

Ms Jan Shuard PSM
Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor
[REDACTED]

Dear Ms Shuard

Review of the Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme (FVISS) and the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Risk Management Framework (MARAM)

Thank you for your email of 5 August 2022 inviting submissions to your office's review of the Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme (FVISS) and the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Risk Management Framework (MARAM).

Who we are

WESNET is Australia's national peak body for specialist women's domestic and family violence services, with almost 350 eligible members across Australia. WESNET represents a range of organisations and individuals including women's refuges, shelters, safe houses, and information/referral services.

Safe and Equal submission

With the FVISS and MARAM being Victorian state matters, we understand that WESNET member organisations based in Victoria have contributed to the Safe and Equal submission to this review. On that basis, we support the Safe and Equal submission, and provide only brief comments below provided directly to us by a specialist family violence service (SFVS)¹.

Comments and observations

To what extent has Part 5A been effective in facilitating the sharing of confidential information for the purposes of establishing, assessing and managing risk of FV?

- The scheme has been embraced as part of the everyday workload of all client-facing refuge staff. Most often staff are requesting information and it is very rare that external parties will formally request information from the refuge.
- While information sharing activities have always occurred, refuge staff can now more strongly advocate when requesting information as a Risk Assessment Entity, if they need to do so. The scheme adds weight to their request and provides a common language with which to talk about the benefits of having the information.

¹ By SFVS we mean Victorian State Government funded specialist family violence services not those agencies funded by the Commonwealth government that go by the same acronym.

- The scheme has also facilitated a wider range of services/agencies for the refuge to request information from; the various tools that list what information is held by each agency/service is extremely helpful. Consideration could be given to extending this to federally funded or nationally operating client facing services, such as those run by WESNET which provide smartphones and technology facilitated abuse advice (including risk and safety planning) to women in Victoria as well as all over Australia.
- The refuge has increased its number of formal requests and embedded information sharing into its intake and assessment processes.
- All of this ultimately leads to a more comprehensive picture of risk than was previously accessible to refuge staff, and FVISS is now an integral part of managing risk for women and children in refuge.

To what extent has Part 5A promoted the coordination of services to maximise the safety of people who have experienced FV, prevent and reduce FV to the extent possible and promote accountability of perpetrators of FV for their actions?

- The scheme has had a huge impact in promoting coordination and providing a common language and rationale about the purpose of sharing information.
- Now that the scheme is part of business as usual operations in Victorian funded SFVS, the educative component of SFVS role with other services/agencies is more apparent. It is important for SFVS to be recognised as the most appropriate to lead the coordination at times, not just be a part of it.
- Specifically with regard to refuges, clients may have moved regions and be located geographically far away from a perpetrator. Previously this could have made risk assessment and management problematic as the perpetrator was not easily kept in view and very often absent from the picture altogether. The scheme has allowed the refuge sector, especially stand alone refuges, to keep perpetrators in view and contribute to accountability measures.

To what extent has Part 5A enabled certain information sharing entities to obtain consolidated and up to date information from a central information point for the purposes of establishing, assessing and managing risk of FV?

The ability to request and receive information from Central Information Point - for those services who do not have direct access - has been extremely useful, especially in complex cases where Child Protection, Corrections and Police have extensive history about the perpetrator (including previous relationships) or where child wellbeing concerns are an ongoing part of the family's situation in addition to family violence risk.

To what extent has Part 11 been effective in providing a framework for achieving consistency in FV risk identification, assessment and management?

- MARAM has been extremely effective in providing a framework for achieving consistency relating to risk.
- The SFVS sector has, for a long time, been providing education and tools for other sectors to enable consistency in language and understanding of family violence risk indicators, assessment and management. The MARAM solidifies this into law and as such is a very effective way of making non-SFV agencies aware of their responsibilities and providing a map of how to manage FV risk in the community.

- It is very apparent in case coordination activities that more and more external agencies are aware of what FV is, what their role might be in identifying, assessing and managing risk, and how the SFVS can lead this work.

Thank you again for the opportunity to make a submission. If you would like to discuss the contents of the submission further, please contact me using the details below.

Yours sincerely

Signed



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web: www.wesnet.org.au | www.techsafety.org.au



WESNET acknowledges and pays respects to the Traditional Owners and Custodians of all the lands on which we live and work.