



# Family Violence

## City of Port Phillip Health Profiles

Family violence is a prevalent and complex issue that has a profound impact on the health and wellbeing of individuals, families and the broader community. In recognition of this, the National, State and local governments across Victoria have established family violence as a key priority for action. Consequently, Council has a legislated obligation to implement measures to prevent family violence and respond to the needs of victim survivors.

### If you need help

Please refer to the list of help lines and organisations outlined towards the end of this profile.

**If you are or someone you know is in immediate danger, please call 000 for Police and/or Ambulance assistance.**

### Understanding family violence

Family violence is any threatening, coercive, dominating or abusive behaviour that occurs between people in a family, domestic or intimate relationship, or former intimate relationship, that causes the person experiencing the behaviour to feel fear. If a child witnesses abusive behaviour or is exposed to the impacts of this, they are a victim of family violence in their own right. In Australia, it is against the law for any member of your family, including your partner, children, siblings or in-laws, to hurt or control you.

Family violence is an umbrella term that captures many different forms of abuse occurring in many kinds of relationships. Family violence is most commonly used by men against their current or former partners (Better Health Channel, 2023). However, family violence can occur:

- In intimate relationships between people of all genders
- In parent or step-parent to child relationships, noting that family violence is a form of child abuse
- When carers, who may or may not be family members, abuse people with disability
- When older children and young people abuse their parents, siblings or other family members
- When family members or carers abuse older people (also known as elder abuse)
- In kinship\* or 'family of choice' relationships.

\*Kinship is in relation to indigenous communities and speaks to the broader family networks, communities and clans connected by country and which care for each other.



Research undertaken by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare found that the groups of people most impacted by family violence are:

- Younger women
- Children
- Older people
- People with disability
- People from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (including people with temporary residency status)
- LGBTIQ+ people
- Pregnant women
- People in rural and remote communities
- People with mental health illness and/or substance misuse problems
- People from socio-economically disadvantaged areas
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2019).

### Forms of Family Violence

While physical violence may be the most widely recognised, other forms such as sexual, emotional, spiritual and economic abuse can be equally harmful (Safe and Equal, 2023). Forms of family violence include:

- **Emotional abuse** – Behaviour that does not demonstrate respect for someone's feelings, opinions and experiences. Emotional abuse can undermine a victim survivor's self-worth, confidence and independence, and help the perpetrator maintain power and control. Examples can include name calling or insults, deliberately undermining someone's confidence and threatening self-harm or harm to the victim, another family member or a pet.
- **Physical abuse** – Any actual or threatened attack on someone's physical safety or bodily integrity. This also includes harming or threatening to harm pets or possessions. Examples can include smashing, destroying or throwing things, pushing, shoving, hitting, slapping, choking, hair-pulling, punching or using weapons and recklessly driving a vehicle with someone else in the car.
- **Sexual abuse** – Any actual or threatened sexual contact without consent, such as unwanted touching, rape, exposure of genitals or making someone view pornography against their will. Examples include rape, including being forced to perform unwanted sexual acts, or to have sex with others, pressuring someone to agree to sex and having sex with someone without consent, or who is unable to give consent due to age, ability or intoxication.
- **Social abuse** – Behaviour that limits, controls or interferes with someone's social activities or relationships with others. Examples include monitoring movements, internet use and social communications, being aggressive towards others who are viewed as 'competition', and acts of jealousy and preventing someone from having contact with family or friends.

- **Financial abuse** – Behaviours that include taking someone’s money, withdrawing access to household funds, controlling all the household spending and excluding someone from financial decisions that impact them. Other examples include denying someone access to money (including their own), stopping someone from earning their own money and stealing money or property.
- **Spiritual abuse** – Behaviour that denigrates someone’s religious or spiritual beliefs, or prevents them from attending religious gatherings or practicing their faith. Examples include ridiculing or putting down someone’s beliefs and culture, preventing someone from belonging to or taking part in a group or ceremony that is important to their spiritual beliefs, or practicing their religion and manipulating religious teachings or cultural traditions to excuse violence.
- **Reproductive coercion** – Any deliberate attempt to dictate a woman’s (or any person who has female reproductive capacity) reproductive choices or interfere with her reproductive autonomy. This may include a person’s partner or family member preventing or promoting pregnancy, irrespective of the person’s wishes. It comprises a range of behaviours, from psychological pressure through to threats of (and actual) physical and sexual violence (Rowlands, Holdsworth, & Sowemimo, 2022).
- **Information, Communication and Technology (ICT) Based Abuse and Harassment** – Intimate partner violence, stalking and technology-based abuse are increasingly intersecting (Messing, Bagwell-Gray, Brown, & Mazzio, 2020). In other words, online harassment itself is a form of family violence with the abuse most often happening in combination with offline abuse (Anderson & Lee, 2017). Technological harassment and abuse can include sending abusive texts, emails or messages via social media, making continuous controlling or threatening phone calls and making the victim survivor prove where they are by sending photos of their location (Safe Steps Family Violence Resource Centre, 2023).

## Rates of Family Violence

Data shows that family violence is predominantly perpetrated by men against women and children within intimate partner relationships and immediate family contexts. Family violence can however, impact anyone.

- Approximately one in four women has experienced intimate partner violence, compared to one in 13 men (Our Watch, 2021).
- According to the 2022 National Homicide Monitoring Program statistical report published by the Australian Institute of Criminology, in 2019-20 there were 25 intimate partner homicides, with 36 (or 80 per cent) of these victims being female (Australian Government, 2022). This average to approximately one woman being killed by an intimate partner every 10 days.
- Rates of family, domestic and/or sexual violence are higher for Indigenous women (34 times as likely to be hospitalised as non-Indigenous women) and women with disability – 25 per cent have experienced sexual violence since the age of 15 compared to 15 per cent without disability (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2019).



- Evidence presented to the Royal Commission into Family Violence suggests intimate partner violence is as prevalent in LGBTIQ+ communities as it is in the general population (Victorian Government, 2023).
- However, people from LGBTIQ+ communities may be at an increased risk of family violence from other family members, including parents, siblings and children, due to societal homophobia, biphobia and transphobia (Victorian Government, 2021).
- In Victoria, intimate partner violence contributes more to the disease burden (an estimate of the impact on the lives of sufferers) for women aged 18 to 44 years than tobacco use, high cholesterol or use of illicit drugs (Webster, 2016).
- With all these statistics in mind, many instances of violence go unreported, and it is therefore not possible to measure the true extent of violence against women in Australia (Phillips & Vandenbroek, 2014).

### How does family violence affect the Port Phillip community and the community more broadly?

According to the Victorian Crime Statistics Agency, there were 1401 police reported family violence incidents in Port Phillip in the 2021-22 financial year, a 0.5 per cent increase from the 2020-2021 financial year. The number of these incidents has been steadily increasing over time since 2018, where it has increased from 1111, to 1275, to 1353 and 1384 in respective financial years.

Of these 1401 family violence incidents:

- 12.8 per cent resulted in Family Violence Safety Notices being issued by Victoria Police.
- 88.6 per cent were recorded as taking place at a residential location.
- 49.7 per cent involved a related criminal offence.
- The most frequently recorded types of abuse/violence were verbal with 800 incidents, followed by emotional (478), physical (356), property damage (73) and social (67). It should be noted that incidents can have multiple types of abuse/violence recorded.
- 8 in 10 occurred between current or former partners.
- 17.7 per cent were recorded as having a child or children as an Affected Family Member (AFM) or witness.

At the rate per 100,000 population, Port Phillip has a slightly lower rate of 1257 police reported family violence incidents compared to the Victorian rate of 1356.8 (Crime Statistics Agency, 2022).

*Note: It is estimated that only 25 per cent of family violence incidents are reported to the police. Consequently, the above data is unlikely to capture the full scale of the issue in our municipality.*

While family violence can affect anyone within our community, some people are at heightened risk, as their experience of family violence may be compounded by the disadvantage and discrimination they experience in their daily lives. Consequently, effective delivery activity to both respond to and prevent family violence must address the specific needs of at-risk, vulnerable populations.

- **Children** exposed to family violence are more likely to have a range of health, developmental and social problems, both during childhood and later in life (Ayre, Lum On, Webster, Gourley, &



Moon, 2016). According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics' (ABS) Personal Safety Survey (PSS) conducted in the 2021-22 financial year:

- An estimated 2.6 million people aged 18 years and over (13 per cent) witnessed violence towards a parent by a partner before the age of 15
- Of women, 16 per cent witnessed parental violence during childhood, including:
  - 14 per cent (1.4 million) who witnessed violence towards their mother
  - 5 per cent (498,300) who witnessed violence towards their father
- Of men, 11 per cent (1 million) witnessed parental violence during childhood, including:
  - 8.9 per cent (853,800) who witnessed violence towards their mother
  - 3.7 per cent (350,000) who witnessed violence towards their father
- **Elder abuse** has been increasingly recognised as a form of family violence against older people, as confirmed by the 2016 Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence (Victorian Government, 2023). While the prevalence of elder abuse is widely believed to be under reported, a 2020 National Elder Abuse Prevalence Study conducted by the Australian Institute of Family Studies found that 15 per cent of people aged 65 and older living in community dwellings had experienced some form of elder abuse in the previous 12 months (Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2022). Of those, 51 per cent were reported to be perpetrated by a family member of some kind, with the most prevalent being a son/daughter (18 per cent), partner/spouse (10 per cent) or son-in-law/daughter-in-law (7 per cent).
- **Women with disabilities** are 40 per cent more likely to be victims of family violence than women without disabilities (Victorian Government, 2017). More than 70 per cent of women with disabilities have been victims of sexual violence at some in their lives. Women with disabilities who require care may be at a greater risk of violence or abuse, since they rely on others for assistance.
- **Aboriginal women** experience family violence at rates that are higher than non-Aboriginal women and with more serious consequences (Cripps, et al., 2019).
- There is no evidence that any **immigrant or refugee community or culture** is more violent than any another community, including the general community. However, there is ample evidence indicating that 1) the current family violence service system is not designed to meet the needs of diverse communities; and 2) preventing family violence initiatives have had limited traction with these communities (AMES Australia, 2016).
- A 2020 Victorian survey conducted by the Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society into **LGBTQIA+** health and wellbeing found that 42.9 per cent of participants reported being in an intimate relationship where they felt they were abused in some way by their partner/s. Additionally, 38.1 per cent of participants reported never feeling abused by a family member, which includes both birth and chosen family (Hill, Bourne, McNair, Carman, & Lyons, 2021).

### Factors that impact family violence

- The ongoing inequality that women experience mean they continue to be at greater risk of family violence. Social drivers of this violence include the condoning of violence against women, men's control of decision making and limits to women's independence in public and private life, rigid gender stereotyping and dominant forms of masculinity, and male peer relations and cultures of masculinity that emphasise aggression, dominance and control (Our Watch, 2023).
- Whilst financial stress is not a driver of family violence it may influence how and when violence is used. Therefore, increased cost of living and inflation may increase stress within a family environment.
- These financial stresses may increase the difficulty of someone trying to leave a situation involving family violence. They may not be able to support themselves since they usually rely on their partner or family's income, particularly when children are involved.
- The current competitive nature of the rental market may mean that it is difficult for people trying to leave their domestic situations to find affordable and secure housing in a safe environment.

### Suicide prevention and family violence

There is growing evidence of a relationship existing between suicide and family violence. A systematic review conducted in 2017 found a history of interpersonal violence victimisation was identified in up to 62.5% of females who died by suicide (Maclsaac, Bugeja, & Jelinek, 2017).

In the same year, a report from the NSW Domestic Violence Deaths Review team found that between 2015-2017, 49% of females who died by suicide had a recorded or apparent history of domestic violence, where 40% were known to police. 52% of males who died by suicide had a recorded or apparent history of violence or relationship breakdown and 41% were known to police for Intimate Partner Violence (NSW Domestic Violence Death Review Team, 2017).

Initiatives focussing on prevention of family violence will not only lower suicidal risk for victim survivors but could also improve outcomes for people who use violence.

**If this material raises concerns for you, you can contact Lifeline - call 13 11 14 for 24-hour crisis and suicide prevention services.**

### Why is managing family violence important for our community?

- The impacts of family violence can be serious, far-reaching, and long-lasting, affecting an individual's physical and mental health, access to education and employment, relationships, financial security, social support, housing outcomes and, in some extreme cases, death.
- Many local governments and their community networks have acknowledged their responsibilities in creating safe and supportive environments in which all citizens can reach their full potential. There are many opportunities for City of Port Phillip to work with local, regional and state partners to prevent and improve responses to family violence. This includes City of Port Phillip's involvement in a primary prevention initiative with the Southern



Metropolitan Region's Promoting Respect and Equity Together (PRET) Strategy group led by Women's Health in the South East (WHISE), and includes other community health and NGO partners.

### From Prevention to Response and Recovery

Ending family violence is long-term work that must occur at all levels and across all sectors of society. There are four broad categories of interconnected and concurrent initiatives that form the strategy for ending family violence (Safe and Equal, 2023). These include:

- **Prevention – or primary prevention** – whole-of-population initiatives to stop violence from happening before it starts. This is about changing the social context in which violence occurs, through advancing gender equality.
- **Early intervention – or secondary prevention** - Initiatives designed to stop early signs of abuse from escalating, prevent violence from recurring, and reduce longer-term impacts and harm. This can involve working with groups or individuals who may be at risk of perpetrating or experiencing violence.
- **Response – or tertiary prevention** - Responding to victim survivors when they need support to stay safe from someone using family violence against them. This may be when they are still experiencing abuse, planning to leave, or have already left. This work can take a variety of forms including crisis response, case management, specialist counselling and recovery support.
- **Recovery** – ongoing process that enables victim survivors to find safety, health, wellbeing, resilience and to thrive in all areas of their life. This may include initiatives such as access to safe, affordable housing.

Initiatives focused on each of these areas are important and reinforce each other.

### How are the State and Commonwealth Governments managing family violence?

The Commonwealth Government sets National Priorities through development of tri-annual action plans for responding to and preventing violence against women (Victorian Government, 2017). The government is also the primary funder of Our Watch, the peak National agency responsible for leading action to prevent violence against women. Small, medium, and large funding grants are also made available to organisations that respond to family violence on an annual basis.

The Victorian Government has played a significant role in advancing activity to both respond to and prevent violence against women. Following the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence, the Victorian Government has:

- Created a Ministerial Portfolio solely focused on family violence
- Undertaken legislative reform to embed a focus on family violence across key sectors, including local government



- Developed rolling action plans which articulate state priorities to be addressed over ensuing years
- Established Family Safety Victoria, a Government Department leading the response to family violence and Respect Victoria, a statutory body tasked with preventing family violence
- Developed a coordinated and integrated service system known as the MARAM Framework to respond to the needs of those subjected to or perpetrating family violence
- Allocated sustained funding to 1) the Municipal Association of Victoria to support local government action to prevent violence against women in this arena, and 2) individual local governments which have established violence against women as a key priority for action.

### What is the role of the Port Phillip City Council in responding to and preventing family violence?

In accordance with new legislative requirements upon Victorian local governments through the Gender Equality Act 2020, City of Port Phillip will:

- Implement multi-level actions to address gender inequality across the organisation and in the community
- Ensure that all staff employed in health and human service delivery have undertaken professional development in risk assessment for family violence
- Ensure that the development of Council policies, programs and services consider the specific impacts of gender inequity on health, wellbeing and safety.

Recognising the importance of family violence to the community, Port Phillip can take additional actions to prevent family violence across the municipality over the next three years, by:

- Providing safe and gender-equitable facilities and public environments
- Playing a leadership role in collaborating and co-ordinating initiatives tailored to the local community that focus on advocacy, public education, community development and organisational change
- Developing an organisational Family Violence policy to support staff experiencing family violence

It is a requirement under the Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008 that councils specify measures to prevent family violence and respond to the needs of survivor victims of family violence in the community via their respective municipal public health and wellbeing plans.

### Who are our partners?

In order to facilitate a comprehensive, consistent and whole of community approach to addressing family violence, Council is partnering with community organisations to deliver community interventions. Some of our key partners include:

- Municipal Association of Victoria





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- Southern Metro Primary Care Partnership Elder Abuse Network
- Women's Health in the South East
- Better Health Network (formerly Star Health)
- Department of Health (formerly part of the Department of Health and Human Services)
- Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (formerly part of the Department of Health and Human Services)
- Victoria Police
- The Orange Door

### Where to go for help if I am or someone I know is experiencing family violence?

In an emergency or if you are or someone you know is in immediate danger or there is immediate risk of harm to yourself or others, please call 000 for Police and/or Ambulance assistance. The following list of crisis and counselling services are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week:

- **1800RESPECT** – A 24-hour national sexual assault, family and domestic violence counselling service for any Australian who has experienced, or is at risk of, family and domestic violence and/or sexual assault. Call 1800 737 732 or visit [Home | 1800RESPECT](#)
- **Safe Steps Family Violence Response Centre** – A 24/7 family violence response centre, providing specialist support services for anyone in Victoria who is experiencing or afraid of family violence. Call 1800 015 188 or visit [Safe Steps Family Violence Response Centre - 24/7 support for Victorians](#)
- **Kids Helpline** - Private and confidential phone and online counselling service for people aged 5 to 25. Call 1800 55 1800 or visit <https://kidshelpline.com.au/>
- **MensLine Australia** - Help, support, referrals & counselling services for men via telephone, online and video. Call 1300 78 99 78 or visit [mensline.org.au](https://mensline.org.au)

The following list of resources, organisations and helplines are available for people affected by family violence:

- **Orange Door** – A free service for adults, children and young people who are experiencing or have experienced family violence and need support. There are Orange Door hubs all around Victoria, and no referral is required. Visit [Family violence support and extra help for children and families \(orangedoor.vic.gov.au\)](#) and for contact details to your closest Orange Door service visit [Locations | The Orange Door](#)
- **InTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence** – Offers free and confidential support services to migrant and refugee women living in Victoria who are experiencing or have experienced family violence. Call 1800 755 988 or visit [Home - inTouch](#)



- **Elizabeth Morgan House Aboriginal Women's Service** – An Aboriginal-led peak body for Aboriginal women and children in Victoria providing family violence services and advocacy. Call 03 9482 5744 or visit [Home | EMHAWS.ORG.AU](http://Home | EMHAWS.ORG.AU)
- **Djirra – Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service Victoria** – Provides legal advice, information, referral and support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at immediate risk of, experiencing or recovering from family violence or sexual assault (women and men). Call 1800 105 303 or visit [Djirra – Sharing stories finding solutions | A culturally safe place where culture is strengthened and practical support is available](#)
- **With Respect 1800 LGBTIQ** – Provides support for LGBTIQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Gender Diverse, Intersex, Queer, Asexual, BrotherBoys, SisterGirls) people of all ages and their families experiencing difficulty in their relationships, including family violence. Call 1800 542 847 or visit [WithRespect](#)
- **Rainbow Door** – A free specialist helpline providing information, support and referral to all LGBTIQ+ Victorians, their friends and family. This includes support for people of all ages and identities who are experiencing relationship issues, family and intimate partner violence (including elder abuse) and sexual assault. Call 1800 729 367 or visit [Rainbow Door](#)
- **Women's Information Referral Exchange (WIRE)** - a free support, referral and information service for women, non-binary and gender diverse people experiencing issues including family violence, financial abuse and housing. Call 1300 134 130 or visit [Support, Referrals & Information for Victorian Women | WIRE](#)
- **Sexual Assault Crisis Line** - Crisis counselling service for people who have experienced past and recent sexual assault. Call 1800 806 292 [Sexual Assault Crisis Line » Sexual Assault Crisis Line \(sacl.com.au\)](#)
- **South Eastern Centre Against Sexual Assault and Family Violence (SECASA)** – a specialist organisation which offers services such as time limited therapeutic interventions and counselling, 24/7 sexual assault crisis response and assessment and intervention for children and young people with harmful sexual behaviours. Call 03 9594 2289 or visit [Home > SECASA](#).
- **Men's Referral Service** – a men's family violence telephone counselling, information and referral service operating in Australia by No to Violence, which provides a point of contact for men taking responsibility for their violent behaviour. Call 1300 766 491 or visit [NTV | What we do](#).

### Reporting child abuse

If a child is in immediate danger, contact 000. Reporting child abuse is mandatory for the following professions should they possess reasonable belief that a child is in need of protection from abuse: Victoria Police officers, registered medical practitioners, nurses including midwives, registered teachers, and school principals, plus more found [here](#). Reporting any kind of child abuse is a community-wide responsibility. Anyone who suspects, on reasonable grounds, that a child or young person is at risk of being abused and/or neglected should report it. If concern is outside of business hours, please contact **After Hours Child Protection Crisis Line** on **131 278**, otherwise if



you're in the City of Port Phillip, you can contact the South Division Intake specifically on **1300 655 795**.

### What may change over the next five years?

In consecutive population surveys over the past ten years, Victorians have shown support for government resources to be directed towards managing family violence (ANROWS, 2018). This community support, alongside government commitment to the eradication of family violence is likely to culminate in:

- Increased expectations placed on local governments to lead local level action in both responding to and preventing family violence
- Improved coordination of activity designed to respond to and prevent family violence at the local level
- Legislative reform to broaden the definition of family violence to include coercive control
- Greater resourcing of the family violence sector to ensure there is available and appropriate support during periods of increased demand for support services and safe housing options
- Greater awareness of elder abuse as a form of family violence and increased resource allocation to address this issue
- Greater understanding of how pandemics and disasters such as COVID-19 can trigger or exacerbate risks of violence for women, such as the impact of losing social support networks, increased isolation, and financial and employment stress.
- Rising inflation and the increase in cost of living may place further strain on families and their financial situations. This could have implications for those experiencing family violence, such as being financially dependent on an abusive family member or partner, making it potentially difficult for them to seek help or leave their situation.



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