

# **ECCWA Response on the 10-Year Strategy for Reducing Family and Domestic Violence**

## **1 Background:**

1.1 The Ethnic Communities Council of WA is the state's peak ethnic umbrella organisation and its objectives include interalia:

- To act as the peak body for ethnic communities in Western Australia, that shall advocate for the rights of ethnic communities in ensuring the protection of these rights.
- To ensure the rights of the ethnic communities including effective participation in decisions which affect them, and encourage the sharing of community resources.
- To do and to perform all acts, matter and things as are charitable and for benevolent purposes having public benefit in accordance with the law of the State of Western Australia and the law of the Commonwealth of Australia and to disseminate any information within a Social Justice framework that achieves the objectives of the Council in ensuring equity and access to and for ethnic communities.

In fulfilling these objectives the Council has responded to many inquiries, consultations etc. organised by State and Commonwealth government agencies. The Council places a strong emphasis on Human Rights and would strongly argue that a Human Rights framework is essential for addressing Family and Domestic Violence and other such social conditions effectively. It is from this perspective that the Council is pleased to respond to the abovementioned Strategy paper.

1.2 This response is based on feedback received from its management committee, its member communities and agencies that provide support services to women and men who are affected by Family and Domestic Violence.

1.3 In addition to the feedback provided in this response we request that the Department of Communities also take into account the experience and feedback provided by agencies and services like Multicultural Women's Advocacy Service, Ethnic Advocacy Support Team, Ishar Multicultural Women's Health Centre, the Multicultural Services Centre, Assets, and Metropolitan Migrant Resource Centre. All these Multicultural Agencies have been providing various forms of support to women and children who primarily are affected by Family and Domestic Violence (FDV), through their counselling, homelessness, mental health and age care programs. They have also provided support to male victims or to perpetrators to ensure they seek assistance to modify their behaviour. Most of these agencies are funded under NPAH and NAHA or other government data bases which would clearly show how much FDV affects the community and the various social conditions that it impacts on. Service reviews are another means in which these agencies highlight the ongoing impacts on society of Family and Domestic Violence. It is our view that Government Departments must not work in silo's but gather the information being provided across Departments to ensure that the 10 year FDV strategy developed is wholistic and responsive, incorporates a substantive equality framework to the social issues to be able to reduce FDV. In light of this we believe it is critical that the Department recognise the unique factors that impact on FDV in the CaLD Community and the very important and integral role that CaLD Community Controlled Organisations have in reducing FDV. Hence the need for adequate resourcing of these organisations to provide vital FDV support is essential..

## **2 Introductory comments:**

2.1 ECCWA commends the government and the Department of Communities for committing to a 10-Year Strategy to Reduce Family Domestic Violence and is very happy to see the intent to address this issue by working across Government, with the Community Sector, Private industry, People with Lived Experience and the Broader community. We are pleased to see the various consultations that have been occurring across the State, the survey cards being

made available in the Community and the Online survey. Also pleasing is the opportunity for submissions to be made to the Department and recognition that feedback needs to be obtained over a longer period, hence allowing groups to consult and discuss before making submissions. Also, the longer term approach of a 10 year Strategy is vital for some of the issues such as trauma that contribute to Family and Domestic Violence or people being at risk of FDV is imbedded in history, culture, society attitudes and are systemic in nature.

2.2 It is ECCWA's belief that FDV cannot be addressed with a "one size fits all" approach and it requires an approach that considers the various social and economic determinants that result in people being victims or perpetrators of FDV. In this regard it is commendable that the Strategy paper has indicated that "Western Australia has the second highest rate of reported physical and sexual violence against women, second only to the Northern Territory. It recognises that the rate of reporting has been steadily increasing over the last eight years and is likely to continue to increase as awareness about FDV is raised across the WA community. However, whilst it recognises that FDV is a significant issue for the Aboriginal Community and rightly so, we have been led to believe that the numbers of CaLD women affected are not sizable. Yet this is contrary to all the anecdotal information and evidence that the Refuges, Specialised DV services such as MWAS, ISHAR, EAST and CaLD Community Controlled Organisations have provided. The Homelessness Directions paper notes that "Family and Domestic violence is the leading cause of people seeking assistance from specialist homelessness services in Western Australia. In 2017-18, 45% of people who accessed specialist homelessness services in Western Australia had experienced family and domestic violence." ECCWA understands a significant proportion of women using the services of Refuges are from CaLD backgrounds. We have been advised that the police do not record the cultural ethnicity of victims and if this is the case then the question has to be raised as to how many of the 54000 incidents reported in 2016/2017 were of a CaLD background. This is an issue that the ECCWA is looking to pursue as we believe that this data is very important in determining the different responses that are needed to the various multicultural communities in WA.

### 2.3 ECCWA

intersectionality of gender, age (youth and seniors), Aboriginality, ethnicity/faith, LGBTQI, disability, Non-English Speaking and other factors such as recency of arrival in Australia, are effectively considered and hence applauds the acknowledgement in the strategy "that the current service system is too difficult to navigate, and ultimately offers too little support for women and children and that the current mainstream service responses are not consistently accessible and inclusive for Aboriginal, CaLD persons, people with a disability or people who identify LGBTQ.

2.4 Given, all of the above it is very disappointing that the over-arching goals of the Strategy do not have a specific goal for CaLD persons identical to **Goal 1 "Identify, challenge and change the structural, social and cultural conditions that support family and domestic violence including family violence as it impacts Aboriginal people, families and culture.** "ECCWA believes that given the growing CaLD population in Western Australia a specific goal like this for CaLD communities is an essential goal for a successful strategy.

ECCWA would however like to acknowledge the recent actions of the WA Government and Dept of Communities in recognising the importance of Aboriginal and CaLD Community Controlled Organisations in prevention strategies involving the education of Communities, the FDV sector in Cultural competence and the respective Aboriginal and Multicultural sectors in FDV education. It is a major step forward in helping to implement effective prevention strategies that are socially acceptable and this training will recognise the needs of the relevant community that in turn will hopefully influence the effectiveness of service delivery and supports. For CaLD women, if they do not receive an appropriate response when asking for assistance, they will often return to the perpetrator and will not seek support again. Hence having appropriate support systems that are not simply based on Crisis models and allow for

responses that take into account cultural conditions and have the support of communities is vital.

## **2.5 Goal 2: Ensure women and children at risk of, or experiencing family and domestic violence are identified early, offered supports and protection and are supported to recover and thrive.**

ECCWA is fully supportive of this goal and believes that where CaLD women and families have access to culturally informed and CaLD led service responses that are inclusive and provide an environment of “belonging” the more success there will be in keeping CaLD women and children safe. This is not to say that culturally secure mainstream services are not suitable but that it is critical that CaLD women have **a choice to** access a culturally secure FDV mainstream service or access a CaLD Community Controlled Organisations service response. Often, these organisations are already known to the women, which means accessing them for FDV support does not identify them to other members of the community. They have a good understanding of CaLD specific issues such as Immigration visa issues, they have an understanding of the trauma some women may have been exposed to prior to entering Australia. Often, they have a very in depth understanding of the Patriarchal culture and the Community relationships. They also understand the reasoning of women to often want the “violence to stop” but not to leave their partners and or their community. They also have connections to Communities that allow them to understand the likelihood of reactions such as risks of Honour killings etc. Lastly, often CaLD women will seek information about support services before they reach a crisis situation and want a support service that can guide them to a better situation hence often seek this information from organisations, they are familiar with. It is this organisation that would then assist the woman if required to access and understand the service system including crisis supports.

ECCWA also believes that enhancing victim safety would also occur if the needs of the individual were at the centre of responses to FDV—supports should be tailored to the needs of the individual rather than a one-size-fits-all approach and procurement policies need to adopt a substantive equality philosophy to ensure that specialist services i.e. “indigenous and CaLD controlled” agencies are considered preferred service providers for such services and are not forced to compete with mainstream providers on an unequal footing.

FDV women and children require long term support and unlike many other social issues, support services are often necessary for lengthy periods (2 – 4 years) hence support services must be person-centred, with the flexibility to help people for as long as they need it. This is even more so for CaLD clients due to Immigration visa issues that also mean often the woman has no income as her visa does not allow her to access income support from Centrelink. ECCWA wishes to emphasise the importance of the above as in addition to the barriers identified above people of CaLD backgrounds often face other barriers such as low proficiency in English, lack of access to interpreters, inability to navigate a complex unfamiliar system, racism and discrimination etc.

In addition, if CaLD women who attend hospitals can immediately be referred to CaLD Community Controlled Organisations so that they can get advice or be linked for further support without alarming their partner or having to seek support services themselves upon discharge this would enhance their safety and ensure early support. We are aware that often, interpreters are not used or appropriately used, that risk assessments are done on a “tick and flick” basis with little understanding by the woman.

ECCWA believes that all FDV support services must be **accessible and integrated, ie** unless services collaborate and work together, provision of holistic, wrap-around support that addresses the needs of families and not just individuals, will not become a reality. Often, we see the need for support for not only the women but the children, and for many families, they

want support for the perpetrator too that allows the violence to stop as they wish to remain in the relationship and our service system currently is geared to supporting separation. Keeping the family together, is very prevalent in CaLD communities particularly as many are communities that believe in extended family systems.

Furthermore, when referring to choice of service providers **meaningful choice** will not be available if the policy of mainstreaming is implemented mindlessly and if place-based service provision ignores the reality of the demographic distribution of CaLD and indigenous communities i.e. a much wider interpretation of “place” has to be adopted to ensure this is effectively addressed and government procurement policies should be such that specialist services i.e. “indigenous and CaLD controlled” agencies are considered preferred service providers for such services and are not forced to compete with mainstream providers on an unequal footing.

The Department of Community Development (a previous iteration of the Department of Communities) to its credit (some ten years ago) ensured that the tender for one of nine Homelessness services was worded such that the successful applicant was a “CaLD controlled” agency. Such an approach needs to continue if people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are to have a meaningful choice between accessing specialist or mainstream services.

All of the above would improve the support services available to women but require both CaLD Community Controlled Organisations to be adequately resourced for FDV and for culturally secure FDV mainstream services to also be adequately resourced.

### **2.6 Goal 3: Ensure perpetrators are held to account and supported to change their behaviour.**

**ECCWA supports this goal** but again, sees a need for an individual based response rather than a one-size-fits-all approach. We totally agree with the goal and its priority areas to achieve behaviour change through interventions for men, that legal systems be fair and just and that service delivery is coordinated and collaborative and organised around the shared principle of safety first. We believe however that how these interventions are made available and accessed should be developed with the communities involved. Current approaches to have legal mandatory participation has not been successful for CaLD men and we believe that getting the involvement of Community leaders to not only participate in the education of what is Domestic Violence is important but that we need to engage them in taking a leadership role in ensuring that behaviours change for identified perpetrators.

These leaders must become part of the “web of accountability”. If this occurs, we will be able to see communities take leadership in reducing FDV. This means getting Community leaders to stand up and be counted, appropriate training offered to them and then supported to be ambassadors against Family and Domestic Violence. Community leaders are often men and we need the Dept of Communities to see the value in funding a CaLD controlled agency to lead this initiative and training.

### **2.7 Goal 4: Create an inclusive and responsive service system that prioritises safety, is risk informed and collaborative.**

ECCWA is totally supportive of this goal and is pleased to see that the factors limiting the degree and effectiveness of CCR have been highlighted. The capacity and resources of services being a primary issue that has been highlighted for a long time.

Furthermore, the ECCWA would like to recommend that consideration be given to creating a

Multicultural HUB that is designed on the successful integrated models in WA such as George Jones Advocacy Centre, and Family Support networks. There are many CaLD Controlled agencies providing many excellent services that could come together to deliver highly effective and supportive services for families affected by FDV. Appropriate support and resourcing from the Department would be invaluable. There is already significant goodwill amongst the Multicultural Organisations who wish to assist in the reduction of FDV in CaLD Communities.

### **3.1 Vision**

The proposed vision i.e. "A future where all Western Australians live free from family and domestic violence, and where women and children are safe, respected, valued and treated as equals in private and public life. -This is a vision supported by the ECCWA unreservedly.

### **3.2 Principles**

ECCWA believes that all principles mentioned in the Strategy paper are important and is in agreement with what has been conveyed under the following in the context of the above comments: It also wishes to stress that **principle h)** needs to have all service systems funded appropriately or though the principle is valid, reality will see different actions and outcomes by agencies.

- a) All Western Australians are entitled to be equally valued and respected regardless of age, gender identity, culture, religion, education, ability or health.
- b) All Western Australians have the right to live in respectful, supportive and safe relationships and to feel safe and secure in their homes.
- c) Family and Domestic Violence is everyone's concern, and ending it is everyone's responsibility.
- d) Women's and children's safety and wellbeing is paramount, and prioritised in all areas of legislation, service delivery, service and system design, and social policy development.
- e) Perpetrators of family and domestic violence are responsible for their choices to use violence and abuse.
- f) Solutions are place based, person centred and culturally safe, informed by understandings about trauma, culture and other available evidence.
- g) Systemic racism and inequality is identified, challenged and eliminated.
- h) The Service system has No Wrong Door. Regardless of funding stream or remit, services are accessible and responsive to the diverse needs of people impacted by family and domestic violence.
- i) Remote and regional service delivery is flexible and responsive to person and family need.

We would like to emphasise from the perspectives of ensuring right solutions are delivered in the right places and that people are provided with appropriate and timely assistance regardless of where they seek assistance the FDV system, mainstream services have to be complemented by services provided by Indigenous and CaLD controlled agencies.

### **4 Conclusion:**

The Council commends the Department of Communities for the consultations it has held and the 10 year Strategy paper that was drafted.

CaLD western Australians are entitled to government funded services that are culturally and linguistically appropriate to their needs and this will not eventuate in this case unless the 10-Year Strategy on Family and Domestic Violence reflects the views and recommendations contained in the body of this report.

For further information about this proposal please contact Ramdas Sankaran, President

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