

Feature:

Election priorities on family violence and prevention

In the lead up to the state election in November we asked each party to provide their top three priorities for family violence and the prevention of violence against women. Here's what they had to say.



Minister Natalie Hutchins

Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Women, the Prevention of Family Violence and Industrial Relations

We have come a long way in Victoria in understanding that family violence and violence against women is not an individual issue – it is a workplace, community and social issue that requires a multi-faceted response.

One of the major catalysts for change was the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence. The Royal Commission provided a blueprint in reforming our family violence system to better respond to victim survivors; to make perpetrators of family violence more accountable; and to invest in programs that change the culture which drives family violence – namely gender inequality and discrimination.

To this end, the Andrews Labor Government has invested \$2.4 billion to implement each one of the Commission's 227 recommendations; \$72.6 million of this is dedicated to stopping family violence before it starts.

Free from violence – Victoria's strategy to prevent family violence and all forms of violence against women, and the accompanying first year action plan 2018 – 2021, outlines the government's primary prevention priorities.

This includes building the infrastructure necessary to embed family violence prevention in the Victorian community; conducting research and evaluations into effective interventions; innovating and building new evidence; scaling up what we know works; and engaging with the community.

The establishment of a world first independent prevention agency is one critical part of this prevention architecture. This new agency, Respect Victoria, will work to prevent violence against women, elder abuse, violence towards gay, bisexual and transgender family members and intimate partners, violence used by and against young people in the home, and violence against men.

It will focus on the primary prevention of violence in education and care settings, workplaces, sport, the arts and media. It will also lead ground-breaking research into what works to prevent family violence, provide expert advice on best practice, and engage the Victorian community.

Supporting the workforces that prevent and respond to family violence is also critical. The workforce of the future needs to be equipped to prevent and respond to all forms of family violence and the individuals that experience or use it.

Through *Building from Strength: 10-Year Industry Plan for Family Violence Prevention and Response*, we aim to develop a greatly valued, skilled, diverse, safe, empowered and supported specialist family violence and primary prevention workforce, whose dedication and commitment are vital to stopping violence before it starts.

To date, this includes the continuation of the successful Gender and Disability Workforce Development Program, strengthening prevention capacity within the women's health sector, and piloting a model of embedding specialist prevention practitioners in the LGBTI, seniors and Aboriginal sectors.

The expertise of the specialist family violence and primary prevention sectors plays a pivotal part in our prevention and response efforts, and for this we thank them. We are not only grateful to the members of the Industry Taskforce and to leaders across social services, health, justice and education, but to the victim survivors who shared their experiences. It is for the victim survivors of family violence that we continue this important work. ■



Georgie Crozier MP

Shadow Minister for Families and Children, Prevention of Family Violence and Housing

Governments of all persuasions and across jurisdictions are taking on the challenge of eliminating family violence. In Victoria, following the Royal Commission into Family Violence, record investment by the current Government has been committed along with the promise to implement all 227 recommendations. This builds on the work of previous governments including the last Coalition government, of which I was a member. A record investment at the time included providing wide-ranging measures to address prevention, safety, and perpetrator accountability.

The bipartisan support given to the elimination of family violence is well documented and that bipartisanship is genuine and ongoing.

The Royal Commission recommendations are complex and extensive and will take many years to fully implement.

Family violence is a whole-of-society issue and it is too important for us to get the reforms wrong. We need to ensure that implementation is being delivered in the right manner. The Government has appropriated considerable amounts of funding and we have a duty to the community to ensure outcomes are achieved and programs are targeted wisely. It is for those reasons that we need to ensure that the reforms are implemented carefully and properly.

I commend the work of the Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor in making

sure government priorities in dealing with family violence are in order. Mr Tim Cartwright, APM and his team have painstakingly put together a comprehensive review on the Family Violence Reform initiatives. I am very pleased that such necessary oversight is in place.

Our support to the family violence sector has not wavered and we are steadfast in our dedication to carry out the needed reforms to eliminate family violence in Victoria.

Violence of any kind should not be tolerated, whether in our streets or behind closed doors. Victims need to be supported and perpetrators need to be brought to account. We have announced important policies on mandatory sentencing, bail and parole, new offences to tackle violent crime and a pilot Family Violence Disclosure Scheme that will give Victorians the right to ask and the right to know about any history of violent criminal offences of a current or former partner.

We have remained firm in our stance in putting victims first as we understand the impact of crime on the disadvantaged and we are set to announce more policies in due course.

As the Shadow Minister for Families and Children, Housing and the Prevention of Family Violence, I want to take this opportunity to recognise the commitment of the entire workforce who are on the ground and at the coalface dealing with some very challenging issues. To all stakeholders, peak bodies, service providers, and community members in the family violence sector, thank you very much for your ongoing dedication and commitment in this important area. ■



Huong Truong

MLC for Western Metropolitan Region

The Victorian Greens have a special responsibility to hold the state government to account on domestic and family violence initiatives. And we appreciate the remarkable advocacy the Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria has provided to support women affected by family violence for over three decades.

Of all the states and territories across Australia, Victoria is well positioned to undertake ground-breaking reform. We must follow through with the recommendations of the Royal Commission. We must focus on improving the safety and welfare of family violence survivors.

Recent crime statistics show sexual offences have been on the rise over the last five years when crime statistics overall have been falling. This confirms that underpinning the prevalence of violence against women in domestic and family settings are worrying societal trends around attitudes to women in general.

We need to do much more, sooner, to ensure respect and safety for women in our society. We need deep-seated and widespread cultural change. I intend to use my voice in Parliament to challenge our communities to aim higher in how we value women, how we protect children, and how we respect each other as members of one Victorian community.

A succession of legislative changes to family violence laws has provided me a good opportunity to understand the careful

and comprehensive nature of the Royal Commission's report into Family Violence. I share with the Family Violence Reform Independent Monitor concerns about whether the current government reform is sufficiently focused on transforming outcomes in the way family violence is handled in this state.

I hear time and again about the current shortfall in the availability of public housing for individuals affected by family violence. Considering that one third of Victorians accessing homelessness services are escaping this kind of violence, I am deeply concerned that the delivery of short-term and medium-term housing is not happening quickly or meaningfully enough.

Though it is not a state issue, the Federal government's proposals around the amalgamation of the Family and Federal Circuit Courts is also deeply troubling. Most worrying is the merging of complex and sensitive issues of family violence into the Federal Circuit Court cases. All parliamentarians have an important role in calling out the Federal Government with the way this amalgamation unfolds.

I grew up experiencing family violence, and today family violence affects too many constituents in my own electorate of Western Metro. Their experiences are often compounded by intersectional disadvantage, such as gender, race and disability. We Greens will ensure the survivors of family violence are front and centre in all ongoing debates. ■