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Judge John Cain
State Coroner
Coroner's Court of Victoria
65 Kavanagh Street
SOUTHBANK VIC 3006

Email: cpuresponses@coronerscourt.vic.gov.au

RE: COR 2016 001876 - Investigation into the death of [REDACTED] VT; COR 2017 1889 – Investigation into the death of [REDACTED] K; COR 2017 2423 – Investigation into the death of [REDACTED] FS; COR 2015 3624 – Investigation into the death of John Reed; COR 2016 2733 – Investigation into the death of [REDACTED] ZT; COR 2017 2423 – Investigation into the death of [REDACTED] A

Dear Judge Cain,

I apologise for the delay in responding to your recommendation based on the investigations listed above. My deepest condolences go out to the family and loved ones of the deceased.

Family Safety Victoria accepts the following recommendation in full.

I recommend that the Victoria Government and Family Safety Victoria develop a research-based strategy, in consultation with victim survivors, informal supporters and priority communities, to provide targeted information and services to informal supporters assisting persons affected by family violence.

Furthermore, Family Safety Victoria and the Victorian Government are already undertaking work across several areas to aid informal supporters assisting persons affected by family violence, as well as priority communities.

MARAM and Information Sharing reforms

The Family Violence Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management (MARAM) Framework, the Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme (FVISS) and the Child Information Sharing Scheme (CISS) are three interrelated reforms that are integral to reducing family violence and promoting child safety and wellbeing.

The MARAM Framework sets out responsibilities for identifying, assessing, and managing family violence risk across workforces in the family violence and broader service system. A range of workforces were prescribed through regulations to align to the MARAM Framework and information sharing schemes in 2018, and Phase 2 of the reforms commenced from April 2021.

There are now over 370,000 workers prescribed into the MARAM reforms across the state. This includes workers in early education, primary and secondary schools, mental health and drug and alcohol services, GPs, public health services and hospitals, refugee and migrant services and state-funded aged care services.

As an example of a tailored work that the Victorian Government's has progressed over this time to assist 'informal' supporters of victim survivors, a Family Violence Support During COVID-19 Practice Note was distributed to specialist family violence services and the Domestic Violence Victoria network in March 2020 and can be found online on the Victorian Government at <https://www.vic.gov.au/maram-practice-guides-and-resources>. This practice note gives informal supporters guidance on what to do if they are concerned someone they know needs help, including safe communication, safe accommodation and the contact number for Safe Steps.

Safe Steps is a 24/7 service coordinating crisis responses for victim survivors of family violence in Victoria and is the key entry point to family violence support services. Safe steps are funded to provide support for victim survivors via telephone and online approaches, with a webchat functionality launched in May 2020 as an alternate access point to support victim survivors without further compromising their safety.

Culturally diverse communities

Family violence support for multicultural communities is an important priority for the Victorian Government. In July 2020, the Multicultural Communities Family Violence Working Group was established, co-chaired by Family Safety Victoria and the Victorian Multicultural Commission, to support the 20 organisations funded under the Multicultural COVID-19 Family Violence Funding Package to advise on opportunities and gaps in the family violence service system.

The 2021-22 Victorian Budget allocated \$2 million to further build the capacity of the family violence service system to better respond to multicultural and faith communities. Of this funding, \$564,000 is for case management and flexible support packages for women on temporary visas.

The Victorian Government also funds specialist family violence services to deliver victim survivor support responses, including family violence case management for multicultural communities. This includes funding to inTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence, which provides a statewide specialist family violence service for migrant and refugee women and their families, and to the Australian Muslim Women's Centre for Human Rights.

Aboriginal communities

Dhelk Dja: Safe Our Way – Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families 2018-2028 is the Aboriginal-led agreement that commits Aboriginal communities, Aboriginal services and the Victorian Government to work together to ensure that Aboriginal people, families and communities are stronger, safe and living free from family violence. Dhelk Dja is built upon the foundation of Aboriginal self-determination and places the expertise of specialist services and people with lived experience at its heart.

One of the key commitments under Dhelk Dja is the Dhelk Dja Family Violence Fund, which will provide \$13.8 million in funding to more than 45 Aboriginal-led initiatives and services. This funding supports Victorian Aboriginal organisations to deliver culturally appropriate, Aboriginal-led tailored responses to victim survivors and people who use violence, including for women, men, children and young people.

The Orange Door

The Orange Door Network is a service for adults and children who are experiencing or have experienced family violence and families who need support with the care of their children and is part of the Victorian Government's response to the Royal Commission into Family Violence. The Orange Door website contains relevant information and advice (including how The Orange Door can assist) for people who may be worried about someone they know experiencing or perpetrating family violence or a child or young person they know who isn't getting the care they need (<https://orangedoor.vic.gov.au/help-someone-else>).

In relation to how The Orange Door Network is supporting priority communities, The Inclusion Action Plan for The Orange Door (Inclusion Action Plan) (**Attachment 1**) is a state-wide two-year plan across financial years 2020-2021 and 2021-22 to embed inclusion, access and equity in The Orange Door services and policies through a set of tangible actions. This Inclusion Action Plan focuses on actions to improve access and responsiveness for people from diverse communities as they can experience systemic barriers when accessing family violence and other specialist services such as child and family services.

As part this approach, each Orange Door Network will work with local ethno-specific and multicultural agencies to explore the most effective approach to enhance the engagement with, and service responsiveness to multicultural, faith based and newly arrived communities. This could include establishing a dedicated Multicultural Advisory Committee, utilising an existing forum in the area or in areas where there are many small multicultural communities a more effective approach may be engagement in the different communities to identify community leaders and use informal community networks to promote engagement and accessibility.

Research

Research is a significant priority for Family Safety Victoria. Family Safety Victoria is currently partnering with universities and community sector organisations to undertake research into the impacts of COVID-19 on family violence and sexual assault prevalence, and how the sector has responded and adapted to the challenges of COVID-19. We are confident that the successful projects will provide important insights that can be used to strengthen our future responses.

Family Safety Victoria is also developing a whole of Victorian government family violence research agenda and research program in response to the commitment made in the 2020-23 Family Violence Reform Rolling Action Plan (RAP). The research agenda (to be published by the end of 2021) sets out the Victorian government's priorities for family violence and sexual violence and harm research, with the objective of targeting research to priority evidence gaps so that we can improve family violence service delivery.

The research program (to be delivered in 2022) will detail how government will work with Victorian universities, the sector and industry to deliver research aligned to the agenda, including on ways to support sector-led research, knowledge translation, and the establishment of collaborative research partnerships.

Consultation with victim survivors

Family Safety Victoria is committed to and has led engagement with people with lived experience of family violence and children and families in need of support in every part of how we design, implement, resource and measure services, systems and policies. We know that to build a service system that works for victim survivors, we must actively empower people with lived experience to have a central voice in our work. We have designed structures and created opportunities for people with a lived experience to continue to influence, inform and contribute to the family violence reforms, including initiatives that provide information and support to informal supporters assisting persons affected by family violence.

A key component of this approach is the Victim Survivors' Advisory Council (VSAC), which was established in July 2016 to give people with lived experience of family violence a voice, and ensure they contribute to and influence the design and implementation of family violence reforms.

Bystander action

The Victorian Government's ten-year Free from Violence Strategy to prevent family violence and all forms of violence against women, released in 2017, includes a focus on bystander action. One of the key actions in the Strategy's First Action Plan 2018-2021 was to "pilot primary prevention bystander

programs”, which has been delivered and evaluated. A strengthening and expansion of bystander programs is being considered as part of the current development of the Second Action Plan 2021-2024, to be finalised in late 2021.

Bystander action is a feature of various government-funded prevention projects that are delivered with women’s health services, Aboriginal organisations, LGBTIQ+ communities, local governments, and Victorian TAFEs and universities. Bystander action has also been the focus of Respect Victoria’s ‘Call It Out’ campaign, with different iterations of the campaign focusing on women, older people, public transport, sport, and COVID-19.

Bystander action is also a part of prevention work with multicultural communities. Since 2016, the Victorian Government has allocated approximately \$20 million in grants to 87 community organisations to deliver 155 family violence prevention, awareness raising and early intervention projects with multicultural and/or faith communities. This funding has enabled multicultural and faith communities to implement and test innovative and culturally appropriate prevention initiatives and strengthen their capacity to identify and respond to family violence.

The community organisations delivering these projects have focused on various aspects of family violence, including the important role of bystanders. Staff from some community organisations have built their capacity in relation to bystanders by undertaking Active Bystander Action and Intervention training sessions run by organisations such as Gender Equity Victoria, No To Violence and Women’s Health in the North. Organisations that are trained in bystander action have then included it in family violence awareness workshops they have provided to their communities.

All of these activities in relation to bystanders are founded in the most up-to-date evidence, with one of the most comprehensive strategies on bystanders completed by VicHealth in 2019. We are continually adding to and strengthening this evidence base through our various community-driven projects and initiatives.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if further information is required.

Yours sincerely



Eleri Butler
Chief Executive Officer

11/11/2021