



Department of Families, Fairness and Housing

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Marde Bevan
Coroner's Registrar
Coroners Court of Victoria
65 Kavanagh Street
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By email: cpuresponses@coronerscourt.vic.gov.au

Dear Ms Bevan

Investigation into the death of Jason [REDACTED] – COR 2021 005548

Thank you for your letter of 7 August 2024 enclosing Coroner Sarah Gebert's findings into the death of Jason (Redacted) and recommendations made to Family Safety Victoria regarding the Personal Safety Initiative (PSI) program.

Family Safety Victoria is a division of the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (the department) and is responsible for statewide programs supporting victim survivors of family violence, including the PSI program.

Coroner Gebert made one recommendation, consisting of five sub-sections, in relation to Family Safety Victoria and the Personal Safety Initiative program (see **Attachment 1**). The recommendation states that, with the aim of promoting public health and safety and preventing similar deaths, that Family Safety Victoria, in consultation with relevant stakeholders, undertake a series of updates to the Personal Safety Initiative program. These updates include:

- the development of a standardised safety plan template specifically for the activation of personal safety devices,
- updates to minimum requirements and key policy guidelines for security providers,
- supporting an update to the National Police Alarm Response Guideline, and
- ensuring these updates are disseminated to local PSI coordinators.

I provide the following response on behalf of Family Safety Victoria, the department and the Victorian Government.

The department supports Coroner Gerbert's recommendation in principle. The department acknowledges the distressing experience of P [REDACTED] who activated her personal safety device during an extended family violence incident involving the deceased and received no response. The department also acknowledges that if a police response had been activated, the outcome for Jason [REDACTED] could also have been different.

The recommendation, and the five sub-sections, will be considered and incorporated alongside the upcoming planned review of the PSI program and its guidelines, which is

expected to be completed in October 2025. This review will include the establishment of a working group that will include representation from Victoria Police and the specialist family violence peak body, Safe + Equal.

The planned review will seek advice from the specialist family violence sector to consider and develop a standard safety plan template which will be used to specify requirements following an alarm being activated but not validated by a victim survivor. This personal safety device activation safety plan, which will supplement existing safety plans for victim survivors, will be shared with security providers responsible for monitoring and responding to personal safety devices through the Personal Safety Initiative.

The department will provide Victoria Police with subject matter advice as requested, to support any opportunities to update and align the planned review with the *National Police Alarm Response Guideline*, in consultation with the Australian Security Industry Association Limited (ASIAL), the national peak body for security providers. The updates to these national guidelines will ensure greater clarity for security providers on when to contact police following alarm activation by a user who has a device for family violence related reasons.

The department is commencing consultations with the specialist family violence sector to review the PSI program guidance, which includes the operational guidelines and guidance specifically for security providers, the *PSI Minimum Technology Standards* and *PSI Minimum requirements for auditing, installation and monitoring services*. As part of this review, updates will be made to incorporate the new processes for the safety plan template and its implementation, as well as any potential amendments to the *National Police Alarm Response Guideline*.

Upon finalisation of the review, an information session and fact sheet will be delivered by Family Safety Victoria, with representation from Victoria Police, the Statewide PSI Coordinator at Safe + Equal and local PSI Coordinators across Victoria, on the topic of personal safety devices, the updated personal safety initiative guidance and requirements for the supplementary safety plan template for alarm activation.

Should you have any queries, please contact Melanie Heenan, Deputy Secretary, Family Safety Victoria [REDACTED]

Yours sincerely



Peta McCammon
Secretary
Department of Families, Fairness and Housing
12/11/2024

Attachment 1 – Coroner Gebert’s recommendation

- 1) With the aim of promoting public health and safety and preventing similar deaths, I recommend that Family Safety Victoria:
 - a) in consultation with the sector, develop a standardised safety plan template that must be completed with the victim-survivor and provided to security providers responsible for monitoring personal safety devices funded by the Personal Safety Initiative (PSI). This template must, at a minimum:
 - i. provide instruction on how the security provider should respond to the activation of a personal safety alarm when the victim-survivor and/or their contacts are unable to be reached; and
 - ii. a copy of the safety plan should also be provided to the victim-survivor and reviewed at regular intervals.
 - b) make changes to the *Minimum requirements for auditing, installation and monitoring services* to ensure that all security providers that are contracted to deliver monitoring services under the Personal Safety Initiative are required to have a copy of a victim survivor’s completed safety plan template on file, as outlined in Recommendation 1(a) and that this must be followed by the security provider when a personal safety alarm is activated;
 - c) coordinate with the Australian Security Industry Association Limited (ASIAL) to develop an update to the *National Police Alarm Response Guideline* to provide clear instructions on when security providers are required to contact police following the activation of a Monitored Personal Safety Alarm by a user who has an alarm for family violence related reasons. Amendments to this document should include:
 - i. clear guidance on when activation of a Monitored Personal Safety Alarm should be considered ‘validated’, including in circumstances where the user cannot be contacted;
 - ii. the limitations of reviewing audio captured by a Monitored Personal Safety Alarm to determine risk to the users who are victim-survivors of family violence;
 - iii. explicit instructions that silent or non-violent audio captured by an activated Monitored Personal Safety Alarm is **not** an indication that the activation was invalid, and that further investigation is required to determine whether police should be contacted; and
 - iv. requirements for security providers to check if a safety plan exists when a personal safety device is activated and to comply with the requirements of the

safety plan, including contacting police even if there is no 'validated' response from the user;

- d) review and update the policies *Personal Safety Initiative – Minimum Technology Standards* and *Personal Safety Initiative – Minimum requirements for auditing, installation and monitoring services* in accordance with the suggested amendments outlined above; and
- e) work with Statewide Personal Safety Coordinators to ensure that PSI Coordinators are provided with guidance on the above amendments. The Statewide PSI Coordinator should also collaborate with the PSI coordinators to ensure that case managers supporting victim-survivors to access personal safety alarms are aware of the limitations of the device and the limited circumstances in which security providers can call police upon activation of the alarm.