



Secretary

Department of Families, Fairness and Housing

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BAC-CO-53796

Kate Sanderson
Coroner's Registrar
Coroners Court of Victoria

By email: cpuresponses@coronerscourt.vic.gov.au

Dear Ms Sanderson

Finding into Death Without Inquest – COR 2018 000175

Thank you for your letter enclosing State Coroner Judge John Cain's findings of 23 October 2024 into the death of TCW and recommendations made to the Victorian Government. As the recommendations fall within the remit of the Department of Families Fairness and Housing (the department) your letter has come to me for response.

The department acknowledges the tragic death of TCW and I offer my sincere condolences to TCW's family. The department provides the following advice in response to the recommendations.

Recommendation (i)

In line with the recommendations of the [Royal Commission into Family Violence (RCFV)] and [Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS)], the Victorian Government develop additional crisis and longer-term supported accommodation options with attached therapeutic support for adolescents who use family violence in the home. The Victorian Government should also consider how this accommodation would be accessible to young people with a disability.

The Coroner's recommendation is under consideration.

Programs for young people using violence

The Adolescent Family Violence in the Home program is an early intervention response which recognises that identifying early indicators of adolescent family violence in the home (including earlier unreported incidents of violence in the home), and adopting an evidence-informed approach to care, is more effective than a justice response, given the complexity and therapeutic needs of young people who use violence in the home.

Since the Royal Commission into Family Violence (RCFV), the department has been working to strengthen the AFVITH program, including through the development of a new AFVITH

Model of Care (MoC) in 2021. Currently, the department funds 14 service providers to deliver the AFVITH program in all 17 DFFH areas across the State, including five Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs).

The department also funds 11 specialist sexual assault services across Victoria to provide the Sexually Abusive Behaviours Treatment Services (SABTS). SABTS is a nationally recognised, highly specialised program which supports the child or young person and their family, carers, school and community. Support includes a developmentally appropriate response to address the child or young person's concerning behaviour as well as their broader needs. SABTS also helps families and carers to understand and support a child or young person to change their behaviour. In the longer term, SABTS programs are providing a point of critical early intervention that reduces the risk of future offending in adulthood.

The SABTS program is informed by practice standards that promote the equity of access and quality of care for therapeutic services working with children with harmful sexual behaviours and are endorsed by the Australian and New Zealand Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abuse (ANZATSA). The SABTS model aligns with national and international best practice theoretical frameworks and assessment tools including the AIM project, ecological systemic approaches, trauma-focused, and family-support approaches, which are shown by research to be effective in addressing harmful sexual behaviours.

The department notes that young people with a disability, and with complex needs, are over-represented in both the SABTS and AFVITH programs. The department is committed to continuing to evolve both programs to ensure they are accessible to young people with a disability, noting that any significant enhancements will be subject to funding.

Further work is required to consider whether the AFVITH program could be tailored for delivery in a residential setting or in youth homelessness settings. Any implementation of such an approach would be dependent on capacity, prioritisation and funding, including for workforce capability building.

Accommodation options for young people

The Victorian Government is also committed to ensuring any accommodation options available for young people are accessible to young people who have a disability, noting that the Commonwealth Government is responsible for the funding of National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) supports and services that could be brought into this accommodation.

Early intervention is the most effective way to ensure vulnerable young people can successfully transition to independent lives. Stable housing and support are essential for

young people experiencing or at risk of homelessness to create opportunities and pathways to positive life changing outcomes.

The 2024-25 State Budget invested almost \$197 million over four years to break the cycle of homelessness. This includes funding to meet critical demand for services providing support and accommodation to young people. It includes funding to continue a range of youth homelessness services, including:

- Holmesglen Education First Youth Foyer delivered by Launch Housing
- Village 21 Preston delivered by Anglicare
- Kids Under Cover Studio Program
- Homelessness Youth Dual Diagnosis Initiative
- Hope Street Outreach Service; and the
- Richmond Youth Hub

This builds on our existing annual investment of over \$80 million specifically to address youth homelessness. This includes funding for a youth-specific entry point, 22 youth refuges with two women-only refuges, two refuges for Aboriginal young people, and 13 youth foyers located across metro and regional Victoria.

Through the Big Housing Build initiative, the Victorian Government's \$50 million Youth Capital Grants Program is delivering 130 new beds across Victoria for young people experiencing homelessness. This investment is making a material difference in the number of young people experiencing homelessness. The overall number of young people presenting alone for homelessness services in Victoria has decreased by 33 per cent between 2012-13 and 2023-24.

Recommendation (ii)

That the Victorian Government review whether NDIS service providers in Victoria are equipped to work with young people who have a disability who also use AFV and provide resourcing and/or training to address any deficiencies.

The Coroner's recommendation is unable to be implemented by the Victorian Government, as the regulation of NDIS service providers is the responsibility of the Commonwealth Government.

The Commonwealth Government has assumed responsibility for the regulation of most disability supports with the introduction of the NDIS, including training and workforce development requirements. NDIS providers, being Commonwealth Government regulated, are not prescribed in Victoria under the Family Violence Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework (MARAM) and they are not part of the Family Violence (FVISS) or

Child Information Sharing Schemes (CISS). As such, the Victorian Government does not have access to comprehensive information about the training of this workforce.

However, the Victorian Government is committed to creating opportunities for providers outside of its jurisdictional responsibility to build their capability to respond to young people experiencing and/or using family violence.

To support opportunities for collaboration, a new Working Group has been established under the Victorian NDIS Executive Steering Committee (ESC). The ESC enables the Victorian Government to work with the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA), NDIS Quality and Safeguard Commission and Commonwealth Department of Social Services to be better equipped to identify and respond to family and sexual violence. Addressing barriers to accessing family violence training for NDIS workforces is part of the workplan for the ESC.

Some Victorian specialist disability services are prescribed under MARAM, such as those engaged under a state contract to provide specialist forensic disability accommodation services and services provided by DFFH under the *Human Services (Complex Needs) Act 2009* and the *Disability Act 2006*. Some individual workers in Victorian Government-funded universal services, such as psychologists and allied health workers who work with people with disability may have undertaken MARAM training, where they work in services prescribed under other criteria, such as community health centres, public hospitals and mental health services.

The department has also made family violence resources and training for organisations who work with people with disability available regardless of their MARAM status. This includes access to a free training in identification of family violence through a MARAM eLearn. Individuals can also access MARAM-aligned, accredited family violence training through TAFEs, Registered Training Organisations, and dual sector universities, as part of the Free TAFE program available to all eligible Victorian workers. Another example is the Eastern Metropolitan Regional Family Violence Partnership Disability Inclusion and Safety Resource Hub, which has dedicated resources on Adolescents using Violence in the Home and Young People with Disability.

NDIS providers in Victoria can also access specialist case consultations through the Family Violence and Disability Practice Leader Initiative. This initiative includes access to the Statewide Disability Inclusion Advisor, operating at Safe and Equal, the statewide Family Violence peak body. This program supports practitioners from family and sexual violence services and disability services to respond appropriately to the intersection of family violence and disability.

The Victorian Government is continuing to engage with the Commonwealth to improve family violence capability across the country in line with Victorian reforms. The department is

working directly with HumanAbility – the Jobs and Skills Council for health and human services – to identify opportunities to align course competencies to MARAM and embed family violence core capabilities into qualifications under the CHC Community Services Training Package.

Collectively, these efforts will increase the amount and quality of training and development available to organisations and individuals seeking to improve their family violence and sexual violence capabilities, regardless of their obligations under MARAM.

Recommendation (iii)

That the Victorian Government review the current Victorian AFV and AFVP service providers to determine whether they are equipped to work with young people who have a disability who also use AFV and provide resourcing and/or training to address any deficiencies.

The Coroner's recommendation is under consideration. The department is committed to continuous improvement across all its family and sexual violence responses, including to ensure they are accessible to children and young people who have a disability. The department notes that while reasonable adjustments are made to accommodate the disability needs of young people accessing programs, there are opportunities to consider more tailored responses.

In 2023 the department funded an independent evaluation of the AFVITH program that was completed by Ernst & Young in November 2024. The evaluation includes findings in relation to strengthening the program in relation to children and young people with disability. The department is currently reviewing the evaluation and considering how its findings can be incorporated into the MoC and service delivery, within existing resources.

The department funds the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare (CECFW) to support the AFVITH program. CECFW works with AFVITH providers to embed best practices, develop training and resources, and continue building an evidence base for effective outcomes, including for young people with a disability.

The department is also working to develop Child and Young Person MARAM Practice Guidance for publication in 2025. This guidance will include content on the identification, assessment and management of family violence risk to children and young people, and content on young people who use family violence, including those with a disability. These resources will support early intervention for young people who use family violence and ensure a collaborative approach to risk management.

Within the department's Forensic Disability Services, the Youth Forensic Disability Clinical Service has been established to work with young people aged 10 – 21 years with cognitive

disability. As outlined in the response to recommendation two, these services are prescribed under MARAM. Work has commenced within the Youth Forensic Disability Clinical Service to develop a Family Violence treatment response within the service.

Recommendation (iv)

That the Victorian Government support ANROWS' calls for further research regarding people with disability who use family violence in order to build an evidence base for work in this area.

The Coroner's recommendation is under consideration. The department notes that building an evidence base for young people with a disability who use family violence in the home is critical, to ensure we continue to develop and deliver evidence-based tailored support services to support young people to change their behaviour and enhance safety for family members. Commissioning further research will be subject to capacity, prioritization and funding.

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

Yours sincerely



Peta McCammon
Secretary

11/04/2025