

29 January 2026

Committee Secretary
House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs

BY EMAIL ONLY: spla.reps@aph.gov.au

To the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs,

Response to the Inquiry into the relationship between domestic, family and sexual violence and suicide

We welcome the opportunity to respond to the Committee's inquiry into the relationship between domestic, family and sexual violence and suicide. Improving responses to domestic, family and sexual violence is a critical area of reform for community legal centres in Victoria.

In this submission, we are focusing on the terms of reference 2 and 5 in relation to data collection and opportunities to enhance prevention and early intervention efforts. We draw to the Committee's attention previous recommendations we have made that are relevant to this inquiry's terms of reference on opportunities to enhance early intervention and strengthening data collection.¹ These recommendations apply to both federal and state levels, and to family and sexual violence.

About the Federation of Community Legal Centres

The Federation of Community Legal Centres (**Federation**) is the peak body for Victoria's 50 community legal centres. Our members are at the forefront of helping those facing economic, cultural or social disadvantage and whose life circumstances are severely affected by their legal problem.

Community legal centres are essential in the response to domestic, family and sexual violence in Victoria. In the last financial year, community legal centres provided more than 170,000 legal services with over 40 per cent of our clients experiencing or at risk of family violence. Our members include specialist family violence legal service providers across Victoria which assist specific sections of the community, including women experiencing disadvantage, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, women from migrant and refugee communities, LGBTQIA+ people, young people and seniors. Community legal centres also run programs for victim survivors of sexual violence, including long-term partnerships with sexual assault services.

¹ Federation submission to the Australian Law Reform Commission's Inquiry into Justice Responses to Sexual Violence (2024), available [here](#); Federation submission to the Victorian Parliament Inquiry into capturing data on people using family violence (2024), available [here](#).

Strengthening early intervention efforts

It is critical that people who have experienced domestic, family and sexual violence can access early and holistic support. There can be devastating consequences where victim survivors are left to navigate high risk situations alone. Linking people into a comprehensive family violence support system as early as possible mitigates against deteriorating mental health and suicide risk. Legal assistance forms a critical part of the family violence support system. It is only through a whole of system approach, including legal assistance, that the various challenges faced by victim survivors can be addressed. This includes access to safety planning, secure housing, counselling, financial support and legal assistance. Legal assistance is integral in helping to restore victim survivors' safety and helping them to recover from domestic, family and sexual violence.

People who have experienced domestic, family and sexual violence require access to early legal assistance to understand their options, make informed decisions and to protect them from violent and abusive situations. This includes helping to secure family violence intervention orders and family law assistance to resolve parenting disputes to put in place safe arrangements for children. It also encompasses a range of related and often compounding legal issues, such as, helping families when child protection authorities intervene, migration assistance for women on temporary visas, criminal law and housing and debt issues. Legal support is also important in restoring victim survivors' financial safety and independence, helping them to recover from often long periods of economic abuse.

Community legal centres are experienced in providing holistic and trauma-informed legal services to victim survivors and have been at the forefront of developing best practice integrated legal models, consisting of lawyers and community service professionals, such as social workers, counsellors, financial counsellors and case managers, within their legal organisation. Community legal centres also operate in partnership with a range of community organisations that assist victim survivors, which helps people to understand and identify their legal need earlier, reach people before their legal issues escalate and provide more wrap-around support. The focus on early intervention has a preventative effect in terms of reducing compounding harms for vulnerable groups and can reduce pressures on the justice system, health system and other parts of the service systems down the track.

In previous inquiries, we have therefore recommended that governments should:

- increase access to early and holistic legal and other supports, including community legal assistance
- invest further in strengthening collaboration and integration across different sectors to promote multi-sectorial response, and
- invest further in the community legal sector to increase access to early, holistic and trauma informed legal assistance.

Reporting and data collection

Community legal centres in Victoria do not currently record data on how a client has died (and, in most cases, whether a client has died). This information is more likely to be held by health services, police or the courts, which would be more appropriate custodians of such data.

If you would like further information on the capture of data on domestic, family and sexual violence by the community legal sector, please refer to our [submission](#) to the Victorian Parliament inquiry into capturing data on people using family violence. This submission sets out some of the key

barriers to improving data collection on domestic, family and sexual violence within the community legal sector and across different sectors (e.g., family violence, justice and health sectors, education, police and government) and jurisdictions. As detailed there, improving high quality data on family violence across different sectors in Victoria is limited because of chronic under-resourcing, fragmented reporting requirements, inconsistent data items and definitions, and technical limitations of existing data systems. We therefore recommended increased funding for frontline services to improve data systems and collection, and investment in targeted research projects to collect in-depth data.

We also draw attention to our recommendations in that inquiry regarding the need to tailor data systems for young people, and to ensure Data Sovereignty and Data Governance for Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations must be respected.

Please do not hesitate to contact Rachael Pliner, Director of Policy and Advocacy, at rachael.pliner@fclc.org.au if you require any further information.

Yours sincerely,



Louisa Gibbs
Chief Executive Officer