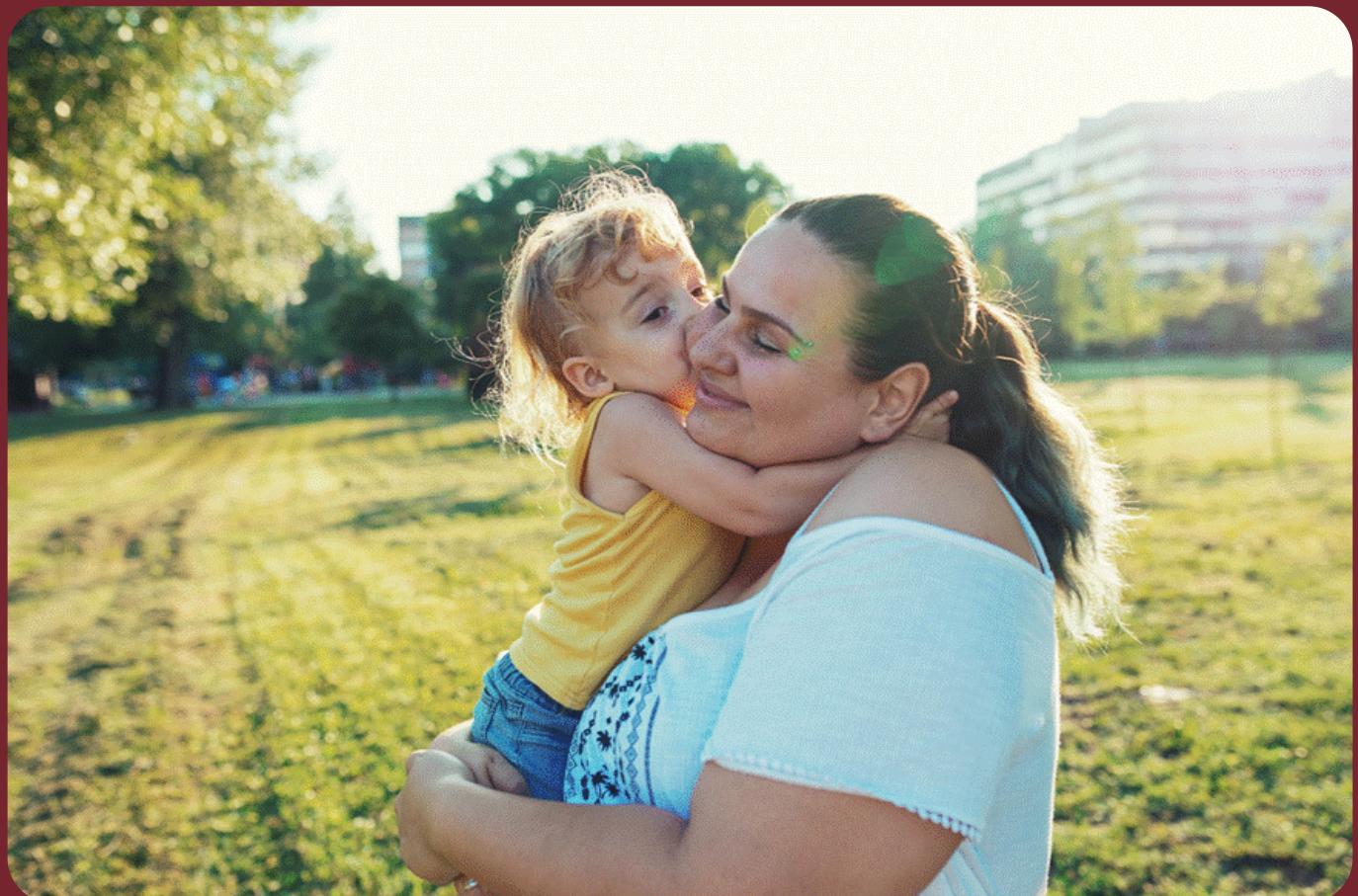




Centre for
Non-Violence

Victorian State Budget 2026-2027

Centre for Non-Violence Submission



Victorian State Budget Submission: Fund the Changemakers

Centre for Non-Violence Submission

Ending violence against women, children and diverse communities requires ongoing commitment to fund specialist family violence services. The Victorian government has a responsibility to ensure that every Victorian lives in safety, with dignity and respect. This cannot be achieved without dedicated investment in prevention, response and recovery programs, initiatives and services.

Introduction

At the Centre for Non-Violence, we have been working for over 35 years across 6 LGAs in Central Victoria: Yorta Yorta Country, Dja Dja Wurrung Country, Taungurung and Wurundjeri Country to help women, children and diverse communities live free from family violence. We have offices in Echuca, Maryborough, Bendigo and Kyneton and our staff travel across the region to support clients in need. Throughout these 35 years we have worked tirelessly to improve system responses to family violence, to improve the lives of victim survivors and to support adults using violence to make better, safer choices for their loved ones.

Over these three and a half decades, we have developed a range of innovative, evidence-based and effective prevention, early intervention response and recovery programs that have improved the safety and wellbeing of victim survivors including children.

But this work comes at a cost. And with increasing demand on services - our service region alone has seen a 18.6 per cent increase in police referrals since 2019-2020 to 2023-2024¹, - we must ensure that victim survivors and adults using violence are given the appropriate wrap around support and response. We are also seeing a significant need for longer, more complex case management in order to meet the worrying trend of more extreme risk indicators. Last financial year our staff worked with 5,816 clients through The Orange Door (TOD) in providing risk assessments and planning support equating to 30,736 hours of support, and within CNV provided specialist case management support to 2060 clients, 990 of whom were children, equating to just over 27,000 hours of support.

For a significant number of the women and children who are seeking safety from family violence, the risk of homelessness and housing security is acute. More than 80 women and children who accessed CNV support in 2024-2025 spent over 6 months in crisis accommodation: most of which is not suitable for those who have experienced or are experiencing family violence. More often than not, the only housing that we are able to secure for clients are motel rooms. This is not a place that allows victim survivors, including children to appropriately seek support, experience stability and recover from family violence. The housing crisis facing the state is putting victim survivors of family violence at

¹ Collation of data captured from the Victorian Crime Statistics family violence data dashboard. Available from: <https://www.crimestatistics.vic.gov.au/> [Accessed: 28 January 2026]

increased risk. The latest data from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare unequivocally highlights that for women and children, family violence is the leading cause of homelessness. And yet, year on year, we experience funding uncertainty for integral core services like crisis brokerage that allows our case workers to place those at risk of harm or death, in crisis accommodation. It's just not good enough. Year on year, we are forced to do more, with less.

A strong and stable family violence system requires more than short-term funding cycles. It needs a long-term commitment that enables services to plan, grow and meet the needs of all communities across Victoria.

- Safe and Equal, 2025

Over the last financial year alone (2024-2025), we have seen a 50 per cent increase in the number of women and children experiencing 10 or more lethality indicators. This necessarily requires much more intensive case management and system mobilisation responses. Our staff work endlessly and tirelessly to advocate for improved safety and wellbeing right across the spectrum of support: from first contact, through to recovery.

But it's not enough. We are running on empty. With increasing costs, increasing demand, increasing risk complexities: we need to see a shift in the funding landscape and prioritisation by the Victorian State Government to courageously invest in three priority areas in order to uphold its commitment to ending gender-based violence.

1. **Secure funding** for family and gender-based violence primary prevention, early intervention, response and recovery
2. **Support children and young people** as victim survivors in their own right
3. **Ensure safe, secure and affordable housing** to facilitate recovery from family violence

It is deeply concerning that against a backdrop of reported family violence incidents at an all-time high, with lethality risk skyrocketing, that the family violence sector is facing a state-level \$118 million dollar budget cut, with lapsing funding due to end on 30 June 2026.

1. Secure funding for family and gender-based violence primary prevention, early intervention, response and recovery

The current funding model is not meeting demand: a \$96 million lapse in funding across the response sector will mean that specialist family violence services, like ours, will no longer be able to support victim survivors, including children, when they need it most.

In order for the state government to see through its commitment to the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children, the sector needs to see funding stability, with at a minimum, funding contracts that span 5 years or more. This approach would allow the sector and organisations like CNV to adequately and effectively monitor and evaluate our programs and services and track long-term outcomes for victim survivors.

Sustainable Funding

Increasing demand and complexity of need of clients seeking support results in longer support periods that go way beyond funded hours. This necessary work to increase safety and wellbeing for victim survivors, including children can no longer survive on 'drip fed' models of funding. It must be replaced by committed ongoing funding that meets demand. We cannot stress enough how important it is that the funding should be indexed and made permanent to ensure that we are able to continue current services. Conservative estimates suggest that in order for services to maintain supports for core services there needs to be at a minimum a 20 per cent increase in committed funding. It must be noted that even with this increase, it will not address the unmet need of many victim survivors who are currently unable to access timely, tailored and effective supports.

Shift the Funding Landscape

In order to really understand the impact of our work in improving and increasing victim survivor safety and wellbeing, our funding models need to better support outcome measurements that extend beyond reaching 'targets'. This necessarily requires investment to support the sector to expand and strengthen outcome data collection, capturing the lived experience and voice of clients from first call through to recovery.

Investing in Innovation

Investment in innovative prevention, response and recovery programs and services results in improved systems integration, it allows specialist family violence services to do the important prevention and early intervention work with individuals, families and communities. Importantly, innovation funding allows us to apply our expertise and specialisation to develop and strengthen our range of adults using violence programs and services - including prevention and early intervention programs.

Beyond the Crisis

The healing journey is often non-linear, and it is recognised through our data that both victim survivors and adults using violence increasingly require longer support periods - including, trauma-informed family violence informed therapeutic responses. Investment in therapeutic programs will result in victim survivors including children receiving more timely and effective delivery of services. Funding allocation must reflect the additional

time and resources required by services such as CNV to 'address systemic harm and navigate structural barriers to support and safety.

Invest in Primary Prevention

Prevention matters. The sector must be supported to stop the violence before it begins.

Prevention is one of the key levers of change outlined in the Federal government's *National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children*, national peak body Our Watch's *Change the Story* framework and the Victorian *Strong Foundations: Building on Victoria's work to end family violence*. Funding prevention programs and initiatives has far-reaching benefits across the health, family and sexual violence sector as well as long-term preventative measures aimed at reducing demand on legal and judicial systems. The \$22 million lapse in prevention funding is out of scope with these frameworks and will result in direct job losses and program closures, putting at risk the long-term social change that is needed to eliminate violence against women, children and diverse communities.

2. Support children and young people as victim survivors in their own right

To end violence in a generation, we must recognise the impacts and the needs of children and young people experiencing family violence. In Victoria we are seeing increased rates of children experiencing family violence, alongside one of the highest child removal rates in the nation and punitive incarceration measures that seek to further isolate children and young people from the necessary supports. We know that children who experience family violence are at greater risk of child removal and incarceration – particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people who face ongoing discrimination and barriers to safe and inclusive system responses.

Children need Dedicated, Tailored Supports

The specialist family violence sector needs committed funding to expand and strengthen response and recovery programs and services for children and young people who are victim survivors in their own right.² 2024-2025 has witnessed a significant rise in the number of children and young people involved in reported family violence incidents in Victoria.³

“...[t]his year, the impact of family violence on children is stark, including in the link between victimisation as a child and future perpetration of violence. Almost half of all young people recorded as a perpetrator of violence in their family had themselves been a prior victim of family violence.”⁴

- Chief Statistician, CSA, Fiona Dowsley

CNV is committed to supporting all victim survivors experiencing family violence, utilising core funding to diversify and tailor our programs and services to ensure that we can provide support for children and young people. We do this work, because we have to; as demonstrated by the most recent crime statistics (December 2025), there is a clear link between victimisation and perpetration, if we are ever to end violence against women, children and diverse communities, we must prioritise the work we do with children experiencing family violence.

² For example: [The Amplify](#) project from Melbourne City Mission provided for innovative and impactful change for children and young people, with a particular focus on developing innovative supports for young people who experience intersecting marginalisation such as LGBTQIA+ community. One of the key findings from the research undertaken was the misconception that the violence and abuse experienced by children and young people from a parent are not seen as victim survivors of family violence. Investment in innovative programs like these, enrich not only the lives of victim survivors, but also contribute meaningful evidence-based outcomes that are able to inform our understandings of best practice and lived and living childhood experiences of family violence.

³ See: <https://www.crimestatistics.vic.gov.au/media-centre/news/media-release-crime-statistics-agency-releases-2024-25-victorian-family-violence> [Accessed: 18 December 2025]

⁴ *ibid.*

Support Us to Support Them

Current funding is unable to sufficiently meet demand of our core services, let alone support capacity and capability building to develop innovative programs that provide tailored, stand-alone supports that we know are needed to keep children and young people safe from harm. Without increased and dedicated funding, children and young people will continue to fall through the cracks and miss out on important supports to increase their safety and heal from family violence. With increased investment organisations such as CNV will be able to expand on the innovative programs and services that we are developing in response to increased rates of children experiencing family violence.

An example of a positive and impactful program that lapsed due to a lack of funding was our Safe, Thriving and Connected therapeutic children's group for children who have experienced family violence. This pilot group used narrative therapy practices to facilitate children safely exploring and making sense of their experiences.

Children were able to tell their stories in ways that made them feel strong and understood by people in their lives. We involved each child's carer, with activities that strengthened and celebrated these safe and nurturing relationships. Children (and their families) have many unique skills and knowledge in responding to hardship in their lives, and the group created space to honour and elevate the importance of these skills. However, with time-limited and ad-hoc funding sources, we have been unable to continue the much needed and in demand program.

Invest in Workforce Capacity and Capability

In order to effectively embed the forthcoming Children and Young People MARAM, there needs to be committed and ongoing funding to support the significant organisational workforce capability and capacity building required right across the sector.

CNV works with Children and Young People Experiencing Family Violence

In the last financial year, our service supported 900 children who were experiencing family violence. A significant number of these victim survivors were also experiencing housing and homelessness risk, particularly if they identified from culturally and linguistically marginalised and First Nation communities. Importantly, the state budget 2026-2027 must support ACCOs to be able to sustainably and meaningfully implement violence prevention initiatives recommended by the Yoorrook Justice Commission.

Invest in the Future

Current funding models do not take into consideration the tailored needs of children and young people. At CNV we echo the call of our peak body, Safe and Equal for the state government to invest the necessary resources that would support children and young people to be able to access more effective, tailored and trauma-informed family violence support. This includes recognising the disproportionate rate of children removed from families and the increased cost of providing equitable access to necessary supports.

3. Ensure safe, secure and affordable housing to facilitate recovery from family violence

Family violence remains the leading cause of homelessness for women and children in Australia. This coupled with a housing crisis and cost of living crisis is placing victim survivors in dangerous situations where they are forced to make decisions to stay in the home with violence or put themselves at risk homelessness and potentially having their children removed from their care.

Our staff work tirelessly to provide emergency and transitional housing to victim survivors and adults using violence: but we are facing a landscape defined by housing unaffordability and insufficient investment in purpose built emergency and transitional housing for the most vulnerable in our communities.

Emergency Housing is at Crisis Point

In the last financial year, CNV provided over 16,237 nights of emergency accommodation to 244 victim survivors (including children). Due to intersecting factors including the ongoing housing crisis and discriminatory barriers to private rentals, 81 of these women and children victim survivors **spent more than 6 months in emergency accommodation**: most often in motel rooms.

CNV Data Snapshot:

Emergency and Crisis Accommodation Support 2024-2025

The average number of nights victim survivors spent in emergency accommodation overall **has risen more than 50 per cent** since 2022-2023 from an average of 30 to 67 nights in 2024-2025.

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children the average number of supported nights in emergency accommodation is even greater - sitting closer to 74 nights.

Safe at Home

We know that the most effective way to support healing from family violence is stable and secure housing for victim survivors. And it is preferable to keep victim survivors in their own homes. However, it must be safe. CNV has been able to offer many of our clients a safe at home response with the Personal Safety Initiative (PSI) which funds essential security upgrades such as locks and security cameras. We urge the state government to extend this 2-year funding package: especially for regional and rural based communities. Many victim survivors in our region face increased challenges in managing safety

including that it can sometimes take more than an hour for police to respond to a 000 call, due to distance and location of 24-hour police station.

When Home Isn't Safe

Emergency accommodation should be there to meet the short-term needs of victim survivors requiring an immediate crisis response. It is not a long-term solution. However, due to the ongoing housing crisis and discriminatory private rental market, many victim survivors are unable to access secure long-term housing options. This forces many women to make decisions around whether they can or cannot leave a violent relationship due to the risk of homelessness - which in turn can trigger a child protection response where housing is not available.

Being **forced to choose between staying in a violent relationship or risk**

homelessness is a decision no person should be forced to make. We have a collective responsibility to ensure sustainable and affordable housing pathways for victim survivors.

In Conclusion

Every four days a woman is killed as a result of family and gender-based violence. We are entering one of the deadliest times for women and children in this country. This year alone, 62 women and 24 children have been murdered. Since January 2024, 167 have had their lives forcibly cut short.

Every death was preventable.

As a front-line specialist family violence service, we work tirelessly with victim survivors and adults using violence to increase safety and wellbeing. Our innovative and evidence informed programs and services are making real, lasting and positive impacts for our clients.

But we cannot be expected to do this work through drip-fed and ad-hoc funding streams and packages. Social change can only be achieved through real commitment to ongoing funding that recognises the value in investing in family violence services right across the continuum from prevention and early intervention through to response and recovery.