



Secretary

Department of Families, Fairness and Housing

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BAC-CO-60233

Ms Kate Sanderson
Coroner's Registrar
Coroners Court of Victoria
65 Kavanagh Street
SOUTHBANK VIC 3006

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

Dear Ms Sanderson

Finding without inquest into the death of FSZ – COR 2019 002055

I write in response to the findings made by State Coroner Judge Sanger on 8 November 2025 regarding the death of FSZ.

The Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (the department) acknowledges the tragic death of FSZ, and I extend my sincere condolences to her family and community.

State Coroner Judge Sanger has made five recommendations; four that fall within the portfolio responsibilities of the department. The department's response to those recommendations is set out below.

Recommendation 2:

The Department of Families, Fairness and Housing provide a roadmap to implementation of the recommendation 35 of the Legal and Social Issues Committee Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria.

Department's response:

This recommendation is being implemented.

Recommendation 35 advised that the Victorian Government improve access to specialist family violence crisis accommodation facilities, including by:

- Conducting demand modelling for family violence crisis accommodation across the state to ascertain need.
- Providing additional funding for accommodation facilities, including for core and cluster models of accommodation.

- Ensuring regional areas have access to family violence crisis accommodation to allow persons experiencing violence to remain in or close to their communities.

The department uses demand modelling to inform statewide funding allocations each year for important crisis responses including family violence crisis brokerage, case management and flexible support packages. The modelling for refuge demand currently uses a range of data points including L17 incidents, Risk Assessment and Management Panel (RAMP) referrals, and Homelessness Data Collection proxy information about families needing short term emergency accommodation.

Work has recently been completed to further improve the department's demand modelling for crisis accommodation through enhancements to the Specialist Homelessness Information Platform (SHIP). This will enable the collection of information about the specific accommodation types provided to clients experiencing a crisis (e.g. motel, hotel, family violence refuge, transitional housing, rooming house, caravan park, etc.) and addresses a historic over-reliance on 'proxies' or clusters of specific data points to calculate motel placements for victim survivors, which has led to both undercounting or double-counting of motel placements. It is anticipated that improved reporting will be realised from 2025-26.

The department continues to deliver the Victorian Government's investment in the refuge system through the delivery of 22 new core and cluster refuge facilities. Once all new 'builds' are complete, the number of refuges will grow to 35, with a household capacity of around 200 households per night, up from 124 prior to this investment. While the department acknowledges program delays caused by a range of factors, 17 of the 22 sites have now been completed, and five sites remain in development with program completion expected in 2027-28.

The department also continues to work closely with Commonwealth officials to secure additional funding for crisis accommodation for victim survivors, including through input into various capital funding rounds such as the Safe Places Inclusion Round and the Crisis and Transitional Accommodation Program (CTAP), as well as through the National Housing Infrastructure Facility – Crisis and Transitional (NHIF CT) opportunity supported by Victoria's Statement of Priorities.

Operational funding under the Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence (FDSV) schedule of the Federation Funding Agreement (FFA) has also been prioritised for new accommodation initiatives that reduce reliance on motels, provide better information about motels when other crisis accommodation options are unavailable (improving coordination and safety), and offer supported transition pathways out of refuge to free up places for other clients. Bridget House is an example of a FDSV initiative that seeks to reduce reliance on motels for victim survivors in crisis. Located in the Bayside Peninsula Area, an area of high demand, this 5-unit facility operated by Good Shepherd accommodates culturally and linguistically diverse victim survivors and their children, enabling them to be redirected away from short-term, emergency accommodation (motels) to safe and secure supported apartment style

accommodation. On site specialist family violence support and wrap-around services are provided to each household, and Good Shepherd regularly accepts referrals from Safe Steps into this facility.

The department's strategic plan for 2025-29 commits to developing a family violence crisis and emergency accommodation strategy with the specialist family violence sector under *Objective 2: Children, young people and families are safe, strong and supported*. This work has commenced and will help guide Victorian Government considerations for further investment in crisis accommodation for victim survivors of family violence across Victoria.

Recommendation 3:

The Department of Families, Fairness and Housing provide Safe Steps with the funding requested for the Sanctuary accommodation model in their budget bid for 2025-26, noting that this aligns with the recommendations of the March 2021 the Legal and Social Issues Committee Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria.

Department's response:

The recommendation is under consideration:

Since the 2016 Royal Commission into Family Violence (Royal Commission), Victoria has been deliberately moving to provide more privacy and flexibility for family violence victim survivors in supported crisis accommodation. The Royal Commission recommended replacing communal refuges with best practice core and cluster model, providing trauma-informed design, privacy and flexibility. Further, Victoria's Family Violence Crisis Response Model, introduced in August 2023, prioritises responses that support victim survivors to stay in their local area whenever it is safe to do so, to maintain community connections and to minimise disruption to their lives.

The Safe Steps' pilot of the Sanctuary model (Nic's Place) provides supported crisis accommodation to victim survivors who need immediate protection, where a refuge place is unavailable. The evaluation of the seven-unit pilot has demonstrated promising findings, and victim survivors report positive experiences. However, the department is carefully balancing the risks associated with accommodating significantly more victim survivors at a single, expanded site, as proposed by Safe Steps.

In line with recommendations from the Royal Commission, Victoria has been moving towards models that provide for more privacy and flexibility for family violence victim survivors in supported crisis accommodation. This has involved replacing communal style refuges with best practice core and cluster models, with designs that are trauma-informed.

While the design of the Sanctuary model allows families access to their own small unit with a kitchenette, these units are not completely standalone as they have shared hallways and rely heavily on communal spaces for kitchen space and indoor and outdoor recreational activities. There remain significant risks with reliance on communal spaces, such as the design of Sanctuary, including children being exposed to trauma-driven behaviours that may compound their own trauma or pose risk to their safety. Additionally, higher density facilities cannot respond to victim survivors with more complex mental health concerns and substance use issues, due to the configuration of the units, and can also result in increased risk for victim survivor residents should the security of the site be breached.

It is the department's understanding that Safe Steps has not yet commenced construction of the additional 28 units it had proposed for the pilot site. Operational funding to continue the existing seven units beyond 2025-26, or to support further expansion of the pilot site at any scale, remains subject to Victorian Government budget processes.

Recommendation 4:

The Department of Families, Fairness and Housing consult with Safe Steps on further expansion of the Sanctuary model to provide a range of Sanctuary facilities across metropolitan and regional communities to give greater choice and access pathways to people experiencing domestic and family violence, and for provision of specialist Sanctuary facilities to accommodate people with complex needs such as mental health and misuse of substances.

Department's response:

The recommendation is under consideration:

The department's strategic plan 2025-29 commits to develop a family violence crisis and emergency accommodation strategy with the specialist family violence sector under *Objective 2: Children, young people and families are safe, strong and supported*. This work has commenced and will help guide Victorian Government considerations of further investment in crisis accommodation for victim survivors of family violence across Victoria. The department will consult closely with family violence agencies and accommodation providers across the state, including Safe Steps, as the insights and experiences of the specialist family violence sector will be critical to informing the development of the strategy.

Recommendation 5:

The Department of Families, Fairness and Housing scale up long term investment in supported accommodation projects like Sanctuary to replace the hotel model.

Department's response:

The recommendation is under consideration:

The department's strategic plan 2025-29 commits to developing a family violence crisis and emergency accommodation strategy with the specialist family violence sector under *Objective 2: Children, young people and families are safe, strong and supported*. This work has commenced and will help guide Victorian Government considerations for further investment in crisis accommodation for victim survivors of family violence across Victoria.

I trust this information is of assistance. If you require further information, please contact Melanie Heenan, Deputy Secretary, Family Safety Victoria at

[REDACTED]

Yours sincerely



Peta McCammon
Secretary

06/02/2026