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*Not Now Not Ever, Queensland Domestic and Family Violence
Prevention Strategy*

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Not Now, Not Ever

Queensland Domestic and Family Violence Strategy

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This paper reflects on the process of development and implementation of the Queensland Domestic and Family Violence 10 year Strategy 2015-2025 focusing on those elements that appear to be making a difference. In September 2014, the Queensland Government, Australia, established a special Taskforce to investigate the extent of violence against women and children in the State and present recommendation to the State Government to reduce incidents of violence against women and their children. The Taskforce was chaired by the Hon. Quentin Bryce AD CVO who was the Governor General of Australia (2008 – 2014). Five months after its formation, the Taskforce presented 140 recommendations to the Premier of the State under a report titled *Not Now, Not Ever, Putting an End to Domestic and family Violence in Queensland* (Queensland Government 2015). The recommendations focused on three themes: attitudinal change of society; improving support services for victims and perpetrators and reforming the justice system to increase support and protection for victims and perpetrator accountability. Of these 121 recommendations were targeted to government to achieve systemic and structural change. This effort follows a National Plan to reduce violence against women and their children. Endorsed by Council for Australian Governments (COAG) the report also focused on cultural and attitudinal change with an emphasis on respectful relationships and holding perpetrators

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In 2012 the Australian Bureau of Statistics safety survey reported that one in every six women have experienced physical or sexual abuse by a partner compared to one in 19 Australian men; one in five women have experienced sexual abuse compared to one in 22 Australian men; and one in four Australian women have experienced emotional abuse by a partner compared to one in seven Australian men. Between 2013-14 and 2015-16 domestic and family violence incidents reported to police and the court system increased significantly in Queensland (ABS 2012 in Queensland Government 2015). In the State of Queensland, applications for protection orders increased from 24,160 to 29,938 a 19.7% increase; breaches of these orders also increased significantly from 14, 579 to 22,853 an 39.5% increase (Queensland Police 2015). The homicide rate spiked in 2014-15 to 34 and dropped in 2015-16 to 23 (Magistrates Court of Queensland 2014). Calls to Menslines and Womensline increased by 27.8% in 2015-16 from the year before (DV Connect 2014; 2015). D&FV is also considered to be a major contributor to premature death in women as well as leading to health issues such as obesity, high blood pressure, smoking and mental health issues (Queensland Government 2015). Children too as impacted by this violence directly and indirectly, through witnessing it, being forced to participate in it or spy on their parent. Children are sometime blamed for the violence and can be used as hostages or forced to take sides. As such the impact on children is significant and can lead to behavioural as well

psychological impacts such as depression, increased aggression, pervasive fear and substance abuse.

The effects of D&FV goes beyond that to affect a family's ability to access accommodation leading to homelessness. Furthermore in 2012 a report by KPMG reported that the economic cost of domestic violence to the economy in Australia is equivalent to 1 % of the GDP (Queensland Government 2015:078). These costs are associated with lost productivity, health, consumption costs related to damaged property, second generation costs related to children witnessing violence and administrative costs related to policing and the court system as well as intervention strategies.

Strategy

The 10 year strategy (Implementation Council 2016:28) has a vision of a Queensland free from domestic and family violence. Its foundational principles are for a significant shift in community attitudes, an integrated response that deliver services and supports victims and perpetrators and a stronger justice system that prioritizes victim safety and hold perpetrators accountable. The ten year framework for this strategy is one of prevention, early intervention, crisis response and recovery.

The strategy was developed through a process of community consultations across the state. The consultation process was led by the chair of the Taskforce and included regional and rural communities as well as indigenous, ethnic and faith groups as well as people with disabilities. The focus was understanding the challenges that victims face and how the system can be improved to support victims and perpetrators. The strategy development was led by a taskforce and oversaw the strategy development process that included 2 summit, surveys, focus groups and community

consultations as well as a community attitudes survey. Situating its work in a human rights framework, the taskforce acknowledged that freedom from violence is a human right and that while violence in the public space is recognized and addressed by the law, domestic and family violence is considered a private issue as it occurs in the privacy of people's homes and raises issues about personal privacy. The taskforce thus established that such violence should not be excused or accepted and that community attitudes towards domestic and family violence are a significant factor in the effort to address the issue (Queensland Government 2015). The Taskforce also noted that D&FV touches everyone regardless of age, ethnicity or education and that community attitudes in particular the shame and stigma associated with it prevents many from reporting and addressing it which means that perpetrators are not held accountable. Domestic violence is also noted to be a gendered issue as it affects more women than men and is perpetrated by men on women in the most.

Over a period of five months in 2015 the Taskforce conducted wide ranging focus groups, community consultations, received submissions, engaged with service providers and the justice and police system to identify gaps in services and consider systemic reforms that has at its core the safety of the victims and is able to hold perpetrators accountable. It received submissions from NGOs, government agencies, academic institutions and the private sector. These submissions together with information gathered from consultations and Summits formed the framework that guided the Strategy for Prevention. It identified gaps in the services at a government level through policing response and the justice system complexity. It also identified areas for legislative reform and need to hold perpetrators accountable. It also highlighted the unique issues faced by women in regional and remote communities as well as other vulnerable groups.

Community Attitude

As part of its strategy to address community attitudes towards Domestic and Family Violence (D&FV) the Queensland Government developed a communication strategy that included a school program of respectful relationships and a campaign “Let us stop it at the Start”. As part of its effort to measure the impact of its campaign, the Queensland Government contracted an independent research agency (Enhance Research) to conduct a community research program over a period of two years aimed at identifying community attitudes towards domestic and family violence and progress made over a period of two years - in February 2015 and again in January 2017. Enhance Research conducted 20 focus groups and a quantitative survey of around 1500 Queenslanders across a range of age groups, gender and backgrounds. The survey measured community attitudes towards D&FV, actions to address the violence, bystander behavior and awareness of relevant communication campaigns (2017:5).

The research conducted show that there is an increased awareness of domestic and family violence including in the media as a major homicide occurred during the January 2017 survey and there was wide coverage over the news. Generally community members acknowledged that it is a problem however they were less likely to acknowledge that it occurs in their local community, even though people acknowledge that they are aware of people in their family or neighborhood being affected by it. However people see these incidents as isolated from the overall trend of incidents of domestic and family violence.

Generally there is an acknowledgment that D&FV is a difficult topic to discuss especially amongst men, and people tend to find justification for its occurrence. Three factors were identified as contributors to D&FV: specific issues such as alcohol, drugs, financial stress or mental health problems that perpetrators might face; an individual exposure to violence through their upbringing or family circumstance, exposure to violence or provocation; and environmental factors that

shape attitudes such as attitudes towards women, lack of respect and pervasive social violence (2017:11). More people are acknowledging that the majority of victims of D&FV are women however men are finding it difficult to accept the view that men are the likely perpetrators and tend to disengage.

To understand the impact of the bystander effect, participants noted that they are more likely to intervene if the victim is a family member or friend. They also noted that in the most they will call the police if the victim was a stranger or a neighbour . Overall participants were not aware of the most effective intervention strategies or who to refer victims to which is one of the reasons they prefer not to get involved.

Participants also noted that they are becoming more aware of the issue through media and campaign and are aware that the government is doing something about D&FV but thought the Government should do more as well as other stakeholders across the community need to be involved in addressing the issue. In the most participants thought that the strategy is effective and the communication campaign is increasing awareness however more specific interventions are needed.

Importantly a number of factors were identified as contributing to the increase levels of reporting of incident of D&FV and these were mainly in regards to removing the stigma of shame linked to victims of D&FV and the increase in level of support for victims which is enabling them to report the abuse. The increased engagement of the Government in the issue and engagement of prominent personalities in discussing the topic is also seen as contributing to removing of the stigma.

The Taskforce recommended an implementation Strategy through four action plans of 140 recommendations 121 focused on government agencies. The first 12 months of implementation was a period for laying the foundations for change to be followed by three, 3 year plans focusing on attitudinal change, improved services and empowering the community to maintain momentum and keep driving the change (Queensland Government 2015).

Governance and Implementation

A governance structure designed to drive change throughout the community was considered essential to ensure commitment and progress. An Implementation Council, a cross government committee and regional committees were set up by government across the State. The governance structure is managed by a secretariat that comes under the Premier Department and is overseen by the Minister for Communities, Women and Youth. Such a positioning ensures the issue remains current and is seen by the Government and the public as a matter of priority.

The Implementation Council was established of prominent members of the community in media, non- government organizations, legal sector, industry, social and education sectors. It also had membership of main service delivery government department in particular the judiciary and the police. A Chief Justice and a Police Commissioner are members of the Council and attend its bi monthly meetings regularly. The Council is tasked with providing oversight for the implementation of the strategy and reports to the Premier every six months initially. It also has an oversight role for the development of an evaluation framework to ensure the strategy achieves its stated objectives. The framework considers policy implementation processes, resource allocation and effectiveness of government mechanisms relied upon to deliver the strategy.

In its first year, the strategy achieved legislative reform to protect victims and hold perpetrators accountable, increased responsiveness of service delivery including police response to incidents and rolled out educational programs at school focusing on gender equality and respectful relationships covering all three thematic areas. During this period the Council held two regional visits, three information breakfasts with business leaders and an extensive program of meetings with government agencies, community groups and service providers as well as schools to gauge the strategy's implementation. The Council also conducted a community engagement design session to inform its public communication strategy and hosted the National COAG Summit on reducing violence against women.

Progress over the period occurred in three main areas (Implementation Council 2016:5): community attitudes and behaviors; delivering services through an integrated approach; and strengthening the justice system.

Systemic reform

A number of reforms at a systems level were considered and some implemented to address issues that further impact victim's safety (Implementation Council 2016).

- Domestic and family Violence Death Review and Advisory Board was established under the Coroner's Act 2003 to review and identify systemic issues. The Board was tasked with making recommendations to the Attorney General on legislative reform, as well as policy and practice and training needs to reduce the likelihood of death occurrences as a result of domestic violence. 29 homicides took place in Queensland in 2014-15 as a result of domestic and family violence.

- Reform to the *Industrial Relations Bill 2016* (2016:36) providing access to a ten-day (non-cumulative) domestic and family violence leave to government employees and a right to request flexible work arrangements and unfair dismissal protection to employees affected by domestic and family violence. This option is also available to other employers and has been adopted by a number of community organisations and workplaces. The Public Service Commission also released a workplace cultures framework featuring e-learning programs to raise awareness about domestic violence and available support.
- Promoting the use of best practice to guide health practitioners on safety planning and patient risk assessment of victims. The Royal college of General Practitioners guidelines, *Abuse and Violence: working with our patients in general practice* is likely to be reviewed to provide emphasis on how to manage victims of domestic and family violence at a health practitioner level. The Department of Health has also completed an online toolkit of two training modules to guide clinicians on referral process for specialist services. Some hospitals have also implemented innovative initiatives such as providing access to free two psychology appointments, legal services to victims and others have employed a domestic and family violence specialists worker at a hospital level to promote awareness, deliver training and establish a database on domestic and family violence.
- Potential training for media on handling reporting of domestic and family violence
- Roll out of a school program focusing on respectful relationships from P-12 as part of a broader effort to address community attitudes on domestic and family violence.
- Consideration for long-term funding for provision of prevention services including to vulnerable communities. In 2016, the Government committed \$198.2 million over five years to assist in reducing the effects of domestic and family violence. The Government is

also providing \$69.5 million over four years to rollout Specialist Domestic and Family Violence Courts, which includes \$40.4 million over four years provided as a whole-of-Government contingency for this measure in the 2016-17 Budget. A \$10.3 million is allocated to perpetrator intervention programs (Queensland Government 2016). These include trials and a review of the perpetrators intervention standards.

- Reform of the administrative handling of support accommodation services to victims of domestic violence to enable them to access a wider range of accommodation services. Accommodation support is an essential element in responding to the needs of victims of domestic and family violence including in crisis response. Services now extend to include access to brokerage services for a range of supports including training to assist victims in recovery.
- The Queensland Government is working at a national level to ensure it works towards the implementation of the National Domestic Violence Order Scheme pursued through COAG that aims to facilitate “mutual recognition and enforcement of domestic violence orders across all Australian jurisdictions” (Implementation Council 2016:55). In indigenous communities the Government funded community justice groups to support reform and improve coordination of services as well as maintain local authority structures. It also passed legislative amendment to notify the Family Responsibilities Commission of DV orders made of welfare reform community residents.
- An eDV project is underway to enable a more streamlined flow of information between police and the justice system. The aim is to enhance victim security and simplify procedures for police and the court system.

- A trail of a specialist domestic and family violence court with two dedicated specialized magistrates, a court coordinator to support the trail by coordinating stakeholder engagement and procedures, a specialist registry as a single point of contact for court staff, access to interpreters and dedicated prosecutor and duty lawyer for both parties. Furthermore the court has a working group that meets weekly to address procedural and operational issues to ensure a streamlined service. Once the trail is evaluated the Government might decide to roll it to other locations.
- A Queensland Law Society best practice guidelines were released to assist practitioners in dealing with victims of DV through prioritizing safety, improving understanding collaboration with other services and improving accountability and communication.
- Further law reform through the Domestic and Family Violence Protection and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016 will lead to better sharing of information across government to ensure victim safety, and perpetrators are held accountable including their participation in intervention and potential GPS monitoring. It also focused on increasing penalties for breaches of DV orders

Success Factors

A success factor of this strategy to-date is in the level of importance the issue has achieved through:

- Its positioning in government system under the Premier Department and with reporting on implementation and progress to the Premier and Minister for Communities Women and Youth;
- Political will by the Premier and Minister for Communities Women and Youth;

- A holistic strategy framework that focuses on prevention and early intervention then crises response and recovery
- A governance structure that incorporates a Council from community and government working together to achieve an integrated response and outcomes;
- The involvement of high profile personalities in the Implementation Council from a representative section of the community and government. The prominence it has achieved in the public consciousness through the non-wavering support of the Queensland Premier - a female -and the chair of the Taskforce - a prominent female – together with the involvement of male figures from sport and Indigenous communities in raising awareness about the issue is significant
- Linking of the strategy to the national effort through COAG
- The involvement of the media in reporting incident of homicide and shining the light on the issue to raise public awareness including through advertising campaigns
- A focus on young people through the school program respectful relationships

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