



Secretary

Department of Families, Fairness and Housing

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BAC-CO-56113

Ms Kate Sanderson
Coroners Registrar
Coroners Court of Victoria

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

Dear Registrar

Investigation into the death of Ms HRZ – COR 2020 007005

I write in response to the findings and recommendations made by Coroner Giles on 4 June 2025 in relation to the death of Ms HRZ.

I was deeply troubled to learn of the circumstances of Ms HRZ's death and I offer my sincere condolences to her children, her extended family and friends.

Coroner Giles made two recommendations to the Victorian Government which fall within the responsibilities of the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (the department). The department provides the following responses.

Recommendation (ii)

That the Victorian Government review the total quantum of primary prevention funding and prioritise longer-term funding across the primary prevention system, including multi-year funding for organisations leading prevention activities, and stable, ongoing funding for Respect Victoria, to assess whether current funding levels meet needs in this space.

The Coroner's recommendation is being implemented as outlined below.

Primary prevention is a core part of Victoria's strategy to prevent and respond to family and sexual violence. Our primary prevention efforts are driven by the 10-year Free from Violence strategy, which focuses on preventing violence at pivotal stages of life and in the places where Victorians live, work, learn and socialise. The range and scale of primary prevention activities that Victoria has progressed under this strategy is nation leading, with 106 individual prevention projects supported in 2024-25.

In the 2025-26 State Budget, the Victorian Government provided \$123.2 million over four years to continue efforts to prevent and respond to family and sexual violence. This includes funding to extend Victoria's primary prevention leadership through Respect Victoria and to partner with multicultural and faith communities to deliver tailored prevention and early intervention programs.

In 2025-26, \$25.3 million is being invested specifically in primary prevention through the Prevention of Family Violence portfolio. This builds on primary prevention investment in other portfolios in the 2024-25 State Budget, including \$39.1 million over four years for Respectful Relationships education in schools and early childhood services and \$18.3 million over two years for 12 women's health services across Victoria. These services are funded to build primary prevention capacity in local communities, alongside promoting the health and wellbeing of women and girls.

Additionally, the Strengthening Women's Safety Package announced on 30 May 2024 is supporting a range of primary prevention initiatives, including a new four-year 'saturation model' in Ballarat. The saturation model brings together every part of the community to deliver a coordinated prevention approach and is being led by Respect Victoria. The package also announced more intensive training and support for staff teaching Respectful Relationships, and an invitation and support for more non-government schools to join.

Recommendation (iii)

That the Victorian Government reaffirm its commitment to funding the development and implementation of a Sexual Violence Strategy, as outlined in the Victorian Law Reform Commission (VLRC) 2021 report, Improving the Justice System Response to Sexual Offences, and provide a timeframe for its completion. As part of the Sexual Violence Strategy, the Victorian Government should:

- (a) Develop a coordinated, community-wide approach to preventing sexual offending which includes investment in the development, delivery and evaluation of initiatives focused on the primary prevention of sexual violence by specialist sexual assault services and other relevant experts (including InTouch); and*
- (b) Consider the circumstances and comments contained within this finding with respect to any future investments in the expansion of:*
 - (i) Multi-Disciplinary Centres;*
 - (ii) Specialist Sexual Assault Services; and*
 - (iii) culturally-responsive support for victim survivors of sexual violence.*

The Coroner's recommendation is under consideration.

Sexual Violence Strategy

The department consulted with the Department of Justice and Community Safety (DJCS) in providing the following response in relation to the Sexual Violence Strategy.

The Victorian Government has implemented a range of priority reforms to strengthen responses to sexual offences in response to the VLRC's recommendations. In November 2021, the Victorian Government's immediate response committed to major law reforms, along with an immediate \$5.2 million funding boost for specialist sexual assault services. The Victorian Parliament subsequently passed legislation to introduce a new affirmative consent model and to explicitly criminalise stealthing.

To support the introduction of these laws, the Victorian Government invested \$3.5 million to deliver the Supporting Young People to Understand Affirmative Consent Program. The program has successfully engaged with young people aged 12-25 across diverse communities to build their understanding of affirmative consent and sexual violence.

Further reforms underway to improve responses to sexual offences include:

- design of an alternative online reporting pathway for sexual offences
- removing barriers to reporting by extending the defence of absolute privilege from defamation proceedings where a victim survivor reports sexual assault to police
- stronger laws to target image-based sexual offences
- legal assistance to families of deceased victims of sexual offences
- Sexual Assault Crisis Line upgrade to improve capacity
- community education on respectful relationships and consent
- continued funding for vital sexual assault services
- a new Justice Navigator pilot to make sure survivors of sexual assault can easily navigate support, recovery and justice options.

The Victorian Government continues to engage with cross-jurisdictional counterparts to align efforts to prevent and address sexual violence, abuse and harm. Along with other states and territories, the Victorian Government agreed to the Standing Committee of Attorney's-General (SCAG) workplan to Strengthen Criminal Justice Responses to Sexual Assault 2022-27. The workplan focuses on strengthening data and research, improving justice sector education and training, and reviewing and responding to issues raised by advocates.

Prevention of sexual violence

The Victorian Government is scoping coordinated, community-wide approaches to preventing sexual violence with the specialist sexual assault services sector. In 2025-26, Sexual Assault Services Victoria (SASVic) has been funded to identify innovative approaches to sexual violence prevention with the Victorian specialist sexual assault services sector.

Since 2016, the Victorian Government has invested \$129 million in the Respectful Relationships initiative, which supports schools and early childhood settings to promote and model respect, positive attitudes and behaviours. Respectful relationships supports a whole-school approach to preventing gender-based violence, including sexual violence.

Over 2,000 Victorian government, Catholic and independent schools are now signed on to the Respectful Relationships whole school approach. This includes all Victorian government schools and more than 450 non-government schools.

Multi-Disciplinary Centres

Multi-Disciplinary Centres (MDCs) bring together specialist sexual assault services, Victoria Police Sexual Offences and Child Abuse Investigation Teams, forensic medical services and Child Protection to provide a victim-centred, integrated response for victim survivors of

sexual violence and child abuse. There are currently eight MDCs in Victoria, located in Seaford, Mildura, Geelong, Dandenong, Bendigo, Morwell, Wyndam and Shepparton.

The MDC model was established in 2008 as part of the Victorian Government's response to the VLRC's 2004 Sexual Offences: Law and Procedure Final Report.

The Coroner's findings regarding geographical barriers to victim survivors of sexual assault accessing co-located and integrated supports where MDCs are not available are acknowledged by the Victorian Government and are under consideration.

The Victorian Government is also committed to improving collaborative practice and integrated supports across services responding to sexual violence both within and outside of MDCs, bringing together existing best practice and innovation.

Specialist Sexual Assault Services

The Victorian Government provides funding for the delivery of specialist sexual assault services, including as part of all eight MDCs. These services provide free and confidential specialist therapeutic support to adults, young people and children who have experienced sexual violence recently or in the past. Where possible, services are also provided to nonoffending parents, partners, family, carers and friends.

The Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission's 2024 Yearly Report to Parliament found that frontline services need to be better and more sustainably funded. Sustainable funding for specialist sexual assault services in Victoria will be considered as part of usual budget processes.

The Victorian Government is also party to the Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence Responses 2021-30 Federation Funding Agreement which includes funding for 500 frontline family, domestic and sexual violence workers nationally, including 101 new workers in Victoria.

Culturally responsive support for victim survivors

While family and sexual violence occurs across all communities, some communities – including culturally and racially marginalised communities – experience unique forms of harm. For this reason, tailored, community-led responses are essential to providing safety and healing. As noted in response to recommendation (ii), the 2025-26 State Budget provides funding for primary prevention and early intervention within multicultural and faith communities. This funding builds on an existing \$9.7 million investment in 2020-21 to establish the *Supporting Multicultural and Faith Communities to Prevent Family Violence Grants Program*, and \$2.1 million provided in 2024-25 to extend the program.

The program has funded 33 culturally tailored prevention of family violence projects, reaching 35,000 people and over 80 multicultural and faith communities across Victoria.

Working Together

The *Working Together: Strengthening family and sexual violence support with multicultural communities grant program* (Working Together), which commenced in 2022, seeks to strengthen coordination between multicultural community organisations and specialist family and sexual violence services, to address barriers experienced by multicultural and faith communities when accessing family and sexual violence services.

Monash University, in partnership with SASVic, will develop and deliver training to interpreters and the sexual violence workforce about interpreting for victim survivors of sexual violence, including children and young people.

InTouch

The Victorian Government funds the InTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence (InTouch) to build workforce capability to support multicultural, ethno-specific and faith-based organisations to better identify and respond to family violence, including sexual violence.

This funding enables InTouch to support training and capability development in the following areas:

- workforce development for the specialist family violence and allied workforces
- capability building with multicultural, faith-based and ethno-specific organisations to improve support and referrals for clients
- research and identification of gaps and unmet needs in how the family violence and sexual assault service system supports clients from multicultural communities.

I trust this information is of assistance.

Yours sincerely



Peta McCammon
Secretary

17/09/2025