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Crime statistics highlight need for more to be done

Central Victoria's leading specialist family violence response agency says a state-wide increase in family violence incidents in our region highlights the need for more to be done to prevent violence before it starts.

Whilst family incidents decreased overall by 1.5%, the latest Crime Statistics Agency data shows significant increases across the Greater Bendigo (+2.8%) and Campaspe (+23.2%) areas. The Centre for Non-Violence is renewing its call for all levels of government to listen to the experts to understand what is needed to address Australia's crisis that is violence against women and children.

In the 12 months to December 2021, there were a total of 4328 family violence incidents reported to police within the Loddon region, with 2395 of these reported across the City of Greater Bendigo, with an increase of 2.8%. Significant increases were reported in Campaspe (+23.3%), consistent data in Loddon and declines in Macedon Ranges (-19%) Mount Alexander (-3.9%) and Central Goldfields (-1.1%) per 100,000 population.ⁱ These statistics do start to tell us of the prevalence of family violence in our regional communities, however, we know family violence is significantly under-reported and these numbers do not tell the full story.

State-wide, there was increased prevalence for females listed as Affected Family Members (AFMS's), with male respondents predominantly listed as the primary aggressor. Reporting showed family violence and abuse mostly occurred within a current or past relationship and was committed by a male partner or ex-partner, within the home or a residence. Some of the biggest increases the data showed were the types of violence and abuse reported, including increased escalation and/or severity of violence and a significant rise in the number of female AFM's experiencing violence from their adolescent children. There were increases in breaches of intervention orders reported and increased co-occurrence of high-risk factors or "red flags" resulting in higher reporting of breaches and criminal incidents.

Centre for Non-Violence Chief Executive Officer Margaret Augerinos says the data reported in the most recent crime statistics reflects the experience of the service.

"We are seeing not only increased demand for all services, but also increasing complexity in the cases we are working with. Demand for services via The Orange Door, CNV programs including adolescent family violence, therapeutic services and programs and interventions for men who use violence remains high. The level of demand on our services reflects the crime statistics data that shows increases in police reports in Greater Bendigo and Campaspe. Increased reports in our region can often reflect increased confidence from community that police will act and follow up reports of family violence and breaches of orders."

"The increased complexity and risk factors also mean our staff are needing to spend increased time with families to assess, support and respond to safety, crisis, and recovery needs. In many of these situations, we are supporting victim/survivors to report breaches of orders to police. Given this, we are not surprised by the increase in breaches of intervention orders in the latest crime statistics."

Increased reports may also reflect that our service system at a local level is also working effectively with good partnerships and integration of responses to ensure we support families where violence and abuse is occurring."

Ms Augerinos says until we see a change in attitudes that condone or excuse disrespect or violence against women, the appalling rates of abuse and tragic deaths will continue.



“Too many women and children are not safe to make their own choices about their lives. We work with women and children every day who live in fear of what may happen to them,” she said.

With the latest data showing higher increases of family violence reports in regional areas, Centre for Non-Violence has renewed calls for greater engagement with the sector from all levels of government, calling on them to genuinely ask ‘how can we help?’

Ms Augerinos says the sector needs long term funding; tailored solutions for rural and regional areas; experts to be consulted about where resources should be prioritised and boosted; an end to short term funding and pilot projects that are based on political cycles rather than local need.

“Regional areas require particular attention and CNV provides local and regional programs, services, and support to both women and children experiencing family violence and men and adolescents using violence within the family context. Across the region, the demands are increasing, and specialist services are instrumental in assessing and managing risk and advocating for safety and accountability within service and system responses.”

“Our frontline workers are responding to increased rates of domestic and family violence against women and children and cooccurrence of risk factors during the pandemic. There is an increased workload and complexities providing support to victim-survivors remotely that puts further strain on an already stretched system. We provide essential services, and our staff have specialist skills and knowledge to respond to family violence and work directly with victim survivors while keeping perpetrators in view. We work with women, children, men, and families, while advocating for integrated services and systems to uphold safety and accountability.”

“The current funding model is a problem. We need genuine consultation on how funding can be used in regional areas, with capacity to tailor programs to suit local needs. And we need acknowledgement that in many regional areas we can’t recruit to six-month or short-term roles – people are not going to give up permanent, ongoing positions to come here, we need to give them certainty.”

Centre for Non-Violence can be contacted on 1800 884 292 | The Orange Door Loddon can be contacted on 1800 512 359 | The 24-hour statewide safe steps family violence crisis response line is 1800 015 188 | Men’s Referral Service 1300 766 491 | In an emergency, call 000 | For information, visit: www.cnv.org.au/we-are-here-to-help

Further information, please contact:

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ⁱ <https://www.crimestatistics.vic.gov.au/crime-statistics/latest-crime-data-by-area>