

Organisational spotlight:

We succeed when specialist knowledge is shared

At the Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS), we understand the strong specialist knowledge all community organisations bring, often built over years of close and careful practice. Community organisations are deeply embedded in communities, and develop expertise from their intimate knowledge of people's direct experiences. The work of specialist family violence organisations is no exception.

VCOSS works towards a society where everyone can thrive. But to excel in this, we must draw upon a vast reservoir of community sector knowledge. Only when we are informed by the direct experience of on-the-ground organisations, can we propose strategic solutions to achieve real change. For much of our family violence advocacy, we rely heavily on our specialist family violence members to help us choose the most important priorities, and stand together with the whole community sector to back them.

VCOSS collaborates with our members for more effective and strategic advocacy, at a time of growth and change. The Victorian Government's response to the

Royal Commission into Family Violence is driving growth across the spectrum of family violence interventions. It seeks to create change by embedding family violence knowledge and understanding across the entire community sector. More than ever, specialist family violence services are called on to collaborate, share knowledge and help anchor new practice across the board.

At the same time, rapid social, economic and technological trends are changing the community services environment. VCOSS has worked closely with the Department of Health and Human Services and other peak bodies to develop the 10-Year Community Services Industry Plan. The plan provides a shared

platform for government and community services to respond to the opportunities and challenges facing the industry.

We want the community industry to retain and build on its strengths. One of those strengths is our diversity and specialisation, letting us reach and respond to people beyond the scope of governments. Our specialist family violence services add essential practice expertise in working with victim survivors of family violence.

VCOSS relies on our specialist family violence members to provide advice and information allowing us to work together to develop and advocate for effective policies. Specialist organisations assist us to prepare



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submissions and reports based on the best available evidence, are grounded in the knowledge of workers at the ‘frontline’ of service delivery as well as the experience of service users.

For example, specialist family violence services are best-placed to assist VCOSS to understand the key determinants of, and contributing factors to, family violence, as well as the immediate and long-term needs of victim survivors. Other community service organisations that work directly with women and children affected by family violence also have specialist knowledge of, for example, housing, the law, and financial counselling. This has helped in advocating for changes to residential tenancy law, or for adapting the practice of water and energy retailers. Their input is also essential in developing innovative solutions for preventing family violence and supporting victim survivors.

In preparing our submission to the Royal Commission into Family Violence, we consulted widely with our members. This information allowed us to prepare a comprehensive 70-page submission with fifty recommendations. The recommendations covered issues including data collection and system monitoring, vulnerable groups, prevention, early intervention, crisis responses and links with alcohol and drugs, mental health, disability, utilities, problem gambling and responses to emergencies and disasters. We drew on the connections between the specialist organisations to recommend ways the system as a whole can work better.

The Royal Commission into Family Violence recommended better family violence workforce training and ensuring other workers had a better understanding of family violence. The 10-year Industry Plan for Family Violence Prevention and Response outlines stronger pathways for new workers into the specialist family violence and community services sector so students and graduates can be more ‘work-ready’. ■

The **Enhanced Pathways to Family Violence Work Project** aims to support the development of the family violence and community services workforce through:

- Student placements in community services sector organisations which provide specialist or non-specialist family violence services
- Supervision training for experienced workers to enhance their competence and confidence
- Developing and transitioning graduates and new workers to family violence roles.

While led by the Department of Health and Human Services on behalf of Family Safety Victoria, the project works in partnership with VCOSS, Domestic Violence Victoria, Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria and the Future Social Services Institute. By bringing together specialist knowledge, government knowledge and wider community sector networks, the project is far stronger – with better resourcing, deeper knowledge and wider reach.

Ten Capability Building Coordinators (CBCs) provide support to 34 participating organisations across Victoria. The

CBCs, located in specialist family violence services, provide support to the participating organisations through:

- Facilitating relationships between education providers and participating organisations to establish student placement partnerships
- Providing support in the use of the student placement matching program
- Supporting workers of participating organisations to attend general supervision training and family violence specific supervision training (developed by Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria)
- Guiding participating organisations through the transition to a Family Violence Framework (developed by Domestic Violence Victoria).

This project is just one example of the success we can achieve when we work together. A strong, well-resourced and expert specialist family violence sector can not only provide better services directly to victim survivors of family violence, but can build networks and share information across the entire community service industry.