultation Paper. VALS does not advocate the de-criminalisation of family violence but was critical of a pro-prosecution approach to family violence. The pro-prosecution approach places emphasis on criminal justice interventions to family violence at the expense of alternative interventions (ie: community led and restorative justice approaches).

Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service Victoria

The Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service Victoria (AFVPLS) was established in 2002 to address family violence in Victorian Aboriginal Communities. The AFVPLS is funded by the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department to provide assistance to victims of family violence and sexual assault and to work with families and communities affected by violence.

The AFVPLS provides free legal advice, Court support and ongoing casework to victims of family violence and sexual assault. The AFVPLS also provides free counseling, support, information and referrals to specialist services.

The AFVPLS works with local community groups and organizations to develop awareness and preventative initiatives, such as the *Responding to Sexual Assault Training Program*, to reduce the incidence of family violence and sexual assault.

Family Violence Court

The Family Violence Court (FVC) is a pilot division of the Magistrates' Court which will operate at Ballarat and Heidelberg from early 2005. The FVC pilot aims to trial new ideas and ways of operating to provide a more open and accessible legal response to family violence, enhance the safety of people who have experienced family violence and

increase the accountability of people who have used violence toward family members. Department of Justice staff who are involved in the development of the FVC are trying to build on the learnings and recommendations of the Indigenous Family Violence Task Force to make the FVC accessible to Indigenous Australians.

Victoria Police Code of Practice for the Investigation of Family Violence and Research of family violence in the Indigenous Australian community

The primary aim of the Victoria Police Code of Practice for the Investigation of Family Violence [(Code) launched 31st August 2004] is to ensure the safety and wellbeing of victims and early intervention in family violence. The Code emphasises investigation and prosecution of criminal offences and the minimisation of family violence in the community. The Code encourages police members to work collaboratively with other Government and community agencies to provide ongoing support to victims of family violence.

The Code requires Victoria Police members to follow a step-by-step processes outlined in the Police Options Model (Model), detailed in the Code. The Model provides three options: the referral option (which is mandatory at all incidents and can be both formal or informal), the criminal option (charge and remand, charge and bail, charge and summons, intent to summons) and the civil option (interim Intervention Order, complaint and warrant, complaint and summons). Police members will choose one or more of these options, depending on the victim's circumstances and needs. The police will investigate reported offences and conduct a risk assessment of the victim to inform their choice of action. The needs of children will be addressed separately. The Code also acknowledges the diversity of needs within the community and the sensitivity required in selecting the best support service for the victim.

The Code ensures greater accountability from Victoria Police members by putting in place a number of checks and balances. All incidents of family violence must be recorded to allow greater scrutiny of repeat offenders and to inform future risk assessments of family members. Police supervisors will be accountable for ensuring that members under their supervision take the most appropriate course of action (ie: prosecute or not) in the circumstances. Similarly, a case conferencing process has been introduced to enable victims of family violence to participate in decision making about whether or not to proceed with criminal charges when they are unsure, or do not wish to proceed.

Each 24 hour police station has a Family Violence Liaison Officer (FVLO) who monitors the police response within their station to ensure a consistent and co-ordinated approach to family violence. They are also a focal point for communication between Victoria Police and local agencies. Each of the five Victoria Police regions have ten full-time Family Violence Advisors who provide advice and strategic support to operational members, FVLOs and community agencies. Victoria Police is in the process of examining its response to family violence in the Indigenous community.