



Secretary

Department of Families, Fairness and Housing

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BAC-CO-54185

State Coroner's Registrar
Coroners Court of Victoria
65 Kavanagh Street
SOUTHBANK VIC 3006
By email: cpuresponses@coronerscourt.vic.gov.au

Dear Registrar

Finding without inquest into the death of Stephen O'Brien – COR 2023 000213

I write in response to the findings made by State Coroner Judge Cain on 11 March 2025 into the passing of Stephen O'Brien, and the recommendations made to the Victorian Government.

I was deeply saddened to learn about the circumstances leading to Mr O'Brien's passing, and I extend my condolences to Mr O'Brien's family and friends.

State Coroner Judge Cain made three recommendations in relation to the findings, the second and third of which fall within the portfolio responsibilities of the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (the department).

I provide the following responses to these recommendations on behalf of the department, noting that these are framed in alignment with *Ageing well in Victoria: An action plan for strengthening wellbeing for senior Victorians 2022-26* (the Ageing Well Action Plan).

The Ageing Well Action Plan is focused on supporting older people to participate and contribute to their local community and live healthy, active, and purposeful lives. One of the Ageing Well Action Plan's priority areas is *Valuing Senior Victorians*, which includes initiatives to improve awareness of ageism and address elder abuse.

I note that these responses should be read in conjunction with the response from the Department of Health, who will be responding separately to the first recommendation.

Recommendation two

That the Victorian Government implement the submission by Seniors Rights Victoria and Council on the Ageing to the *Inquiry into Capturing Data on Family Violence Perpetrators*, namely, to raise awareness through targeted campaigns and greater investment in community education to educate older people about the various forms of elder abuse and the importance of seeking help, providing clear information on

where and how to get assistance to empower them to report abuse, thus improving data collection and enabling timely intervention.

The State Coroner's recommendation is under consideration. The department supports in-principle the need for targeted campaigns that raise awareness of elder abuse and support pathways; however, these efforts must be balanced against the capacity of frontline services to respond to the uptick in demand that such campaigns are likely to generate.

The Victorian Government has funded a range of initiatives to increase awareness of elder abuse. In 2019, Respect Victoria launched a campaign to raise awareness of elder abuse in the community, by highlighting common forms of elder abuse and encouraging people to call out ageist and sexist behaviours. The *Respect Older People: Call it Out* campaign remains available on Respect Victoria's website, with downloadable educative materials that have been translated into five languages.

Additionally, the department funds eight Elder Abuse Prevention Networks (EAPNs) across the state to deliver local action that raises awareness of elder abuse and prevents it from happening, using a primary prevention approach. EAPNs are membership based, comprised of community groups and organisations that work with or provide services to older people. These networks organise activities ranging from community sessions, workshops and activities that address ageism in their local communities and will often raise awareness of elder abuse and support pathways as part of these events.

The department also provides funding to the Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria (ECCV) to deliver the Raising Awareness of Elder Abuse in Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Communities project. As part of this work, ECCV works in partnership with Seniors Rights Victoria to train bilingual community educators, who in turn deliver in-language sessions to raise awareness of elder abuse and the ways in which older people can seek support. Reporting from ECCV indicates that participation in these sessions has increased steadily since 2020-21, with 700 participants attending a session in 2023-24.

Recommendation three

That the Victorian Government fund pilot programs of integrated response models of care specifically for both victim survivors and perpetrators of elder abuse, given the barriers to engage with support for this type of family violence.

The State Coroner's recommendation is under consideration. The department supports in-principle the need for integrated response models of care for both older people experiencing elder abuse, and the people using violence, subject to resourcing.

The 2023-24 State Budget provided \$6 million over four years to continue delivery of Seniors Rights Victoria, which includes the statewide elder abuse helpline, and fund the eight Elder Abuse Prevention Networks.

The department also funds a range of additional initiatives to prevent and strengthen responses to elder abuse. This includes delivery of an elder abuse counselling and mediation service in five of the department's areas, of which The Orange Door and other Community Health Services can make referrals. The department also funds awareness-raising activities in multicultural communities, and a free online Elder Abuse Learning Hub for professionals working with older people.

Underpinning Victoria's family violence system is the Family Violence Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management (MARAM) Framework which provides a shared understanding and system wide approach to the identification, assessment, and management of family violence risk. Within MARAM, elder abuse is defined as family violence experienced by older people within family or family-like contexts, including co-resident violence in residential care services and supported residential settings. MARAM practice guidance and risk assessment and management tools provide best practice guidance for professionals working with older people who are experiencing family violence, including questions specific to family violence risk for older people.

The MARAM Framework aims to ensure coordinated responses across all prescribed organisations and entities across the service system. In the health and aged care sector, prescribed services include state-funded aged care services, public hospitals and health services, community health, alcohol and other drug services, mental health services and Ambulance Victoria. These services must align their policies, procedures, practice guidance and tools with the MARAM Framework and can apply the learnings from the MARAM Family Violence Against Older People (Elder Abuse) – victim survivor focused eLearn.

The Department of Health's Strengthening Hospital Responses to Family Violence (SHRFV) provides a framework for statewide public health services to embed the practice of identifying and responding to family violence experienced by patients, as well as aligning their organisation and prescribed workforces to MARAM and Information Sharing reforms. The Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme (FVISS) enables prescribed entities to share information to assess or manage family violence risk, allowing the service system to manage victim survivors' safety and hold people using violence accountable for their actions. Some health entities are prescribed to both MARAM and FVISS, such as public hospitals, where others are only prescribed to FVISS, such as general practitioners.

In Victoria, both older people experiencing elder abuse and people using family violence can access support through several services. The Orange Door is an accessible community entry point that provides information and support to people of all ages experiencing or choosing to use family violence, as well as children, young people and families seeking parenting and well-being support. The Orange Door brings together partner organisations from Family Violence, Child and Family Services and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) to provide an integrated intake and assessment point in each area.

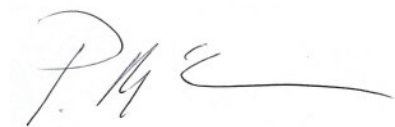
The Orange Door responds to people experiencing elder abuse and those who are using or at risk of using family violence by assessing their risk and needs and supporting them to navigate the service system for longer term supports. This may include providing a family violence risk assessment, safety planning, information sharing and risk management, crisis response, including brokerage, service planning and referrals and secondary consultations and capacity building. The department funds a range of programs to meet the needs of people who are using violence either in the form of group work or individualised case management.

Male victim survivors of family violence can also access support through the Department of Justice and Community Safety's Victims of Crime Helpline, and Victims Assistance Program, which is the primary support service for male victims in Victoria. The Victim Assistance Program is available through the Victims of Crime Helpline and provides a free service that offers tailored service to victims of crime to manage the effects of experiencing a violent crime and promote recovery. This can include assisting with day-to-day needs, helping with communication with police and making a report, and assistance getting ready for court.

In addition, the department has recently engaged the Council on the Ageing (COTA) Victoria and Safe and Equal to deliver the Elder Abuse Capability Development Program, which will build the capability of specialist family violence practitioners to appropriately identify and respond to elder abuse. The program will provide tailored learning options for family violence practitioners with comprehensive responsibilities under the MARAM Framework. This will support participants to understand the risk factors, nature and dynamics of elder abuse, identify presentations of older people experiencing elder abuse and provide an appropriate response, and develop a greater awareness of referral pathways and opportunities for cross-sector collaboration.

I trust this information is of assistance. Should you wish to discuss this matter further, please contact Kelly Nolan, Managing Principal Solicitor, Public Law, Litigation and Inquiries, Legal Services Branch at the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing via

Yours sincerely



Peta McCammon
Secretary

27/05/2025