

EARLY INTERVENTIONS IN FAMILY VIOLENCE

BACKGROUND

A needs assessment conducted by local Primary Care Partnerships/PCPs in April 2014 across Melbourne's north and west metropolitan region revealed that a large number of frontline staff from health services were not well prepared to recognise the signs of family violence, due to a lack of policies and procedures in place and limited or no training. These findings are consistent with the 2016 Royal Commission into Family Violence enquiry which identified the need for guidelines and training to support all services in family violence early intervention.

The Identifying and Responding to Family Violence Project is a 5 year regional project delivered in partnership by the four PCPs in the region; Inner North West Primary Care Partnership, North East Health Communities, HealthWest Partnership, and Hume Whittlesea Primary Care Partnership. The project aims to improve early intervention responses to family violence by building the capacity of health and community services to identify and respond appropriately.

PARTNERS

- Inner North West PCP
- North East Healthy Communities
- Health West Partnership
- Hume Whittlesea PCP

The project has been supported by 16 expert advisors who have ensured that best practice principles have informed the project's design and generated outputs.

METHOD

Collaboration between key partners has provided an effective platform for delivering the following project outputs:

- A client policy template containing best practice principles for identifying family violence and responding to support women and children experiencing violence
- A workplace policy template containing best practice principles for responding to staff disclosures of family violence
- Guidelines for identifying and responding to people who cause family violence harm
- Provision of family violence training to 375 managers across 48 partner organisations
- Development of a training package to support organisations to train their staff internally

OUTCOMES

An external consultant was engaged to evaluate the impact of this project. The evaluation found that actual change is happening within organisations as a result of participating in the project. This includes:

- Policy and procedure changes have occurred, including changes to salary structures and leave provisions.
- Organisations have changed the way they work with clients and staff in relation to family violence, which has resulted in internal resources to support staff experiencing family

violence, clearer referral procedures, and, for some organisations, the establishment of dedicated family violence officer roles.

In addition, organisations report that:

- The advice and support provided by this project to review how their organisation identifies and responds to women experiencing family violence was positive.
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- That it was good to have “someone with family violence expertise and an external point of view”. They appreciated having the latest research, best practice and new information brought to their attention for action in an area undergoing rapid change. One agency stated that it was “very useful to have assistance as there was a lot of work and time needed to be put in to progress policies”.

Benefits of the regional project are ongoing, with regular data collection and evaluation findings contributing to Victoria’s evidence base on addressing family violence.

‘If it were up to individuals, we would not be able to get it off the ground and to the same quality. We would end up with siloed policies and practices- this is the real value in PCP projects’- partner

‘The changes in our organisation were entirely attributed to the project, as it was a catalyst which initiated change’ partner

