



VICTORIA
POLICE FORCE

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Our ref: LEX 15873

Coroner Audrey Jamieson
Coroners Court of Victoria
65 Kavanagh Street
SOUTHBANK VIC 3006

Subject: Ms YN - Finding into death without inquest
Ms WX - Finding into death without inquest
Ms TP - Finding into death without inquest
Ms MH - Finding into death without inquest

Court Reference: COR 2018 5104
COR 2018 2583
COR 2018 4780
COR 2019 3839

Date of Receipt: 7 September 2020

Dear Coroner Jamieson,

Victoria Police response to recommendations arising from Findings without inquest into the death of YN, WX, TP and MH

This document provides the response to your recommendations directed to Victoria Police (recommendations 2 and 3), arising from the Findings into the deaths of YN, WX, TP and MH without inquest, each delivered separately on 7 September 2020 (collectively, **the Findings**).

Victoria Police's response to the recommendations, set out identically in each of the Findings, is below.

RECOMMENDATION 2:

With the aim of promoting health and safety and preventing like deaths, I recommend that Victoria Police allocate Family Violence Investigation Units to investigations into suspected intentional deaths of women in the City of Whittlesea who are from culturally and linguistically diverse communities, in circumstances where there is any indication that previous family violence incidents may have contributed to the death.

RECOMMENDATION 3:

With the aim of promoting public health and safety and preventing like deaths, I recommend that Victoria Police allocate Family Violence Investigation Units to investigations into suspected intentional deaths of women in the City of Whittlesea who are from culturally and linguistically diverse communities, in circumstances where there is any indication that social isolation may have contributed to the death.

1. The Coroner's recommendations two and three have been considered by Victoria Police but will not be implemented at this time.
2. Victoria Police welcomes any opportunity to improve the police response to family violence in the community and recognises the pro-active engagement by Sergeant Damian Lehmann of Mill Park Police Station in identifying the elevated frequency of suicides of South Asian Women in the City of Whittlesea.
3. Following receipt of the Coroner's recommendations, Family Violence Command (FVC), Priority Communities Division, Crime Command and North West Metro have considered the role that Family Violence Investigation Units (FVIUs) may have in investigating suspected intentional deaths of women from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities in circumstances where there is any indication that previous family violence or social isolation may have contributed to the death.
4. FVIUs were introduced in response to recommendations from the Royal Commission into Family Violence, the Coroners Court of Victoria and through funding from the Victorian Community Safety Statement 2017. In accordance with these recommendations, FVIUs have been designed to investigate serious and complex investigations, manage high-risk, complex and repeat cases and support general duties police and specialist units. The roll out of FVIUs was only recently completed in 2019/2020, with each FVIU led by a Detective Senior Sergeant and supported by a team of investigators, an intelligence officer and a Family Violence Court Liaison Officer.
5. An important function of the FVIUs is to develop good working relationships with local government agencies, relevant interest groups and the community, and maintain up to date knowledge of local issues. As a result of these functions, it is hoped that FVIUs will pro-actively engage with family violence issues relevant to specific local communities so that suicides of the kind identified in the City of Whittlesea may be prevented in the future across the whole State. FVIUs' strong links to the community and government agencies will also assist in addressing issues of social isolation that can form part of a pattern of family violence, but remains a broader social issue that cannot be addressed through the Victoria Police family violence response alone.
6. The Coroner's recommendations seek to expand the role of FVIUs in the City of Whittlesea. While deaths of women from CALD communities in Victoria in circumstances where family violence or social isolation may have been a contributing

factor is a matter of concern for Victoria Police, Victoria Police considers the role of FVIUs should evolve in order to meet the needs of the Victorian community as a whole, rather than focus on a specific city or region such as Whittlesea.

7. Further, there are practical and logistical implications that will arise should FVIUs be tasked with investigating intentional deaths as set out in the recommendations. Currently when an intentional death occurs the procedure set out in the *Victoria Police Manual Deceased Persons* provides that a detective from the Criminal Investigation Unit attends to investigate. It could be some time before the investigation reveals that family violence or social isolation may have contributed to the death and that a FVIU should be allocated the investigation. Additionally, it would be difficult to communicate to Victoria Police members a deviation in the standard procedure for a small number of deaths in a particular local community.
8. Accordingly, Victoria Police is of the view that the current model for the investigation of intentional deaths, including suicides, is appropriate and it is not considering a change to include FVIUs in that process at this time. However, Victoria Police will continue to work with police regions, including the City of Whittlesea, to measure and understand FVIUs' successes, challenges and any future opportunities to improve the FVIU model across the State.

Relevant initiatives additional to FVIUs

9. In addition to the FVIUs, Victoria Police have undertaken a number of other initiatives to improve the response to family violence. In circumstances of a family violence-related homicide, Victoria Police have recently established the Family Violence-related Death Assessment (FDA). The FDA process has been developed to identify whether there are systemic compliance, process or legislative issues relevant to the police response to family violence incidents that occurred prior to a family violence homicide. One option that is being considered in the context of the Court's recommendations is whether the criteria for the FDA could be broadened to include deaths where family violence is a factor.
10. In respect to engaging with CALD communities, Victoria Police and FVC acknowledge that there is significant underreporting of family violence in these communities and consequently it has undertaken the following initiatives to improve reporting of family violence:
 - 10.1 Developed the information sheet *Family Violence: What Police do* in 13 different Languages (Arabic, Burmese, Chinese (Simplified and Traditional), Dari, English, Farsi, Greek, Italian, Macedonian, Punjabi, Somali, Turkish and Vietnamese); and
 - 10.2 Developed Family Violence Quick Guides on various priority communities to support police members to better understand family violence in these communities.
11. Further, Victoria Police are continuing to work to develop a deeper understanding of the impact of family violence in CALD communities. Family Violence Command is

currently developing the Second Action Plan under the *Policing Harm, Upholding the Right: Victoria Police strategy for Family Violence, Sexual Offences and Child Abuse 2018-2023* and has identified the need for increased focus on system-wide service improvements to support diverse communities.

12. In late 2018, the 'Crossroads to Community Wellbeing Working Group' was established in response to the perceived increased frequency of suicides of South Asian women in the City of Whittlesea. The group was established to gather local intelligence to inform a strategic direction for a response in the community. The group aims to develop a tailored suicide prevention response, develop social support and culturally responsive programs for women to reduce social isolation and enhance mechanisms for early identification of family violence and suicidal ideation.
13. Victoria Police considers that early intervention to support women experiencing family violence, by police and other primary service and agencies, is key to preventing adverse outcomes. This is particularly important for vulnerable communities. Victoria Police's primary role will continue to be responding to all reports of family violence, supporting victim safety and perpetrator accountability.

Yours sincerely



Shane Patton APM
Chief Commissioner

22/6/21
