



MOVING TOWARDS BETTER PRACTICE

Implementing family violence policies in the Victorian water sector

May 2017



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CHAIRPERSON'S INTRODUCTION

As a bunch of economists and engineers we, at the Essential Services Commission, did not quite know how to respond to the *Helping not Hindering* report released by the former Consumer Utility Advocacy Centre in 2014. Our knowledge of marginal cost curves and our understanding of water delivery systems had not prepared us for dealing with the scourge of family violence. At the time, we did not understand how it could be our responsibility to deal with this extraordinarily complex social problem. We did not understand that it was our responsibility precisely because it is everybody's responsibility to do what they can.

The Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence took away the luxury of our bewilderment. It made clear that regulators such as the Commission sit firmly within an overall community response.

Recognising the weight of the task that lay before us, Marcus Crudden, the director of our water regulatory team had the foresight to pull together a dedicated team consisting of Lucy Weston, Maria Ponce, Ciara Sterling (seconded from Yarra Valley Water) and Ann Randles (seconded from the Energy and Water Ombudsman Victoria). Before long, the team had assembled a broad network of experts and practitioners from community organisations, other service sectors and representatives from all Victorian water businesses. I am particularly grateful for the work of our team as well as the time and patience this broader network invested in supporting our work.

Over ensuing months, the team methodically and meticulously uncovered how a regulator can make a difference—how we could fulfil our responsibility to support people touched by family violence. On 10 April 2017, we amended the water industry codes to enshrine new obligations on water businesses to assist customers experiencing family violence.

This paper supplements those code changes. It provides examples and guidance about how water businesses might go about complying with their new regulatory obligations. But it is early days and we, the water industry regulator and regulated water businesses, still have much to learn. We expect this paper will develop over time as businesses take different approaches, some of which may work better than others. That experimentation should be welcomed and we should all look to learn from it.

As we have travelled this road, we have also introduced our own family violence policy for Commission staff. We have trained all our managers and many of our staff in how they can recognise the signs of family violence and support colleagues who are working through a family violence experience, no matter how it may have involved them.

I am exceptionally proud of the strides we have taken as a regulator and as an organisation. While this paper is primarily targeted at the Victorian water industry, I hope others also find it useful as they explore the role they can play in responding to the devastation of family violence.

Dr Ron Ben-David

Chairperson

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- In April 2017, the Essential Services Commission (the Commission) released revised customer service codes that require each water business to implement a family violence policy. The code changes take effect from 1 July 2017.
- Recognising that each water business faces different circumstances, we are providing time for water businesses to develop and implement family violence policies. From July 2018, we will monitor and report on whether the water businesses have implemented their family violence policies.
- The code changes require a water business to assist customers experiencing family violence to manage the impact of physical and economic abuse and to provide informed and consistent advice and referrals. The code requirements are high level and enabling, so a water business has flexibility in choosing its specific approach. A water business can account for its unique circumstances, and it can learn from and adapt its family violence policy over time.
- **The purpose of this paper is to provide guiding material on how a water business might meet the family violence requirements in the revised codes. We include examples of family violence policies, and of water businesses' current measures. We also provide useful contacts and resources.**
- We anticipate water businesses will develop their approach to family violence over time, including learning from other sectors. We will continue to facilitate workshops and to work with water businesses and community organisations to identify when and how we should update this guiding material.

1 BACKGROUND

In February 2015, the Victorian Government established the Royal Commission into Family Violence to inquire into and report on how Victoria's response to family violence can be improved. In March 2016, the Royal Commission tabled its report, including 227 recommendations for improving the community's response to the scale and risks of family violence. It highlighted that family violence includes a broad range of behaviour that is not limited to physical violence.¹ It found many parties—including essential service providers—have a role in addressing family violence.

Utilities deliver essential services—critical for daily life—for every household. The Royal Commission found perpetrators can use control over essential services as a form of family violence called economic abuse. This control may include:

- insisting an account is in a victim's name and refusing to contribute to the cost
- putting a service in the sole name of the victim without their knowledge or consent
- holding an account jointly and refusing to contribute to the cost
- holding the account in their own name and not paying bills, resulting in disconnection²
- holding the account in their own name and threatening to have the service cut off, or having it cut off when they leave the family home.³

¹ State of Victoria 2016, *Royal Commission into Family Violence: report and recommendations*, volume 1, parliamentary paper no. 132 (2014–16), March, p. 15.

² Restrictions, rather than disconnections are applied in Victoria's water sector.

³ State of Victoria 2016, *op. cit.*, p 104.

The Royal Commission found these actions can result in family violence victims facing financial difficulties and losing access to essential household services. So, noting the role of the Essential Services Commission as the economic regulator of Victoria's energy and water sectors, the Royal Commission recommended we amend our customer service codes to help address these issues.⁴ Our codes oblige the regulated businesses to meet conditions and standards in delivering services to their customers.

On 10 April 2017, we released our final decision on amendments to the urban and rural water customer service codes. The amendments require all water businesses to develop and implement family violence policies to support customers and staff experiencing family violence.⁵ The aim is not for water businesses to replicate family violence counselling services; rather, the businesses need to be part of a whole of community response to this systemic problem. They have a role to play through their customer interactions and their collaborations.

Our new family violence clause (box A) requires water businesses to have family violence policies for:

- training and supporting staff who deal with customers affected by family violence
- protecting private and confidential customer information
- facilitating access to businesses' existing payment difficulty programs
- minimising the need for customers to disclose family violence repeatedly
- making customer referrals to specialist family violence services.

⁴ State of Victoria 2016, *Royal Commission into Family Violence: report and recommendations*, volume IV, parliamentary paper no. 132 (2014–16), March, p. 120.

⁵ Essential Services Commission 2017, *Customer service code—urban water businesses and Rural water customer service code*, April.

BOX A: FAMILY VIOLENCE CLAUSE⁶

A water business must have and implement a family violence policy⁷.

As a minimum, the policy must:

- (a) provide that all relevant staff have ongoing training to:
 - (1) identify customers affected by family violence;
 - (2) deal appropriately with customers affected by family violence; and
 - (3) apply the water business's family violence policy and related policies and procedures to customers affected by family violence;
- (b) identify the support the water business will provide to staff affected by family violence, including any training, leave, external referrals and counselling available;
- (c) promote customer safety by providing for the secure handling of information about those affected by family violence, including in a manner that maintains confidentiality;
- (d) specify the water business's approach to debt management and recovery where a customer is affected by family violence, including, but not limited to:
 - (1) the recovery of debt from customers with joint accounts; and
 - (2) the circumstances in which debt will be suspended or waived;
- (e) recognise family violence as a potential cause of payment difficulties and as an eligibility criterion for access to the water business's hardship policy under clause 5.3 and 5.4, and address what payment support will apply to customers affected by family violence;
- (f) provide for a process that avoids customers having to repeat disclosure of their family violence, and provides for continuity of service; and
- (g) provide a means for referring customers who may be affected by family violence to specialist family violence services.

A water business must:

- (h) publish on its website, and keep up to date, the assistance and referrals available to customers affected by family violence and how customers may access such assistance;
- (i) provide a copy of the policy to a customer upon request; and
- (j) provide for a periodic review mechanism of the policy and its associated procedures.

⁶ Clause 14 *Customer service code – urban water businesses 2017* and clause 11 *Rural water customer service code 2017*

⁷ "Family violence" has the meaning given in section 5 of the *Family Violence Protection Act 2008* (Vic).

ABOUT THIS GUIDING MATERIAL

The purpose of this paper is to inform the approach a water business might take to meet the family violence requirements in the codes. The paper also responds to the Royal Commission recommendation that we provide industry guidance to our regulated water businesses.

We designed this guidance material for Victorian water businesses (from board members to operational staff), but it may also apply to water businesses in other states or territories, and other utility service providers.

The guidance reflects our collaboration with water businesses and other organisations that have already commenced workplace and customer centred initiatives on family violence. These organisations include Yarra Valley Water, the Australian Bankers' Association and the Energy and Water Ombudsman (Victoria), among others. More than the other water businesses, Yarra Valley Water is our main reference because it has well developed family violence processes and available examples.

We encourage water businesses to draw on a range of sources of information and best practice to inform their family violence policy. As water and other utility service providers progress how they approach family violence, we will work closely with the water sector and community organisations on when and how we update this guiding material. We welcome the involvement of all water businesses, particularly regional businesses, in further updates.

Each business will decide how it will meet the codes' policy requirements and this guiding material is intended to inform their approach. Given that all businesses have different starting points, resources and communities, we expect some businesses will go beyond the scope of this guidance material and the code requirements. Some water businesses may, for example, develop processes to address the complexity of family violence experienced by customers from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities, and from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) communities.

CALD customers are at higher risk of family violence because they can be more isolated. They are less likely to be aware of or able to access support services available to them.⁸ ATSI women are more likely to be victims of domestic violence than other members of the community, and less likely disclose family violence or seek support from mainstream services.⁹ For these reasons, a water business may need to tailor initiatives for these more vulnerable groups. Section 3.2.7 explains approaches some organisations have used to support CALD and ATSI customers.

Water businesses may also seek to take a more holistic approach to family violence, including prevention initiatives. Gender inequity, for example, is a significant contributor to family violence, and organisations such as Our Watch and White Ribbon seek to reduce the prevalence of family violence within the community and workplaces by promoting improved gender equality and diversity. Section 3.2.2 outlines prevention strategies adopted by water businesses.

As with other papers the Commission has published on family violence, we use gender neutral language where possible. We recognise that family violence is seen as a gendered issue, and that male against female violence is the most common form of family violence and causes a greater incidence of harm. Family violence may also occur within extended families, by siblings, against men, in same-sex relationships and within all socioeconomic and ethnic groups. By using gender neutral language we aim to recognise this broad definition of family violence.

⁸ R Flory 2012, Whittlesea CALD communities family violence project: Scoping exercise report, *Whittlesea Community Futures & Whittlesea Community Connections, Melbourne*.

⁹ Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service Victoria 2015, *Submission to the Royal Commission into Family Violence*. June p. 23

2 MAKING A DIFFERENCE—A CASE STUDY

The need for policies and processes that better protect customers and staff is driven by what can happen on any given day in call centres and in the field. Here is an example from the perspective of Yarra Valley Water, which has progressed further than other businesses in setting up family violence measures. We provide this example to demonstrate how a business's policies and processes can make a difference for staff and customers experiencing family violence.

BEFORE FAMILY VIOLENCE MEASURES

A female customer called Yarra Valley Water's contact centre with a billing enquiry. While talking to the consultant, the customer began speaking to a male in the background. The consultant could hear the male become aggressive and threatening towards the female customer. The customer became distressed and began crying. She asked the call centre operator for help and for someone to call the police.

The consultant believed the female customer was afraid of the male in the house and was at risk of harm, either during the call or when the call ended. The consultant had never come across a situation like this before, he was distressed with what he was hearing and unsure what to do. He had to make decisions to the best of his ability during the call, including when and how to involve his manager. He needed to determine whether to make the contact with police as requested and keep the customer on the phone or if it was safer for the customer to end the call and contact the police herself. The consultant was very shaken by the experience, he was worried about the safety of the customer and if he had done the right things. The consultant required additional support from management after taking the call before resuming his work. As a result of this call, Yarra Valley Water learned:

- such calls can come into the water business at any time, and the business cannot control when or how these immediate risk situations present
- it needs to protect customers and staff, by being aware of and actively addressing (where possible) the associated risks for all parties.

In response to its learnings, Yarra Valley Water implemented specific training for staff based on their role within the business. The training comprised:

- family violence awareness so the contact centre staff can identify risks and triggers, and apply the business process to best support vulnerable customers
- specialised skills for the customer support team who manage many vulnerability issues, including customers identified as being at risk of family violence. The team are trained to ask appropriate questions, consult without judging, avoid blaming victims, assess the safety risk, and offer a range of support and referral pathways. This team also has formalised debriefing support to minimise their vicarious trauma
- skills for managers to support their staff
- awareness training across the organisation so all areas of the business understand the need for family violence policies and processes.

Yarra Valley Water also developed formal procedures to better support customers and staff, and to minimise the pressure and risks around decisions needed in high risk calls (for example, a procedure for calling emergency services). As a result of these two measures, Yarra Valley Water is better placed to help customers and staff on family violence issues.

AFTER FAMILY VIOLENCE MEASURES

A customer called the contact centre to close her account (which was in joint names) and to open a new account at a new property in just her name. She advised that she had a safety plan in place to escape her current property and relationship due to family violence. The call centre operator immediately transferred this customer to Yarra Valley Water's customer support team, which is trained to assist customers experiencing family violence.

During the call, the customer support consultant confidently asked the appropriate questions because they had received specific family violence training. They assigned a single point of contact (a case manager) so the customer would not have to repeat the same information if she called again. And they took steps to protect the customer's safety and confidentiality by applying a safety flag to the new account. This flag locks the account so only the customer support team has access.

Working with the customer, the consultant also assessed her safety and security requirements for the account. This assessment included:

- identifying whether a password was needed for identification
- disabling access to the online account, because the perpetrator knew her personal details to get through the privacy check points (for example, date of birth and address details)
- establishing the safety protocol for future contact, including SMS communication.

The consultant also referred the customer to a support network through Kildonan's CareRing. CareRing provides access to support such as financial counselling, family violence programs, grants and food vouchers.

Through its new measures, Yarra Valley Water better protects its staff members and customers. Staff report feeling less stressed and anxious about the prospect of a family violence call because of their training and because they have familiar processes to follow (for example, they have referral pathways).

3 POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION

In developing a family violence policy, water businesses have different starting points and have sought guidance in the early stages of policy development and implementation. While not an expert on family violence, we can share the information and resources that we gathered when consulting on the family violence provisions for our customer service codes.¹⁰

Our consultation on the codes took place over 12 months in 2016-17. It included organisations such as state and national family violence organisations, representatives from Victoria’s community sector, Victorian water businesses, energy retailers, the banking sector, some industry ombudsmen, and representatives from government. Yarra Valley Water assisted us, sharing practices and procedures that it already has in place. For more detailed information about who and how we consulted, please see the final decision on our amendments to water customer service codes.¹¹

Here, we offer examples of how a water business might develop and implement family violence measures. We have included:

- existing family violence policies, including our family violence policy for staff
- better practice for each of the key policy elements in the customer service codes

¹⁰ Essential Services Commission 2017, *Customer service code—urban water businesses and Customer service code—rural water businesses*, April.

¹¹ Essential Services Commission 2017, *Amendments to water customer service codes—new requirements for family violence policies, Final decision*, April.

- family violence scenarios that the community sector identified as an appropriate checklist for businesses wishing to evaluate the effectiveness and comprehensiveness of policies.

We expect to update this material (and include more examples) as the water businesses develop and implement their family violence policies.

3.1 FAMILY VIOLENCE POLICIES

The amendments to the customer service codes require water businesses to implement a family violence policy and to specify support measures for employees. Businesses may choose how they meet this requirement. Here are examples of what is being done:

YARRA VALLEY WATER

Yarra Valley Water has two components (attachment 1) to its family violence approach:

- a high level family violence policy that the board approved
- a process document that details how the business will enact the policy

It is developing a third document, a fact sheet to be published on its website to inform customers of the support it provides.

ESSENTIAL SERVICES COMMISSION

Our family violence policy and procedure document (attachment 2) contains toolkits and checklists that provide practical guidance to staff. It covers support within the organisation, confidentiality, leave and flexible working entitlement, and staff grievance procedures.

There are separate toolkits for managers and other employees. The manager's toolkit helps ensure staff privacy and safety are protected and supported by human resources. The employees' toolkit and checklist explain available support services and practical steps for an employee to protect their safety and privacy.

UNITYWATER

Unitywater, a south east Queensland based water business, has many interrelated policies and procedures to support staff. Its overarching employee welfare management policy identifies the business's commitment to staff welfare and how staff contribute to each other's welfare. This policy and the related domestic violence policy (attachment 3) detail the support available both within and outside Unitywater.

3.2 EXAMPLES OF BETTER PRACTICE

Many water businesses already have measures to support customers who disclose family violence. Some of these measures are progressive compared with those of peer organisations, and could benefit other water businesses and their customers.

Here, we bring together examples of businesses' current and emerging practices to support customers who are experiencing family violence. We expect these practices will change as businesses develop and implement their family violence policies up to June 2018, and again as business policies and processes align with changing community standards and expectations.

This section includes better practice examples for each element of the family violence provisions in the customer service codes:

- training staff to improve responses to family violence victims - response for customers
- training staff to improve responses to family violence—response for staff
- protecting private and confidential information
- responding to customers with payment difficulty
- ensuring eligibility for hardship programs and payment difficulty support
- minimising repeat disclosures of family violence
- referrals for customers to expert services.

We have also included better practice examples for two consequential amendments to the customer service codes:

- improving flexibility in providing billing history
- including support information in customer charters.

3.2.1 TRAINING STAFF TO IMPROVE RESPONSES TO FAMILY VIOLENCE VICTIMS - RESPONSE FOR CUSTOMERS

Our customer service codes require water businesses to have family violence policies that provide for staff training.¹² This will enable staff to better identify and respond to signs that indicate customers may be affected by family violence, including economic abuse.

The Royal Commission into Family Violence noted economic abuse is a form of family violence that is not well understood.¹³ It found service providers (and others) do not consistently and appropriately recognise, intervene and respond to economic abuse. Our consultation confirmed this and highlighted that service providers need awareness training to develop their capacity to identify economic abuse so as to offer support that meets the specific needs of victims of family violence. Signs of possible economic abuse may include when a customer:

- is seen or heard to be taking instructions from another party
- remains silent while another party does all the talking
- appears fearful, unfocussed or withdrawn
- agrees to take on additional liabilities when doing so has no apparent benefit to them
- expresses concerns about their privacy and the disclosure of information to another account holder
- appears reluctant to involve other account holders when seeking assistance to repay a debt
- mentions an intervention order (or equivalent) is, or has recently been, in place.

¹² Clause 14 (a)(1-3) *Customer service code – urban water businesses 2017* and clause 11 (a)(1-3) *Rural water customer service code 2017*

¹³ State of Victoria 2016, *Royal Commission into Family Violence: report and recommendations*, volume I, parliamentary paper no. 132 (2014–16), March, p. 15

Some Victorian Water businesses already provide family violence awareness training across their organisation.

- **Yarra Valley Water's** family violence training program incorporates all areas of the business, including the executive team, board members, contractors and plumbers. Front line staff receive additional training on family violence, including awareness and identification, and the process for protecting customers' privacy and securing personal information.

Yarra Valley Water identified the increased risk to customers experiencing family violence, including personal safety. It sought to develop system changes to improve privacy and safety for customers who disclose family violence. One change is the capability to lock down the accounts of those experiencing family violence so only case managers who are aware of the customer's circumstances can access those accounts. This system change proved difficult at first, given competing business priorities and a lack of common understanding of the issues.

Yarra Valley Water looked at a customer centred design approach to the issues. Using this approach, it provided training and insight to the IT staff about the impacts and risks of family violence—for example, listening to real customer calls. Becoming more aware of the risks from inadvertent disclosure of personal information, IT staff were motivated to prioritise and develop innovative solutions that provided greater security measures for staff and customers. The end solution was above and beyond the scope of the original request, and resulted in a highly effective IT system change.

- **City West Water** provides family violence awareness training to all customer operations, connections and metering, operation control centre and trade waste staff, to ensure they better identify customers experiencing family violence, and can offer appropriate support when required. Staff identified as an escalation point for customers experiencing family violence receive additional training, to ensure they handle any cases of family violence promptly and sensitively.

The Royal Commission cited examples of customers who were reluctant to disclose their circumstances because staff within essential service providers lacked empathy and understanding. From our consultation, we also learned that one poor experience when disclosing their circumstances of family violence can often deter a victim from disclosing again.

To avoid barriers to disclosure, and to support staff to remain impartial, objective and nonjudgmental about a customer's circumstances, our customer service codes require a business to train staff to deal appropriately with customers affected by family violence.

Yarra Valley Water's customer support team continue to be specially trained in identifying and responding to the complex issues associated with family violence, so the team can work with customers in a respectful and appropriate manner.

Yarra Valley Water reported that call centre staff, once trained in the customer family violence policy, are more able to identify family violence customers and are more confident in responding to personal disclosures.

Our consultation also highlighted the importance of training that ensures water business staff provide accurate information and consistent service to customers. The requirement for staff to be trained in the business's family violence policies will ensure staff are aware of the policies and procedures when responding to family violence.

The **Essential Services Commission** developed a family violence policy for employees in 2016. Before the launch of our policy, all managers were trained to support employees who may need assistance under the policy. In addition to raising awareness of family violence, the training included role plays showing how to have safe and effective conversations with employees experiencing family violence, whether they be victims or perpetrators of abuse. Once we launched the policy, we offered training for all staff. We also promoted the policy internally on the staff website and with flyers.

3.2.2 TRAINING STAFF TO IMPROVE RESPONSES TO FAMILY VIOLENCE—RESPONSE FOR STAFF

Water businesses' staff may experience the same levels of family violence experienced in the general community. So, staff may be directly affected by family violence, as perpetrators or victims. They may be experiencing family violence, have a family member or friend whom they are supporting, or have experienced family violence (or known victims) in the past.

Our consultation revealed training for staff in customer family violence measures can raise personal issues for staff who have been affected (or know someone affected) by family violence. For this reason, our customer service codes require businesses to consider how they will support their staff.¹⁴ This may include policies and processes for staff who experience vicarious trauma as a result of their work.

- **All Victorian public sector employees** can now access 20 days of paid family violence leave, and casual employees are entitled to unpaid family violence leave.
- The **Essential Services Commission's** family violence policy outlines our family violence leave entitlements plus provisions for the protection of personal information. It includes toolkits for managers and employees, and is relevant to both victims and perpetrators of abuse.

The training for line managers emphasised the importance of non-judgmental discussions, and how to approach staff and help them to access relevant support.

- When training staff in its family violence policy, **City West Water** also ensures its employee support service provider knows the training schedule in advance so it can prepare support staff and make referrals specific to family violence.

¹⁴ Clause 14 (b) *Customer Service Code – Urban Water Businesses 2017* and clause 11 (b) *Rural Water customer service code 2017*

AGL was one of the first utilities to formalise internal-facing family violence initiatives. It focused on engaging staff around family violence. Unitywater and Wannon Water also looked at staff awareness and prevention in their internal work on family violence.

- **AGL** noted its family violence policy aims to develop a supportive workplace culture in which affected employees can obtain help and support, and to guide its leaders in how best to support their staff. The policy mentions measures that may be used to provide a safe work environment for employees, and offers an external employee assistance program. As we do at the Essential Services Commission, AGL will work with employees to try to adjust work schedules and locations if required, and will provide additional personal leave if required.

- **Unitywater** is undertaking White Ribbon accreditation, which includes developing family violence policies for staff and customers. It also partners with a local women's refuge, for referrals and for staff training and awareness programs.

Staff response kits are available for both managers and employees. These kits include information on how staff should approach family violence with customers, and the process for making appropriate referrals. Unitywater has also trained contact officers to help staff access support.

- In 2015, **Wannon Water** partnered with Women's Health and Wellbeing Barwon South West to participate in 'Take a Stand' workplace training. The program aims to increase awareness of the role of gender inequity in violence against women, including family violence.

Since this training, Wannon Water has undertaken initiatives to improve gender equity, including flexible workplace arrangements. By encouraging men to take up these arrangements, Wannon Water seeks to improve men's work-life balance and support more opportunities for women to participate outside the home.

Wannon Water also promotes campaigns such as the 16 days of Activism (a global initiative to raise awareness of family violence) and trains staff to assist employees affected by family violence to access support.

A number of organisations provide workplace related information on family violence, including guidance on workplace policies. Examples are the Domestic Violence Resource Centre, Our Watch, White Ribbon and the Inner North West Primary care partnership (which released a Workplace Family Violence Policy Template).¹⁵

TRAINING PROVIDERS

Many sources of training are available to water businesses seeking to combat family violence, and they reflect the scale and local requirements of each business. The training divisions of Kildonan Uniting Care and Good Shepherd both provide family violence training to utilities and have developed programs targeting different business streams and roles. Other organisations, such as Bendigo's Centre for Non-Violence, specialise in family violence training for local services.

- **City West Water** and **South East Water** both have ongoing partnerships with Good Shepherd, which includes advice and consultation on issues relating to family violence, and tailored family violence training programs for staff.
- **Yarra Valley Water** engaged Kildonan Uniting Care to develop a combination of face-to-face and online training modules built around different roles within a water organisation. The online component enables call centres to stagger training across its workforce, so all staff have access to the training. Kildonan provides similar training for only organisations that commit to the full training program, to reduce the risk of harm to staff who have not received adequate support or training.
- **Coliban Water** engaged a local service provider, Centre for Non-Violence, to deliver its staff training. The Centre for Non-Violence uses a model based on the common risk assessment framework (CRAF), which is a state-wide method that ensures staff are trained to identify and assess risk, and make an appropriate referral. Because the Centre for Non-Violence is a local service provider, Coliban Water is part of an integrated approach to family violence within its community.

¹⁵ <http://inwpcp.org.au/resources/identifying-and-responding-to-family-violence/family-violence-policy-templates/workplace-family-violence-policy-template/>.

3.2.3 PROTECTING PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION

Our customer service codes require water businesses to have policies for securely handling the information of customers affected by family violence.¹⁶ This means that businesses are to maintain the confidentiality of customer information and not compromise a customer's safety by disclosing their private details, either directly or indirectly, to a perpetrator.

Our consultation consistently reinforced how important it is for water businesses to recognise, in the case of family violence, that a utility's handling of personal information can directly affect a customer's safety. Customers experiencing family violence need to be confident that their personal information is secure and not at risk of deliberate or inadvertent disclosure to anyone associated with the perpetrator of abuse.

In cases of family violence, particularly when there is a joint account, the perpetrator can use a victim's personal information to pass routine privacy protections and obtain their ex-partner's new contact details, to continue the abusive behaviour. A further risk is water businesses' inadvertent disclosure of personal information, which can result from internal processes or process errors.

Recognising these risks, the Australian Bankers' Association's industry guideline on financial abuse and family violence policies highlights that customer confidentiality and safety need attention.¹⁷

The **Australian Bankers' Association** recommends its members implement measures that ensure communication with joint account holders excludes contact information for the customer experiencing family violence; informs customers of when and what information must be shared with a joint account holder; and facilitates the change of passwords if required, and any contact information.¹⁸

¹⁶ Clause 14 (c) *Customer Service Code – Urban Water Businesses 2017* and clause 11 (c) *Rural Water customer service code 2017*

¹⁷ *Australia Bankers' Association Inc 2017*; www.bankers.asn.au/media/media-releases/media-release-2016/banks-enhance-support-for-family-and-domestic-violence-victims, Accessed 10 February 2017.

¹⁸ Australian Bankers' Association 2017, *Industry guideline: financial abuse and family and domestic violence policies*, p. 4.

For property owners, the responsibility for water debt differs from other forms of utility debt because it is statute based rather than contract based. That is, debt is tied to a property rather than a person. So, in instances of family violence, if the property title is held jointly by the perpetrator and victim, then the water company is legally required to maintain the account in both names, and the debt accrues in both names even if one partner has left the property. In this case, the perpetrator may have access to joint account information that may include a victim's forwarding address. In our consultations, many businesses explained they have already taken steps to reduce this inadvertent disclosure of confidential information.

- **Yarra Valley Water** applies a specific safety flag to the account when notified that a customer, or their family, is experiencing family violence. The flag indicates to all frontline staff that this customer has additional sensitivities and is being case managed. It also disables the online functions and access to the account by anyone other than the customer support team (who are trained to work with customers with complex issues, including those customers affected by family violence). Yarra Valley Water also discusses with the customer safe ways to communicate, covering emails, site visits and safe phone messages. When appropriate, it arranges increased privacy settings for the customer's account, such as a password, a secret question/answer, or SMS or email verification.
- **City West Water**, in consultation with the victim, applies a flag to the account and sets up password and call-back options as needed. It is investigating how its system could lock down personal information that is relevant to the security of the account. In the interim, it uses a spreadsheet that has restricted access by approved staff only. Customers who call via the general enquiries number and identify as experiencing family violence are referred to the leadership team and provided with direct numbers for ongoing discussions. City West Water redirects invoices to upskilled staff to ensure the invoices are delivered through the agreed safe method (for example, a nominated alternative address that is not noted on the billing screen). But the business also recognises that a customer needs to have input into the security arrangements for the account. A recent customer, for example, requested that no flags or notes be included on their account. As a victim of family violence, the customer did not want the perpetrator to see any change in the joint account or in their dealings with the water business.

- **South East Water** holds any personal contact information in a secure database outside its account management system. This database can be accessed by only the SEW Assist team; no contact information for a victim is accessible on the account management system. When needed, the business can send two bills: one to the perpetrator and one to the victim, using the secure database information. A flag on the account management system identifies the account is being managed by SEW Assist, but no flag identifies the matter is related to family violence.

Regional water businesses may face additional complexities and confidentiality issues because staff might know staff or customers who disclose family violence, their abusers and other family members. We recognise this emerging issue, and businesses are still evaluating the merits of various approaches.

- **Gippsland Water** is upgrading its billing system, and the scope of works includes the ability to restrict a customer's personal records. Current practice involves an alert on the account, which directs the enquiry to specific staff.
- **North East Water** places an alert on the account and records new contact details on paper in a file that only a single specialised staff member can access. Additional staff are being trained to deal with these restricted accounts.
- **Westernport Water, Gippsland Water, East Gippsland Water, South Gippsland Water, and Southern Rural Water** are working together to identify how to best support customers experiencing family violence and their staff.

The Energy and Water Ombudsman Victoria (EWOV) is an external dispute resolution scheme. It provides alternative dispute resolution services to Victorian energy and water consumers by receiving, investigating and facilitating resolutions of complaints. As such, EWOV has experience in family violence related complaints. Its position statement on family violence covers disclosures of private or confidential information.¹⁹

¹⁹ See EWOV's position statement at www.ewov.com.au/files/position-statement-7-family-violence.pdf

EWOV expects water businesses to address as quickly as possible any issues that lead to privacy breaches or other errors. It may also expect a business to deal with customer service issues that result from privacy or safety issues. The business may need to pay for (or contribute to) the cost of emergency accommodation, or make other financial compensation to recognise the impact on the customer. Further, EWOV may expect the water business to treat matters more urgently for customers experiencing family violence than for other customers.

3.2.4 RESPONDING TO CUSTOMERS WITH PAYMENT DIFFICULTY

During our consultation with the community sector and family violence experts, we learned that perpetrators of domestic violence often avoid responsibility for debts. Partners, or former partners, can be left with substantial liabilities that restrict their ability to manage financially or to leave the abusive environment. We were advised that debt incurred through joint accounts is one of the most difficult issues for customers experiencing economic abuse and family violence to resolve, leading to economic abuse continuing after the relationship ends.

The Royal Commission recognised a role for utilities to do more in assisting customers affected by family violence to regain control of their finances. Through our consultation, community groups noted the Royal Commission's approach to joint debt and highlighted the need for customers and their support workers to have a consistent experience when dealing with utilities.

Our customer service codes require water businesses to provide a greater level of transparency about how it may recover debt from joint accounts and when it may suspend or waive debt.²⁰ They also make it explicit that customers experiencing family violence must be eligible for assistance under a business's hardship program or other payment difficulty support.²¹

²⁰ Clause 14 (d) *Customer Service Code – Urban Water Businesses 2017* and clause 11 (d) *Rural Water customer service code 2017*

²¹ Clause 14 (e) *Customer Service Code – Urban Water Businesses 2017* and clause 11 (e) *Rural Water customer service code 2017*

TREATMENT OF DEBT

Many industries are grappling with how to recover joint debts. The Royal Commission recommended the Australian Communications and Media Authority (Recommendation 109) and the Australian Bankers' Association (Recommendation 111) provide standards for addressing joint debts in situations of family violence.

The **Australian Bankers' Association** industry guideline²² states banks may, in circumstances of domestic violence, settle a claim for the whole or part of the debt against one co-borrower who is a victim of family violence. A bank can sever or apportion the loan so a victim of family violence pays only a portion, or makes no payment if appropriate.

Some water businesses have already adopted processes to ensure victims of family violence who are joint property owners with their abuser are not disadvantaged after separation.

Yarra Valley Water and **City West Water** provide options based on the customer's circumstances. These options include suspending the joint account and creating a tenant account after the victim of family violence, or the perpetrator, leaves a jointly owned property. This new tenant account includes only the use charges, and enables victims of family violence to apply for concessions, and to enter payment plans for ongoing usage. Property based charges continue to accrue on the joint account, but water businesses can exercise discretion to suspend collection activity until the property issues are addressed through family court processes.

Credit reporting has an impact on customers' ability to re-establish financial independence, and access rental housing and other services. Many victims of family violence, including children, thus become homeless as a result of financial abuse.

²² Australian Bankers' Association 2017, *Industry guideline: financial abuse and family and domestic violence policies*, p. 5.

Recognising this issue, some water businesses (urban and regional) have already established processes for managing, suspending or waiving debt for customers experiencing family violence.

- **Yarra Valley Water** takes a flexible approach to debt waiver, placing the safety of victims of family violence at the centre of decision making. Its customer support team works with customers who are experiencing more complex issues, and bases decisions on each customer's circumstances. It developed a business case to substantiate that this approach benefits the business as well as customers.
- **City West Water** avoids debt recovery or debt listing with a perpetrator, to avoid the risk of re-igniting abusive behaviours and placing a customer at risk of harm. A victim's debt is managed via an upskilled staff member, and the account is removed from any credit paths or automated recovery actions. Write-offs and waivers are made on a case-by-case basis in consultation with the customer affected by family violence.
- **Coliban Water** suspends legal action on joint accounts where family violence is present to take into account the complexity of the range of issues the affected person may be dealing with and the complex decisions she or he may need to make. While recognising the important function of utility relief grants (URG) in managing debt, Coliban Water encourages customers not to apply for URG on the joint account, but rather to retain the option for the URG for future accounts they may have only in their name.
- **North East Water** has incorporated flexible processes to treat the debt of customers affected by family violence. North East Water refers all family violence cases to its team leader customer support, who has discretion in relation to recommending finalising account and debt waiver. North East Water may also temporarily suspend collection of debt based on advice provided about a customer by a financial counsellor.
- **Gippsland Water** is currently exploring debt waiver and incentive schemes. After training customer contact staff on family violence, it has tasked teams with identifying options for the treatment of debt, the circumstances under which these options can be applied and the delegation level of staff who can apply them.

In its position statement on family violence, EWOV has outlined its approach to complaints involving family violence and joint debt.

Depending on the circumstances, **EWOV** may require utilities to pursue part of the debt with the other account holder, even though the provider may have the legal right to pursue the whole debt from the victim. EWOV will also consider how this approach, if taken, aligns with the businesses' policy²³.

Water business wanting to learn more about the impact of and approaches to joint debt can review:

- EWOV's position statement on family violence²⁴
- the Good Shepherd Australia and Wyndham Legal Service report *Restoring financial safety: legal responses to economic abuse*²⁵
- the Consumer Utilities Advocacy Centre's report *Helping not hindering: uncovering domestic violence & utility debt*.²⁶

²³ www.ewov.com.au/files/position-statement-7-family-violence.pdf

²⁴ www.ewov.com.au/files/position-statement-7-family-violence.pdf

²⁵ Good Shepherd Australia and Wyndham Legal Service 2015, *Restoring financial safety: legal responses to economic abuse*.

²⁶ Consumer Utilities Advocacy Centre 2014, *Helping not hindering*.

3.2.5 ENSURING ELIGIBILITY FOR HARDSHIP PROGRAMS AND PAYMENT DIFFICULTY SUPPORT

The Royal Commission recommended we include family violence as an explicit criterion for access to water a business’s hardship program.²⁷ The intent is to improve access to support measures already offered as part of a hardship program but that family violence victims may miss if they do not present initially as being in hardship. The Consumer Utilities Advocacy Centre noted this risk. It found, even when victims of family violence satisfy the criteria for assistance with payment difficulty, some utilities do not assess these customers’ circumstances as worthy of hardship assistance.²⁸

- **South East Water** for many years has included family violence as an explicit criterion for its hardship program.
- **Yarra Valley Water** refers all customers affected by family violence to case management by its customer support teams, regardless of whether they present with payment difficulties. This approach aligns with a criterion in its hardship policy and ensures victims of family violence receive advice on its hardship support program.
- **City West Water** ensures its hardship program is accessible to all victims of family violence, and may also apply grants, debt waiver, debt write-off, deferment and payment options based on the needs of the customer experiencing family violence.
- **Coliban Water** customers who experience family violence are automatically included in its hardship program. Staff then have discretion and flexibility around processes and debt collection time frames. They may, for example, wait three to six months before seeking information about payment or completion of a utility relief grant.

²⁷ State of Victoria 2016, *Royal Commission into Family Violence: report and recommendations*, volume IV, parliamentary paper no. 132 (2014–16), March, p. 120.

²⁸ Consumer Utilities Advocacy Centre 2014, *Helping not hindering*. p. 23.

3.2.6 MINIMISING REPEAT DISCLOSURES OF FAMILY VIOLENCE

Our consultation noted the challenges that customers and their support workers face when communicating with creditors about family violence. The lack of dedicated staff means victims have had difficulty disclosing their abuse and often need to repeat their story. Community organisations noted the need to repeat a family violence story can often have a traumatising effect, with customers re-living the experience of family violence. In addition, customers cannot always explain their circumstances to a utility, because the perpetrator may be present or monitoring the call.

Our customer service codes thus require water businesses to handle family violence calls in a way that avoids forcing the customer to repeat their disclosure of family violence, and provides for continuity of service.²⁹ In its position statement, EWOV also recognises the importance of effective communication between utilities and victims of family violence:

*Poor customer service can adversely affect family violence victims in a disproportionate way—for example having poor contact notes can require a customer to repeat intimate and difficult details to numerous staff members.*³⁰

The Australian Bankers' Association also addressed this issue, in its policy guideline to the banking sector:

The **Australian Bankers' Association** guideline recommends banks implement processes that minimise the information that a customer is required to provide; minimise the number of times that a customer has to disclose the same information to the bank; and ensure customers have consistency in speaking to one staff member.³¹

²⁹ Clause 14 (f) *Customer Service Code – Urban Water Businesses 2017* and clause 11 (f) *Rural Water customer service code 2017*

³⁰ EWOV Position Statement, *Family violence* p. 6.

³¹ Australian Bankers' Association 2017, *Industry guideline: financial abuse and family and domestic violence policies*, p.4.

During our consultation, we heard of initiatives that enable a consistent point of contact for when a customer or a support worker reconnects with the business. We recognise, however, no single approach may suit the needs of all regional and metropolitan businesses.

Businesses such as Yarra Valley Water, AGL and ANZ have enabled customers who are experiencing family violence, and their support workers, to make contact through a single point of entry. WEstjustice advocates this approach as it avoids customers having to repeat disclosures, and provides for continuity of service.

Yarra Valley Water offers a free call number that directs all calls to the customer support team, whose staff have received specialist training on issues to do with customer vulnerability, including family violence. This approach enables all family violence contacts and customers managed through the customer support team to then communicate with individual case managers using direct phone numbers. Other frontline customer facing staff are also trained to identify customers who may be experiencing family violence, and they will redirect those customers to the customer support team.

Businesses that have adopted this direct point of contact for victims of family violence noted benefits for both the business and the customers. Staff are better able to assess a customer's needs when tailoring support, and customers are more trusting of the support that they receive. Other businesses are exploring this option, or have tried to streamline customer contact using existing processes.

City West Water is exploring the options for a single point of entry. In the meantime, it refers all family violence calls on its general enquiry line to an upskilled team leader, who provides a direct phone number for future contact. City West Water assigns a case manager to the account, and the case manager also provides the customer with their direct phone number. Where the customer has requested their contact details be confidential, the case manager ensures the customer's bill is removed from the automated billing system, so the bill is diverted to them. The case manager can then assess how the bill should be sent.

- **North East Water** places a pop-up box and a flashing critical call icon on all accounts that are identified as belonging to victims of domestic violence. For staff taking a call, the pop-up box indicates the call should be put through to the team leader of customer support.
- **Gippsland Water** directs account enquiries presenting with family violence to specific staff, to minimise repeat disclosure and improve continuity of service. It is working to develop the expertise of experienced call centre staff, to improve access to this service when critical staff are on leave.
- **South Gippsland Water** is investigating the extent of its phone functionality for reducing a customer's need to repeatedly disclose family violence. One option is whether a dedicated number could be used to alert staff to the nature of the call before it is answered.
- **Coliban Water** has developed trusted relationships with community support workers in its area. As a result of these relationships, it accepts information directly from the community support worker, so the customer does not have to retell their story. It then works with the support worker on an agreed outcome.

3.2.7 REFERRALS FOR CUSTOMERS TO EXPERT SERVICES

Our consultation highlighted the importance of specialist family violence referrals. These referrals are needed to deal with the complex issues that face victims, and to assess a victim's safety. The Royal Commission noted that accessing support services can be difficult for those living with, or escaping from, family violence. It also noted that isolation caused by family violence means victims may be unaware of available services. This isolation is heightened for regional customers, culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders (ATSI). For these reasons, our customer service codes require businesses to offer referrals to specialist family violence organisations³².

It is not expected that these obligations will require water businesses to become experts in the field of family violence or provide a counselling service. As providers of an essential service that already identifies and refers vulnerable customers to support services, water businesses are well placed to identify and provide specialist family violence referrals. By building referral pathways, water providers also have the opportunity to strengthen existing links, or develop new ones with local family violence service providers.

During our consultation, some regional businesses raised concerns about the availability of family violence specialist services in their local communities. We also heard that victims' of family violence may wish for anonymity by accessing services outside their local area, or are unable to attend a centre because they are confined to their property because of family violence.

While not specifically designed for family violence services, SA Water has developed a guide that provides a useful example of how a water business can play a role in increasing their customer's awareness of both local and national support services.

³²Clause 14 (g) *Customer Service Code – Urban Water Businesses 2017* and clause 11 (g) *Rural Water customer service code 2017*

SA Water produced a community help referral guide to assist vulnerable customers seeking to access support services from across SA Water's large geographical area. SA Water has identified multiple national and state based services as well as list of local service providers and the towns they operate in. SA Water's referral list is provided in Attachment 4.

During our consultation, we heard that relationships with local and dedicated community organisations can improve the quality of referrals that water businesses provide. These relationships also support a water business to develop and review its customer service policies and processes in accordance with the expectations of its community.

- Since implementing its family violence training, **Coliban Water** has continued to develop its relationship with a local family violence agency, the Centre for Non-Violence. This organisation provides training, is a local referral agency, and provides Coliban Water with local insight into its family violence initiatives and emerging trends.
- **Unitywater**, through its work with White Ribbon accreditation, has developed a relationship with the local women's refuge. The refuge is both a referral point and a source of training and information about family violence prevention strategies.
- **Goulburn Valley Water** has an ongoing relationship with Primary Care Connect which provides support services in the area of family violence, as well as mental health, financial and youth support services. Through this relationship, the business has been able to develop relationships with other service providers such as Salvocare and Women's Health North East in the areas of indigenous issues, refugee services and women's refuge.

CALD AND ATSI COMMUNITIES

CALD as well as ATSI customers are likely to experience family violence differently to others in the community. The Royal Commission found that CALD customers are less likely to disclose their family violence,³³ while the Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria identified that compared to the general population ATSI customers are at higher risk of family violence.

*Aboriginal women are 34 times more likely to be hospitalised from family violence and almost 11 times more likely to be killed as a result of violent assault. Aboriginal women have been identified as the most legally disadvantaged group in Australia.*³⁴

To support victims of family violence from ATSI and CALD communities, AGL works closely with specialised support services that have already established relationships with these communities.

- **AGL** notes that specialist organisations, such as AMES, have strong and trusted relationships with their clients and are more likely than a mainstream service provider to hear a disclosure of family violence. As a result of AGL's outreach, these organisations can facilitate a customer's contact with AGL's hardship support services.
- In its industry guideline, the **Australian Bankers' Association** recommended banks make it as simple as possible for victims of family violence to appoint an agent or representative—such as a professional financial counsellor, lawyer, community services worker, legal aid officer or family and domestic violence specialist—while recognising the banks privacy obligations under the law.³⁵

³³ State of Victoria 2016, *Royal Commission into Family Violence: report and recommendations*, volume I, parliamentary paper no. 132 (2014–16), March, p. 101.

³⁴ Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria 2016, *Family violence in Aboriginal communities*, viewed 1 February 2017, < <http://www.dvrcv.org.au/knowledge-centre/our-blog/family-violence-aboriginal-communities#one>>.

³⁵ Australian Bankers' Association 2017, *Industry guideline: financial abuse and family and domestic violence policies*, p.4.

3.2.8 IMPROVING FLEXIBILITY IN PROVIDING BILLING HISTORY

Confidentiality is critical to customer safety, yet perpetrators of abuse have been able to use a clause in the customer service codes to obtain personal information about joint account holders and perpetrate further abuse. We thus amended the customer service codes³⁶ to provide water businesses with the flexibility to apply this clause in a way that is consistent with other aspects of its family violence policy.

Water businesses advised that this clause provides the flexibility to protect confidentiality while providing necessary billing services to both victims and perpetrators of abuse.

City West Water is case managing an account for a customer who has disclosed family violence and does not want her location made known to the joint account holder. The perpetrator routinely seeks billing records for the account. After talking through options with the victim of abuse, City West Water provides billing records to both customers in a format approved by the victim of abuse. If the perpetrator seeks additional information, the case manager knows to contact this customer to discuss any potential impacts. City West Water considers the code's revised clause gives it the flexibility that it needs to manage this customer's concerns about safety.

³⁶Clause 14 (g) *Customer Service Code – Urban Water Businesses 2017* and clause 11 (g) *Rural Water customer service code 2017*

3.2.9 INCLUDING SUPPORT INFORMATION IN CUSTOMER CHARTERS

Customer charters outline a water business's service commitments, and the rights and responsibilities of customers. Our customer service codes require water businesses to update their customer charters to reflect service commitment changes that follow from their family violence policy.³⁷

A number of energy retailers have clauses in their customer charters about dealing with joint account holders. Some of these clauses allow a customer to be held jointly or severally liable depending on the circumstances in which the debt accrued. Under Red Energy (Victoria)'s customer charter³⁸ for example, each person who makes up a joint account is jointly and severally bound by obligations in the agreement. Such clauses will likely be relevant when a customer is working with a retailer to manage the impact of economic abuse that resulted from the customer's experience of family violence.

³³ Clause 15 (f) *Customer Service Code – Urban Water Businesses 2017* and clause 16 (g) *Rural Water customer service code 2017*

³⁸ Red Energy (Victoria) *Customer Charter* p. 32.

3.3 CASE STUDIES—A CUSTOMER’S EXPERIENCE OF FAMILY VIOLENCE

Our amendments to the water customer service codes require the businesses to routinely review their family violence policies.³⁹ The purpose is to ensure policies remain relevant to community standards that water businesses have the opportunity to adopt better practice approaches. In other words, responding to family violence should be a dynamic process.

This review process cannot be effective if done in isolation. Section 3.2.7 discusses the benefits of external input into a business’s review of its family violence policies and processes in the form of partnering with community organisations and family violence specialists. A business can also develop and review its family violence measures by referring to its experience with its customers.

For businesses that have not yet captured their customers’ experiences of family violence, the Consumer Utilities Advocacy Centre’s report *Helping not hindering*⁴⁰ may be useful. The report identified five scenarios most common to women experiencing economic abuse. Here, we outline the five scenarios, which each include a real customer account. The identities of the customers and the water businesses have been removed, to ensure the privacy of the customers.

³⁹ Essential Services Commission 2017, *Customer service code—urban water businesses*, clause 14(j); *Customer service code—rural water businesses*, clause 11(j).

⁴⁰ Consumer Utilities Advocacy Centre 2014, *Helping not hindering*, p. 11.

SCENARIO 1

The victim is still in the household. The perpetrator has left the household, and the account remains open and in the perpetrator's name.

Customer story

The customer called the water business in distress because she had received a water bill in her ex-partner's name. Several thousands of dollars were owing, and it was the first time she had seen the bill. The water business consultant identified her and then advised he could not discuss the account with her because she was not authorised on the account. After listening to the caller's story, the consultant transferred her to the specialist family violence team, who opened a new, secure account in her name. As per the *Water Act 1989*, the debt was kept against the previous account holder and not transferred to the victim's new account.

Frequently, perpetrators leave a property with accumulated unpaid debt in their name. Due to privacy laws, if the victim is not listed on the account, they cannot obtain information about the status of the account, apply for concessions or receive information about imminent restriction of supply.

When victims of family violence seek to open a new account in their own name, they may be asked to take responsibility for the charges from when their partner left. Asking a victim of family violence to take responsibility for the debt incurred in their ex-partner's name may breach the provisions in the *Water Act 1989* and subject the victim to (further) economic abuse (or have a similar effect). The historical debt may make it more difficult for a person to become financially independent, exacerbating the impact of the family violence even after a relationship is over.

When a victim of family violence contacts a water business, the business will need to apply its family violence policy and use measures to stop the victim being further disadvantaged by the actions of the ex-partner. These measures may include:

- ensuring the security and confidentiality of new account information
- offering hardship support.

SCENARIO 2

The victim is still in the household, and their abusive partner has left the household. The victim and partner are joint account holders as tenants.

Customer story

When the customer called and identified herself on an account, the water business advised her of a substantial debt on the account. Her partner had handled the family's finances and had told her that the bills were paid. She was shocked and upset because she did not have the money to pay the debt and was worried her water would be cut off.

This scenario was found to be the most common. The Water Act does not explicitly account for liabilities of joint account holders, although where the property is jointly owned, water businesses maintain an account in accordance with the property title so debt can be recovered.

The Australian Bankers' Association guideline⁴¹ recommends banks work with their customers to manage joint accounts and joint liabilities. Banks work with each partner separately and do not require account holders to have direct contact with the other party. They will recognise economic abuse as a factor contributing to financial hardship.

We now require water businesses to specify their approach to the recovery of debt from customers with joint accounts. Options may include:

- waiving all or some of the debt
- apportioning the debt between the parties, allowing each party to arrange separate payment plans, and pursuing debt recovery from one party only if no payments are made
- closing the joint account and opening an account in one name only, and apportioning the debt as agreed

⁴¹ Australian Bankers' Association 2017, *Industry guideline: financial abuse and family and domestic violence policies*, p. 5.

- for joint property owners, leaving the debt against the property and then recouping the debt when the property is sold.

For tenants, liability is tied to the period of occupation. A vacating occupier ceases to be liable once they notify the water business. Rather than notifying the water business that they are no longer liable for the account, perpetrators of abuse may maintain the account so they can use water supply and debt collection as ways to harass the household occupier.

When a consultant suspects family violence they will be able to transfer the customer to a specially trained case manager for evaluation of economic abuse. In this example, because this woman's partner was no longer a resident at the property, the water business agreed to close the joint account and open a new account in her name only. The customer also discussed how she could pay back the debt. The business agreed to a payment arrangement with her for half of the debt. It advised it would leave the other half against her ex-partner, and may pursue him for that debt.

SCENARIO 3

The victim is still in the household, and their abusive partner has left. The account is in their name only.

Customer story

When the customer called her water business, she became distressed when she was told she owed \$4789 on her water account. At first, she said she could not understand how the debt was so high, but then explained she couldn't afford to make any payments. With the customer's permission, the consultant transferred her to a hardship specialist. The customer advised she shared the property with her partner, who had put all the utility bills in her name. He contributed nothing from his Centrelink payments towards the bills or other household expenses, keeping all his income for himself and using most of hers as well. She could not make regular payments towards her utilities, and was in arrears for electricity, gas and water, and lived in fear of being disconnected. Her partner was physically abusive to her, as well as being manipulative and controlling of her finances. He had left her without warning, and she hoped he would not come back. The business agreed to establish a payment plan, to work with her to obtain a utility relief grant, and to help her reduce the debt. She advised she may have to find emergency accommodation because she could not afford to pay the rent, but wanted to work to reduce the debt.

The Customer Utilities Advocacy Centre noted abusive partners commonly put utility bills in the name of the victim without the victim's knowledge or consent.⁴² Often, the victim is unaware the account is in their name until the abusive partner has vacated the household. The Australian Bankers' Association guideline on financial abuse and domestic violence states banks will investigate circumstances where a customer is unknowingly responsible for a credit obligation, including a joint debt or a debt in an individual's name.⁴³

⁴² Consumer Utilities Advocacy Centre 2014, *Helping not hindering*, p. 11.

⁴³ Australian Bankers' Association 2017, *Industry guideline: financial abuse and family and domestic violence policies*, p.2.

SCENARIO 4

The victim has left an abusive household and is living in a transitional situation (such as a refuge). The account is in their name only, and their partner remains at the property.

Customer story

A landlord called the water business to request a tenant's recently closed account be reopened because the tenant's husband had reported the account had been incorrectly closed. The water business already had the account in lockdown because the account holder had advised that she had fled an abusive relationship. Without breaching the account holder's privacy, the case manager declined the landlord's request, and offered to open the account in the husband's name.

The husband called the water business himself to request the account be reopened in his wife's name. The water business again offered to open an account in his name, which he declined. The husband called back claiming his wife's identity, and asked the account be reopened. He later had a female call and pretend to be his wife. He could offer his wife's personal information, sufficient to meet the water business's routine privacy screening questions. However, the account now had additional security measures attached, so he (and other people whom he had call) could not access the account.

This example highlights the efforts of some perpetrators to continue their abuse by avoiding taking responsibility for the charges and increasing the victim's personal debt. Under the Water Act, the onus is on the victim as the vacating account holder to give notice. This person may be held liable for charges until they do give notice, or until an alternative tenant notifies the water business that they are occupying the premises. A perpetrator may delay contacting the water business, or as described above, seek to re-establish the account in the victim's name.

Victims fleeing an abusive household often leave with no documentation of liabilities or utility bills.⁴⁴ Their lives can be chaotic as they seek to re-establish themselves in new

⁴⁴ Consumer Utilities Advocacy Centre 2014, *Helping not hindering*, p. 11.

accommodation and schooling, and with little or no access to income. Frequently during this period, collection activity will begin. The debt may end up being sold to a third party mercantile agency, and the account holder will be default listed because they are not contactable at the service address. A default listing inhibits the victim's ability to re-establish financial independence for at least five years.

Banks have committed to working with victims of family and economic violence, and will not default list a customer affected by economic abuse, as far as it can under law. They now limit the information that a customer must provide, including not needing an intervention order as evidence of family and domestic violence.

In the water customer service codes, the payment difficulties provision and the new family violence clauses provide water businesses with clear responsibilities to offer assistance. The type of assistance is up to the water business and could include consideration of:

- the date on which the victim advised they left the property
- any confirmation or documentation that it may require to prove the date on which the victim left, or to prove that domestic violence has occurred and may continue
- special customer circumstances, such as those EWOV would consider if investigating a complaint
- whether the victim was aware that the account was in their name
- in the case of tenants, whether the lease should have been opened as a joint account rather than an account solely in the name of the victim
- whether the account is locked down with additional security measures and closed from the accepted date on which the victim left the property.

SCENARIO 5

The victim has left an abusive household and is attempting to establish a new household. They are a joint account holder with their abusive partner from the previous household.

Customer story

When the victim contacted the water business to discuss her previous account, it explained she could not be removed from the account unless the joint account holder gave his consent. She explained that she had fled a violent relationship and would not be able to get this consent. The consultant transferred her to the business's hardship specialist to discuss how the business could assist her. The hardship specialist was able to obtain more information about when she had vacated the property by looking at the history of the account. The customer was hesitant to give her current address because she feared that her partner would find her. The hardship specialist explained how the business could secure her account information so no-one else could access it unless she gave the additional security details to someone. The water business then discussed how best it could support her, and how to split the debt.

The Water Act specifies that a 'vacating occupier' is no longer liable once they give notice. However it does not mention the issue of terminating a joint account holder when that person vacates the property and the former partner remains. As mentioned for scenario 2, the Australian Bankers' Association advises banks to consider joint debt and treat it differently for victims of economic abuse. The difference in this scenario is that the victim has left the household and the account is still in joint names: as a result, the victim continues to be responsible for any further debt that accrues on the account

In this case, as in scenario 2, the water business needs to consider whether:

- the victim and perpetrator are joint tenants or property owners
- it will close the joint account (as of the date the victim advised they left the property) and open a new account in the occupier's name only
- it will waive all or some of the debt, or apply some debt to the new account opened for the victim at the new property, with their agreement

- it will leave all the debt against the joint account and pursue debt action against the remaining occupier only
- it will apportion the debt between the parties, allowing each to arrange separate payment plans, and pursuing debt recovery against one party only if no payments are made
- for joint property owners, it will leave the debt against the property and recoup it when the property is sold.

4 NEXT STEPS

IMPLEMENTATION PERIOD

We know the water businesses are at different stages of developing family violence initiatives, and we expect they will need time to develop policies and processes and to train staff. So while the family violence provisions in the code come into effect from 1 July 2017, for the first 12 months our focus and effort will be on supporting water to effectively establish their policies and processes.

WORKSHOPS

We intend to facilitate workshops that help the water businesses explore ways to implement the family violence provisions in the codes. In particular, the workshops will help the sector identify and share emerging better practice approaches.

We will work with the water sector and community organisations to decide on the timing and nature of the workshops. The learnings from the workshops, as well as progress in other sectors that are actively addressing family violence, will inform how and when we update this guiding material.

REPORTING

After 30 June 2018, we will review whether all water businesses have family violence policies in place. Then, together with water businesses and community organisations, we will develop a monitoring and reporting framework to ensure businesses implement their policies, and that these policies are leading to improved outcomes for customers who experience family violence.

5 REFERRALS AND RESOURCES

We adopted the following resource list for our toolkit for staff and managers. The list is not exhaustive, and other agencies may provide similar services.

SERVICES DIRECTLY RELATED TO FAMILY VIOLENCE

Agency	Contact details
Police	000
Emergency response (24 hours)	000
The Lookout: online regional service directory and resources aimed at preventing and responding to family violence.	www.thelookout.org.au/sector-info/service-directory

OTHER USEFUL SERVICES

WOMEN'S SERVICES

Elizabeth Morgan House Aboriginal Women's Family Violence Services: crisis accommodation and support for Aboriginal women and spouses of Aboriginal men	(03) 9482 5744
Safe Steps: a 24/7 family violence response service for women and children that provides information on family violence support services, legal rights and accommodation options	1800 015 188 (03) 9928 9600 www.safesteps.org.au
Women's Information and Referral Exchange: free and confidential support, information and referrals on any issues, for Victorian women. Services include the telephone support service, women's information centre, online Livechat support and email support service.	1300 134 130 www.wire.org.au
Women's legal service: phone advice and appointments available to women in Victoria who are in need of legal advice, information or referral, irrespective of income or assets	1800 133 302 (03) 8622 0600 www.womenslegal.org.au
National 1800 RESPECT Line: national 24/7 free advice and counselling for both people experiencing domestic violence and professionals responding to domestic violence	1800 737 732

MEN'S SERVICES

Men's referral service: an anonymous and confidential telephone counselling, information and referrals service to help men involved in family violence matters	1300 766 491 www.mrs.org.au
Men's Shed: promotion of the social, civic and economic participation of men, helping to replace social isolation and dislocation with inclusion and connection	0408 465 228

CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Kids Help Line: support and information for children (24 hours)	1800 551 800
Our Watch: agency established to drive nationwide change in the culture, behaviours and attitudes that lead to violence against women and children	www.ourwatch.org.au

GENERAL SERVICES

Alcoholics Anonymous Victoria (AA Victoria): a fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism (24 hours).	(03) 9429 1833 www.aavictoria.org.au/
Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service: advice and assistance for indigenous people experiencing domestic and family violence	1800 105 303 www.fvpls.org
Beyond Blue: a provider of information and support to help everyone in Australia achieve their best possible mental health, whatever their age and wherever they live (24 hours)	1300 224 636 www.beyondblue.org.au
Court Network: a voluntary non-legal court support service operating throughout Victoria and Queensland, which can tell you about how the court works and can also make referrals to other community agencies for support after the hearing	1800 681 614 www.courtnetwork.com.au
InTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence: statewide provision of services, programs and responses to family violence in CALD communities	1800 755 988 www.intouch.asn.au
Lifeline: crisis support and suicide prevention services (24 hours)	13 11 14
Pets in Peril Domestic Violence Service: a service provided by Animal Aid and Eastern Domestic Violence Outreach Service (EDVOS), which can assist in emergency situations. You must obtain a referral from a caseworker through EDVOS, an emergency housing program or a community health service.	(03) 9739 1988 www.petwelfare.org.au/pets-in-crisis/
Sexual Assault Crisis and Counselling Line: a statewide, after hours, confidential telephone crisis counselling service for victims/survivors of both past and recent sexual assault	1800 806 292 www.sacl.com.au
Victoria Legal Aid: assistance with free information about family violence intervention orders.	1300 792 387 www.legalaid.vic.gov.au/find-legal-answers/family-violence-intervention-orders/get-help

ATTACHMENT 1

YARRA VALLEY WATER'S HARDSHIP POLICY AND GUIDELINES

- Yarra Valley Water's family violence policy
- Yarra Valley Water's family violence guidelines, including for employees, managers and customers

HARDSHIP POLICY



Yarra Valley Water (YVW) recognises that some customers may from time to time experience financial difficulty which will vary in its extent and duration depending on individual circumstances. This policy ensures that all customers, regardless of their circumstances will face no judgement, and will be treated with understanding, dignity and respect with a focus on customers who may be vulnerable to financial difficulties. It is a living document that will continue to evolve and be responsive to our customer needs. We are committed to continual improvement through our learning, working with partners and experts in the field of customers facing financial vulnerability.

Our Hardship policy and associated programs are based on a focus of shared responsibility and delivered in a model that supports self-determination. We believe that Customer Support customers, given the opportunity actively work to manage their debt, and with the appropriate support are able to better gain control of their bills. We work with our customers to ensure they feel listened to and understood, with payment arrangements established that are realistic and affordable based on their individual financial situation. We have developed a holistic approach when working with customers in financial difficulty, who are provided with information on internal support programs as well as referrals to external agencies, where appropriate.

We are committed to assisting all customers who are experiencing any degree of financial hardship. We have a focus on early identification and proactive intervention where we can direct customers to the appropriate support pathways earlier in the vulnerability cycle. A customer who requires additional assistance through our Customer Support Team, is defined as someone who has the intention but not the capacity to pay their account, either through lack of financial resources, or the ability to meet specific timelines. This identification can be through a number of channels, such as directly through Yarra Valley Water staff or partners, referral through a community agencies or self-identification. While customers are engaged with our Customer Support programs they will not be guided through our normal debt collection process.

Our experience is that financial vulnerability is complex and varied, with different requirements needing a range of options for assistance available, dependant on the time required to financially stabilise. Generally speaking, long term impacts are those with low or fixed incomes, who may require ongoing assistance and can contribute to a low level of payment (e.g. high private rental, on a disability or aged pension). Short term impacts are associated with customers who have experienced a change in circumstances such as ill health, unemployment, a death in the family, a loss arising from an accident, or some other temporary financial difficulty. There are also many other factors that can impact on someone's capacity to manage their bills and debts, such as mental health, low literacy or instances of family violence.

Assessment Criteria

There is no formal assessment criteria used to determine customers eligibility. All customer are assessed on a case by case basis and are based on a meaningful two-way conversation. Some of the indicators that may highlight a customer's need for additional assistance are listed below:

- a history of frequent requests for payment extensions or payment arrangements that have not been met
- unable to afford the costs of current usage and debt, even if smoothed over a 12-month period
- a payment history that indicates difficulty paying their account in the past,
- has previously applied for a Utility Relief Grant (irrespective of whether or not the application was successful),
- eligibility for Government funded concessions (e.g. Health Care Card, Centrelink benefit),
- sudden change of circumstances that adversely affects their financial capacity to pay,
- through referral from a financial counselling agency or community organisation,
- identify themselves as having affordability issues,
- any instance where a customer or their advocate identifies as being affected by family violence they are immediately referred into the customer support team
- asylum seekers or refugees who have limited access to financial stability

- people experiencing health and mental health issues
- having a low level of income, that is unlikely to change; and
- are currently unemployed.

Rights of Customer Support Customers

Each customer has the right to:

- be treated sensitively and have their circumstances kept confidential,
- receive information about alternative, flexible payment arrangements, Government concessions and programs and YVW's Hardship Policy,
- either nominate themselves or have their financial counselling representative nominate a payment arrangement amount that is affordable, regardless if it is sufficient to cover the current usage and outstanding arrears,
- redirect the account to another person for payment provided that person agrees in writing,
- renegotiate the amount of their arrangement if there is a change in their personal circumstances,
- choose from various payment methods in accordance with their circumstances and financial ability,
- receive written confirmation of the agreed alternative payment arrangement
- be referred to an accredited financial counsellor in a timely manner,
- receive a language interpreter service if required,
- have no restriction of supply, legal action and additional debt recovery costs, while actively engaging with the Customer Support programs
- access a range of YVW support programs to meet their individual needs, access to the company's Arrange and Save incentive scheme, if the payment amount that they can reasonably afford is not adequate to cover both arrears and future estimated water accounts.
- If the Customer Support customer meets their payments consistently, on time and in full they may receive bonus credits in accordance with approved business rules and if they continue to meet their payments over an extended period of time, they may receive:
 - For tenants, a write off of their long term debt in accordance with approved business rules
 - For owners, an opportunity to have their property based debt deferred until the sale of their property, in accordance with approved business rules
 - Note: A customer can choose to pay off their deferred debt prior to the sale of the property if their circumstances change; and
- be offered information about YVW's dispute resolution policy and their right to lodge a complaint with Energy & Water Ombudsman of Victoria (EWOV).
- a '1800' telephone number is available, ensuring customers do not incur additional costs when contacting Yarra Valley Water

The Hardship Policy is based on some of the following key principles.

1. Information Provision: Transparency and Accessibility

We will work with the customer and/or their advocate with clear communication and make available our Hardship policy. The policy is also available on request and via the YVW website in a number of languages. To ensure customers are aware of the availability of our assistance programs their ability to contact YVW to discuss alternative payment arrangements is included on all accounts and follow up notices.

YVW is committed to whole of business training where all YVW's customer facing points, including new inductees and external contractors (e.g. debt collection agency) are trained in the Hardship Policy, principles and programs. We have established a review process that informs all changes to the policy and programs to relevant staff and contractors.

YVW is part of the community and being connected to the community through understanding our customers and their needs is vital. This enables our support programs to be meaningful, successful and relevant. The Hardship policy and programs that underpin the Customer Support Team, are communicated extensively to all agencies and organisations that make up the fabric of support for consumers experiencing vulnerabilities.

2. Operating Protocols: Respect and Engagement

The operating protocols that are established under the Hardship policy define how all customer contact staff, in particular the Customer Support Team, interact with customers to provide targeted assistance in a respectful manner.

It is recognised that Customer Support customers may have a range of pressures and at times this may limit their ability to engage in open dialogue regarding their personal circumstances. We approach these discussions recognising it requiring sensitivity and compassion on our part.

We endeavour to identify customers who may require additional support early in the collection process and create an environment where customers are more comfortable to indicate their needs to us. We understand that proactive and empathetic communication is required when dealing with customers in financial difficulty. As such we provide an environment that encourages customers to be open, and we are committed to listening, without judgement to achieve an outcome that meets both the business and customer's needs.

Our strategy of support will require at times referral across the business, in which case a respectful and appropriate referral process is maintained.

To ensure that customers are managed in an appropriate manner, the Customer Support Team has the following key attributes:

- having the capability and skills to provide the required support and solutions,
- are appropriately resourced and empowered to manage the situation and negotiate appropriate outcomes,
- an understanding that some complex situations requires specialist support, in which case they refer the customer to our specialist partners which includes independent financial counselling; and
- are provided with appropriate financial authority levels to effectively manage the customer's account including suspension of payments, reduced payment arrangements, credits and write offs in accordance with the delegation of authority levels in the Companies Who Can Authorise Register.

All key stakeholders, are provided contact details for the Customer Support Team, to facilitate ease of contact, minimise customer concerns and to assist with speedy resolution.

To protect customer's rights, we have in place appropriate escalation procedures to deal with customer complaints regarding this policy.

To ensure that we maintain a strong management focus in supporting customers in financial difficulty, a YVW Divisional Manager is allocated responsibility for the strategic direction, operation and management of the Company's Hardship Policy and programs.

3. Family Violence Protocol

Any instance where a customer is identified as being affected by family violence, the customers will be referred into the Customer Support Team to be case managed and their supply will not be restricted, no legal action or additional debt recovery costs, while engaging with the Customer Support programs. The Customer Support Case Manager undertakes ongoing training that includes training focused specifically on family violence. This is due to the complexity and sensitive nature of the customer's circumstances and the possible increase risk to their safety. Yarra Valley Water has an internal process to identify these customers and ensure their details are managed with the highest degree of privacy and sensitivity. All staff in the Customer Contact Centre, Customer Debt Management and the Customer Support Team, are trained in identifiers and indicators of family violence.

4. Extensive and Ongoing Staff Training

All customer contact staff are trained in the Hardship policy and programs and are able to sensitively engage with customers. A comprehensive training program is delivered to all customer contact staff as part of the induction program, which is supplemented by regular refresher sessions. The training program is reviewed regularly and updated as required. To ensure that training remains current, relevant and appropriate, advice is sought from our financial counselling industry partner on the content and delivery of our training programs.

The training program provided is structured and designed to meet the specific needs of the business area covering some or all of the following items:

- Hardship Policy and programs,
- triggers of financial difficulty,
- family violence awareness,
- identification of customers experiencing financial difficulty,

- how to talk to customers experiencing financial difficulty in terms of language and tone,
- when to refer customers to the Customer Support Team,
- literacy and access issues experienced by some customers,
- Aboriginal cultural awareness
- Government programs including concessions, water efficiency programs, relief grants and capital improvement programs; and
- Cultural diversity awareness; and
- legal requirements and responsibilities (e.g ESC Customer Service Code).

To ensure the Customer Support Team are updated on community trends and issues we workshop case studies with community based external experts, undertake site visits and receive specialist training from external bodies. Our financial counselling partner also provides assistance in the development of strategies and training to ensure we appropriately support Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) customers and engage with CALD communities through involvement of bi-lingual financial counsellors. We also have relationships with partner organisations to gain greater understanding around the issues associated to vulnerable members of our community including our Aboriginal customers, to better understand how to engage with and support all customers.

Training programs and procedure manuals are provided to external partners including debt collection agencies and our plumbing contractor to ensure they communicate with and deliver a level of service to our Customer Support customers in accordance with our requirements. These requirements are commercially based and documented in the terms and conditions of the contract.

To ensure we measure the effectiveness of our programs, key performance measures for the Customer Support Team which reflect the type and nature of the work undertaken are in place and monitored (e.g. compliance to payment arrangements).

5. Water Efficiency Focus

We understand the importance of assisting customers in financial difficulty to manage their water consumption, as one method to help gain control of their bill. When assessing the customer's situation, the Customer Support Team reviews the need for water efficiency advice and the customer's eligibility for any existing water conservation and retrofit programs.

As part of the delivery of any water conservation and retrofit program we engage with key stakeholders on the outcomes of the program, our processes, communication and information provided to customers, to ensure we maximise the effectiveness of our water efficiency programs.

If a Customer Support customer requires additional plumbing work to be undertaken that is outside of the approval limits of the applicable Government program, we engage with the customer on options to address the customer's situation.

6. Continual Improvement

The Hardship policy and associated programs are formally reviewed annually in consultation with our key partners to ensure they remain appropriate and adequately meet our customer needs. However, as a document which is flexible to community needs and the external social environment, improvements are ongoing.

We will continue to actively participate in forums with key partners and stakeholders including advocate bodies, financial counselling agencies, ESC, DHHS, EWOV and other businesses to improve our understanding of the complex issues confronting customers and share our experience and learning's with others.

YVW is part of the customer safety net, recognising that customers may have more than one issue and need a variety of support and information provided.

Feedback from customers, partners, stakeholders, community organisations along with other local, interstate and overseas developments by other service providers are reviewed to improve the services provided to Customer Support customers.

We will continue to work closely with our community agencies and financial counselling partners to develop appropriate, customer focused but commercial and innovative ways to assist Customer Support customers to reduce debt levels and effectively transition them back to mainstream billing and payment processes.

Title:	Family Violence Guidelines	
Doc Type:	Business Rule	
Division:	People & Culture	
Owner:	General Manager People & Culture	

1. PURPOSE

Yarra Valley Water actively supports measures to reduce family violence, promotes health and safety of employees and recognises that employees will be amongst those affected by situations of family violence. This guideline outlines the support available to all employees experiencing family violence, enabling employees experiencing family violence to continue to participate in the workplace and maintain their employment. Further, Yarra Valley Water seeks to create a supportive work environment where employees are comfortable in requesting assistance for family violence related concerns.

2. SCOPE

These guidelines apply to all Yarra Valley Water employees. These guidelines do not apply to sub-contractors or customers of Yarra Valley Water.

3. DEFINITIONS

Family or Domestic Violence	<p>Behaviour by a person towards a family member of that person if that behaviour</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) is physically or sexually abusive; or (ii) is emotionally or psychologically abusive; or (iii) is economically abusive; or (iv) is threatening; or (v) is coercive; or (vi) in any other way controls or dominates the family member and causes that family member to feel fear for the safety or wellbeing of that family member or another person; <p>or</p> <p>behaviour by a person that causes a child to hear or witness, or otherwise be exposed to the effects of, behaviour referred to above.</p> <p>It is important to note that when referring to 'family' this may include current or former partners, and does not necessarily mean partners who live together.</p>
EAP	Employee Assistance Program (free and confidential counselling service including professionals trained specifically in family violence)

4. GUIDELINES

4.1 Requesting support

An employee experiencing family violence can elect to contact

- (i) Their immediate or second line supervisor or manager; or
- (ii) Staff Support Officers; or
- (iii) A member of the People & Culture team; or
- (iv) Union delegate; or
- (v) The Yarra Valley Water EAP

to discuss their situation and access support.

It is recognised that employees experiencing family violence may also disclose their experience to a trusted colleague or someone from outside their immediate work unit or an external support agency. Employees approached by a fellow staff member raising issues of family violence should as much as possible refer their colleague to this guideline, related support materials and the EAP.

Any individual receiving a disclosure will:

1. respect the rights of the employee to make their own decisions regarding their personal affairs and avoid judgement, and
2. bring the Family Violence Guidelines to the attention of the affected employee.

Employees may request a support person to attend any meetings in relation to matters of family violence.

Yarra Valley Water will co-operate with all legal orders protecting staff experiencing family violence.

4.2 Types of support available to employees experiencing family violence

Yarra Valley Water offers a variety of support avenues for employees experiencing family violence:

4.2.1 Leave

- (i) An employee (with the exception of casual employees) experiencing family violence will have access to **20 days per year** of paid special leave for medical appointments, legal proceedings and other activities related to family violence.
- (ii) This leave is not cumulative but if the leave is exhausted consideration will be given to providing additional leave.
- (iii) This leave will be in addition to existing leave entitlements and may be taken as consecutive or single days or as a fraction of a day and can be taken without prior approval.
- (iv) P&C should be notified of the leave as soon as practical, where it will be recorded confidentially. No leave request needs to be submitted through Employee Self Service (ESS).
- (v) Casual employees are entitled to access leave without pay for family violence purposes.

4.2.2 EAP

Employees may contact the Employee Assistance Program (EAP), which is a free and confidential counselling service. Generally, employees are able to access four free sessions per year, however Yarra Valley Water will offer employees experiencing family violence additional sessions as required.

Yarra Valley Water's EAP provider is *The Three Seas Psychology Group*, which has several established practice locations across Melbourne and has professionals trained specifically in family violence. Employees can make appointments at their practices from 8am to 9pm Monday to Friday, and from 8am to 5pm on Saturdays. To make a booking please contact The Three Seas Psychology Group directly on **03 9809 1000** or visit their [website](#) for more information.

4.2.3 Flexible work options

Yarra Valley Water will approve any reasonable request for support from an employee experiencing family violence, including:

- (i) temporary or ongoing changes to their span of hours or pattern of hours and/or shift patterns;
- (ii) temporary or ongoing job redesign or changes to duties;
- (iii) temporary or ongoing relocation to suitable employment;
- (iv) a change to their telephone number or email address to avoid harassing contact;
- (v) any other appropriate measure including those available under existing provisions for family friendly and flexible work arrangements.

Any changes to an employee's role should be reviewed at agreed periods. When an employee is no longer experiencing family violence, the terms and conditions of employment may revert back to the terms and conditions applicable to the employee's substantive position.

In the case where a reported family violence situation is occurring between two employees, Yarra Valley Water will make reasonable changes necessary to support and maintain the safety and confidentiality of both parties.

4.2.4 Safety plans

Yarra Valley Water understands that there may be occasions where an employee is at risk of family violence in the workplace. In such circumstances, Yarra Valley Water is committed to working with the employee to implement a workplace safety plan to improve the safety of the employee and their colleagues.

A safety plan is developed in consultation with the employee, the manager and People & Culture. The plan should reflect the specific needs of the employee and take into account the nature of their role and the workplace environment. A safety plan may include (but is not limited to):

- Programming mobile phones with emergency and contact numbers;
- Screening incoming calls to the employee;
- Changing work phone numbers and email addresses;
- Ensuring the employee is in a security restricted area/location where possible and/or practicable;
- Access to cab vouchers or emergency phones where required;
- Action to be taken if the employee does not arrive at work.

Changes to an employee's work phone number, email address, working hours and nature and place of work can be discussed and agreed on either a temporary or permanent basis to support the safety of the employee.

In developing a safety plan the following should be considered:

- (i) The plan must have the employee's agreement and consent;
- (ii) It should be reviewed with the employee on a regular basis;
- (iii) The employee's emergency contact details must be kept up to date;

- (iv) All reasonable attempts should be made to ensure employees maintain their normal working hours and working conditions to minimise the impact on the individual;
- (v) Co-operation with legal orders (e.g. Apprehended Violence Orders) may be required;
- (vi) In applying for such measures, the employee may be required to provide supporting documentation of the kind listed in the Section 4.5 of this document.

4.2.5 Ongoing support

When returning to work after leave due to family violence related issues, employees are encouraged to talk to their manager regarding any ongoing safety concerns they may have.

A return to work plan may be developed to support an employee who has been absent due to family violence. The plan would be developed in consultation with the employee, manager, People & Culture and, if appropriate, a health practitioner.

4.2.6 No adverse action when disclosing family violence

A consequence of family violence may be deterioration in an employee's attendance and/or performance. Managers/Supervisors will be sensitive to the employee's experience of family violence and the impact this may have on performance when addressing attendance/performance issues. No adverse action will be taken against an employee if their attendance and/or performance deteriorates as a result of their disclosure of, or experience of, family violence. However, if the work is client-related alternative arrangements may need to be made to ensure appropriate coverage.

An employee who discloses that they are the perpetrator of family violence will have no adverse action taken against them, with the exception of section 4.2.7. Support options outlined in section 4.2.1 and 4.2.2 are available to perpetrators.

4.2.7 Perpetrating family violence in the workplace

Yarra Valley Water does not tolerate family violence being perpetrated in or from the workplace; this behaviour is in direct violation of the YVW Code of Conduct. Any employee who threatens, harasses or abuses a family or household member at, or from, the workplace will be subject to disciplinary action. This includes employees who use workplace resources such as phones, fax machines, email, mail or other means to threaten, harass or abuse a family member. If an employee is observed or suspected of perpetrating family violence from the workplace, managers have a responsibility to enact the appropriate action, which may result in disciplinary action.

An employee who is perpetrating family violence may contact the EAP (see section 4.2.2 above) to seek urgent assistance for their behaviour.

4.3 Types of support available to employees who are supporting a person who is experiencing family violence

Yarra Valley Water offers a variety of support avenues for employees supporting a person who is experiencing family violence:

4.3.1 Leave

An employee (other than a casual employee) who supports a person experiencing family violence may apply to utilise their personal/carer's leave entitlement to accompany them to court, to hospital, or to care for children. Yarra Valley Water may require evidence from an employee seeking to utilise their personal/carer's leave entitlement in line with normal leave procedures.

Casual employees may apply to access leave without pay for supporting a person who is experiencing family violence.

4.3.2 EAP

Employees may contact the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) to access four free counselling sessions.

4.3.3 Flexible work options

Yarra Valley Water will consider any reasonable request for temporary support, including:

- (i) temporary changes to their span of hours or pattern or hours and/or shift patterns;
- (ii) any other appropriate measure including those available under existing provisions for family friendly and flexible work arrangements.

4.4 Addressing safety concerns

If a person breaches a court order by coming into the workplace or disrupts the workplace, the employee's supervisor must:

1. Contact the Police on 000 immediately;
2. Notify their manager and People & Culture;
3. Document any incident as soon as possible;
4. Refer any employees involved in or witnessing the incident to the EAP.

4.5 Evidentiary requirements

When applying for support under this procedure, including for special leave, proof of family violence may be required by management or People & Culture. Evidence can be in the form of a document issued by:

1. the police
2. a court
3. a medical practitioner
4. a government agency
5. a counselling professional, or
6. a statutory declaration from the employee.

4.6 Confidentiality

All personal information concerning family violence will be kept confidential in line with the Yarra Valley Water's policies and relevant legislation. No information will be kept on an employee's personnel file without their express written permission.

Any request for leave or support by an employee as a result of family violence will be dealt with on a confidential basis. The reasons for the leave or support will not be discussed with anyone outside People & Culture or line management unless there is a legal obligation to do so, or as agreed by the affected employee for the purposes of providing support or security.

4.7 Training and support

Training and support resources will be provided to employees in relation to family violence:

- i. Managers, team leaders and the leadership team will be provided with training on recognising the signs of family violence and responding appropriately.
- ii. All employees will undergo online or face to face training on recognising the signs of family violence in colleagues, and responding and supporting them appropriately.
- iii. Managers can refer to the Manager – Family Violence Support Guidelines when they have an employee disclose family violence or they suspect are experiencing family violence.

4.8 Resources

4.8.1 Immediate Support (for both men and women)

Resource	Description	Contact
Safesteps	National family violence support service available 24/7 with safety planning, risk assessment and further support services. Can arrange refuge for women. Website has a 'quick escape' button redirecting to Google	Phone: 1800 015 188 (Avail 24/7) safesteps.org.au
1800 RESPECT	National counselling helpline available 24/7 with support services and resources, available in 28 languages other than English. Has a 'quick exit' button redirecting to Google	Phone: 1800 737 732 (Avail 24/7) 1800respect.org.au
In-touch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence	Victorian multilingual multicultural support service and resource centre for women from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities	Phone: 1800 755 988 www.intouch.org.au
Lifeline	National website giving support services and resources for those suffering from mental health issues, as well as those experiencing domestic and/or family violence	Phone: 13 11 14 (Avail 24/7)
Mensline Australia	Mensline Australia is the national telephone and online support, information and referral service for men with family and relationship concerns. Mensline provides 'male-friendly' counselling both online and by telephone	Phone: 1300 789 978 (Avail 24/7) mensline.org.au

4.8.2 Generalist Counselling and Information

Resource	Description	Contact
Yarra Valley Water EAP – The Three Seas Psychology Group	Free counselling service available to all YVW employees which has several established practice locations across Melbourne. Employees can make appointments at their practices from 8am to 9pm Monday to Friday, and from 8am to 5pm on Saturdays. To make a booking please contact The Three Seas Psychology Group directly	Phone: 03 9809 1000 thethreeseas.com.au
Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service Victoria	For Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples living in Victoria to access culturally safe and appropriate support services and resources	Phone: 1800 737 732 www.fvpls.org
Another Closet — LGBTIQ Domestic & Family Violence	National website for LGBTIQ people in relationships who are or may be experiencing domestic and family violence	Phone: 1800 737 732 www.anothercloset.com.au
Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria	Victorian support service and resource centre, with a clickable map giving support services and resources for different regions in Victoria. Has a 'quick exit' button redirecting to Google	Phone: (03) 9486 9866 (9am-5pm M-F) www.dvrcv.org.au
Eastern Domestic Violence Services Inc	The specialist family violence service in Melbourne's eastern metropolitan region and covers the municipalities of Boroondara, Manningham, Whitehorse, Knox, Monash, Maroondah and Yarra Ranges. They provide an integrated range of services to empower women and children who are responding to family violence: support, advice, information, case management, safety planning, community education, programs for pet safety and a strong network of referral pathways to other services that can assist	Phone: (03) 9259 4200 www.edvos.org.au edvos@edvos.org.au
Eastern Metropolitan Region Regional Family Violence Partnership	The mission of the Region Family Violence Partnership (RFVP) is to provide an integrated service response that prioritises safety for women and children and accountability of those who use violence (www.easternfamilyviolencepartnership.org.au)	Phone: (03) 9259 4200
In-touch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence	Victorian multilingual multicultural support service and resource centre for women from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities	Phone: 1800 755 988 www.intouch.org.au
Men's Referral Services (MRS)	The MRS takes calls from Australian men dealing with family and domestic violence matters. They offer anonymous and	Phone: 1300 766 491

	confidential telephone counselling information and referrals to help men	mrs.org.au
Our Watch	Aim is to drive nation-wide change in the cultures, behaviours and attitudes that underpin and create violence against women and children	Phone: (03) 8692 9500
Mobile Apps	Aurora Live Free (Rotary) Daisy (Medibank Private) Aspire News (Created by Robin McGraw (wife of Dr Phil) Invisible app to help victims of domestic violence)	

4.8.3 Legal and Financial Assistance

Resource	Description	Contact
Kildonan UnitingCare	Kildonan UnitingCare is an innovative and trusted community service organisation within one of Australia's largest welfare networks.	Phone: 1800 002 992 www.kildonan.org.au
Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service Victoria	For Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples living in Victoria to access culturally safe and appropriate support services and resources	Phone: 1800 737 732 www.fvpls.org
Department of Human Services	Centrelink can provide extra financial support if you are in, have left, or are preparing to leave a situation where you are affected by domestic and/or family violence. Has an 'exit' button banner at the bottom of the page. Call to speak to a Centrelink social worker, or find out about extra financial support	Phone: 132 850
Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria	Victorian support service and resource centre, with a clickable map giving support services and resources for different regions in Victoria. Has a 'quick exit' button redirecting to Google	Phone: (03) 9486 9866 (9am-5pm M-F) www.dvrcv.org.au
Safesteps	National website with safety planning, risk assessment and further support services. Can arrange refuge for women. Has a 'quick escape' button redirecting to Google	Phone: 1800 015 188 safesteps.org.au
WIRE	Provides support, information and referrals to women throughout Victoria who may be experiencing any type of issues in their households: domestic violence, health, relationships, family,	Phone: 1300 134 130 (9am-5pm M-F) wire.org.au

	housing, legal and money issues. It's a free and confidential service, they will listen and provide support where needed	
Women's Legal Service	National network of community legal centres specialising in women's legal issues. They aim to promote a legal system that is safe, supportive, non-discriminatory and responsive to the needs of women.	Phone: 1800 133 302

Document History

Date	Reviewed/ Actioned By	Version	Action
20/02/2017	Estelle Tzanabetis	1.0	First published version.
09/03/2007	Estelle Tzanabetis	1.1	Updated the referrals with better contact details

Title:	Family Violence Manager Support Guidelines	
Doc Type:	Business Rule	
Division:	People & Culture	
Owner:	General Manager People & Culture	

1. PURPOSE

Yarra Valley Water actively supports measures to reduce family violence, promotes health and safety of employees and recognises that employees will be amongst those affected by situations of family violence. This guideline provides guidance and support to supervisors, managers and team leaders for when they suspect an employee may be experiencing, or discloses that they are experiencing, family violence.

2. SCOPE

These guidelines are for all Yarra Valley Water managers who have direct reports and the members of the People & Culture team. These guidelines do not apply to sub-contractors or customers of Yarra Valley Water.

3. DEFINITIONS

Family Violence (also known as domestic violence or intimate relationship violence)	<p>Behaviour by a person towards a family member of that person if that behaviour</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) is physically or sexually abusive; or (ii) is emotionally or psychologically abusive; or (iii) is economically abusive; or (iv) is threatening; or (v) is coercive; or (vi) in any other way controls or dominates the family member and causes that family member to feel fear for the safety or wellbeing of that family member or another person; <p>or</p> <p>behaviour by a person that causes a child to hear or witness, or otherwise be exposed to the effects of, behaviour referred to above.</p> <p>It is important to note that when referring to 'family' this may include current or former partners, and does not necessarily mean partners who live together.</p>
EAP	Employee Assistance Program (free and confidential counselling service including professionals trained specifically in family violence)
"Need to know" philosophy	Maintaining confidentiality and only disclosing this information if there is a direct safety risk to the employee or other employees (such as the risk that an aggressive spouse may attempt to enter the workplace).

4. GUIDELINES

4.1 General responsibilities of managers

Managers, leadership, and team leaders at all times have the responsibility to:

- (i) Model the Yarra Valley Water values, including behaviour in a way that promotes a work environment free from any form of violence;
- (ii) Ensure all employees in their area of supervision are aware of the Yarra Valley Water Family Violence Guidelines;
- (iii) Maintain confidentiality and privacy at all times, using the “need to know” philosophy;
- (iv) Actively participate in all training provided regarding diversity and family violence.

4.2 Responsibilities of managers when an employee discloses their experience with family violence

Managers, leadership, and team leaders have the responsibility to:

- (i) Provide a sensitive and non-judgemental approach;
- (ii) Discuss measures to prioritise safety in the workplace and make all reasonable efforts to provide a safe work environment for the employee;
- (iii) Refer the employee to the EAP to enable support in relation to the issues;
- (iv) Make the employee aware of the Yarra Valley Water Family Violence Guidelines;
- (v) Work with the employee to accommodate their requirement for adjustments, flexible work options and leave;
- (vi) Maintain confidentiality and privacy at all times, using the “need to know” philosophy;
- (vii) Ensure ongoing communication and regularly check in with any affected employee;
- (viii) Maintain relationship with employee as manager, not the role of counsellor;
- (ix) Ensure appropriate management of work performance and monitoring of attendance issues. The employee should not be adversely affected as a result of experiencing family violence.

4.3 Steps to follow if an employee discloses their experience with family violence

Below are some general steps to follow in the event an employee discloses that they are experiencing family violence. These are a guide only; managers will need to work with People & Culture and use their best judgement when dealing with each particular situation.

It is important to note that managers are not going to be able to “fix” the situation for their employee, nor should they become their counsellor. The manager’s role is to ensure the employee’s safety and wellbeing at work, and refer them to the relevant support services. The employee may not choose to take up the support of those services, which can be confusing or frustrating, but managers need to allow the employee to make their own decisions without judgement and support them in those decisions.

1. At time of disclosure

- Listen, be non-judgemental, compassionate and caring.

- Acknowledge the employee is in a difficult situation and thank them for disclosing to you. For example, you could say “It must have been difficult for you to talk about this. It sounds like you’ve had a really hard time. Violence in any form is not acceptable”.
- Reassure the employee that their safety is important to you.
- Do not ask questions such as “why don’t you just leave?”, “why have you waited so long to seek help?”, or questions that may imply they are to blame for the situation.
- Assess the situation as to whether the employee is in immediate danger, and if police or other support service need to be called. Ask “Are you safe to go home tonight?”.
 - YVW would only call police or other service when there is a serious and imminent threat to the employee’s life, health, safety or welfare or where unlawful activity is being engaged in, or if there is a reasonable belief that a sexual offence has been committed by an adult against a child under 16.
- Ask the employee if there are any changes that can be made to make them feel more comfortable at work.
- Reassure the employee that you care for their wellbeing and that this disclosure will not adversely affect their job.
- Reassure them that their information will be kept strictly confidential and will not be recorded on their file or anywhere else, however People & Culture may need to be informed regarding their disclosure.

2. Provide information

- Provide them with or refer them to the Family Violence Guidelines, taking the time to explain the key points to them.
- Provide them with other resources (listed in section 4.7 below).
- Refer them to the EAP. Business cards are available from P&C.

3. Speak to People & Culture

- Seek confidential support from the relevant Business Partner in the People & Culture team.

4. Follow up with employee

- Check in with the employee to see if they have determined any of their support needs, such as:
 - Leave
 - Safety plan
 - Flexible work options
- Refer to the Family Violence Guidelines for further information regarding these options and what evidence you may need to ask the employee to provide.
- In conjunction with People & Culture, develop a safety plan with the employee, if applicable. See section 4.4 below for more details.

5. Continue to support the employee and the wider team

- Support any family violence leave the employee requests, and notify P&C so they are able to record it confidentially.
- Keep in regular contact with the employee to ensure communication remains open, but do not become their counsellor.

- Respect the employee's privacy and boundaries, even if in disagreement with their decisions regarding their relationship.
- Monitor the wider team and speak to any other employee who seems to be affected, referring them to the EAP in the first instance.

6. Look after own wellbeing

- Supporting an employee through a difficult time can have an impact on a manager's own wellbeing, so it is vital that they look after themselves and consider:
 - Contact the EAP for support and counselling
 - Speaking with People & Culture about ongoing support

4.4 Workplace safety plans

When helping a victim of family violence develop an individual safety plan, asking questions can be useful to assist the employee in determining what changes can be made to make them feel safer. Questions could include:

- Has the perpetrator threatened the employee at the work site or threatened to come to the work site?
- Has stalking been a problem?
- Are there any protection orders that Yarra Valley Water needs to be aware of, and comply with?
- Has the perpetrator threatened co-workers? If so,
 - Seek advice from an external family violence service (see Resources in section 4.7) or Victoria Police
 - Changes may need to be made for the colleagues, such as change in phone number or email address
 - Ask for copies of any threatening emails, letters or voicemails from the perpetrator
- Is the employee's parking arrangement safe? Can a car park close to the entrance be arranged or can someone escort them to and from their car?
- Do the necessary people at Yarra Valley Water have the relevant information to help protect the employee?
 - Photograph of the perpetrator at reception
 - Colleagues who may intercept a call from the perpetrator are given their phone number so they can screen the calls
- Is the employee temporarily residing in a shelter or other confidential location? Do People & Culture need to be aware of new emergency contact information?
- What changes can be made to the employee's work schedule to enable them to feel safer, attend court or police meetings, or collect children from care?
- Has the employee programmed key emergency contacts into their phone?
- Does the employee need a new phone number and/or email address?
- Does the employee wish to create a code word to indicate to a colleague or manager that they are in danger or experiencing the effects of family violence at work?
- What actions should the employee's manager or People & Culture take, if any, should the employee not show up for work and cannot be contacted?

4.5 Guideline for discussion with an employee suspected of experiencing family violence

If a manager suspects, or is told by colleagues that they suspect, an employee is experiencing family violence, the manager should have a private conversation with them. The discussion needs to be sensitive, empathetic, and has regard for the employee's privacy.

- Gently approach the employee without forcing disclosure.
- Let the employee know what has been observed e.g. "I noticed your bruises and you seem upset or worried today" or mention that you've noticed a change in their behaviour and wanted to check that everything was ok outside of work.
- Express concern that the employee might be abused e.g. "I thought it was possible you are being hurt by someone and I am concerned about you".
- Make a statement of support e.g. "I am really concerned about your safety".
- If an employee at risk of family violence does not disclose, no further questions or speculations should be made. The details of the Employee Assistance Program and support services should be provided to the employee.
- Reinforce to the employee the confidentiality of the discussion.
- If the employee does disclose, refer to section 4.3 above.

4.6 Guideline for discussion with an employee who discloses they may be a perpetrator of family violence

Below are some general steps to follow in the event an employee discloses that they are or may be a perpetrator of family violence.

It is important to note that managers are not going to be able to help the situation for their employee, and they should not become their counsellor. The manager's role is to ensure the employee's wellbeing at work, and refer them to the relevant support services. The manager must avoid judgement of the employee due to the disclosure, and their behaviour towards that employee must not change.

At time of disclosure

- Listen without judgement.
- Acknowledge that it must have been hard for the employee to disclose. For example, the manager could say "Thanks for sharing this, it takes a lot to own up to violence. Would you like me to give you the contact details for an agency that can help support you change your behaviour?"
- Reassure the employee that this disclosure will not adversely affect their job, however using work time or resources to perpetrate any violence against another person will not be accepted.
- Reassure them that their information will be kept strictly confidential and will not be recorded on their file or anywhere else.
- Provide them with or refer them to the Family Violence Guidelines, taking the time to explain the key points to them.
- Provide them with other resources (listed in section 4.7 below).
- Refer them to the EAP. Business cards are available from P&C.

4.7 Resources

4.7.1 Immediate Support (for both men and women)

Resource	Description	Contact
Safesteps	National family violence support service available 24/7 with safety planning, risk assessment and further support services. Can arrange refuge for women. Website has a 'quick escape' button redirecting to Google	Phone: 1800 015 188 (Avail 24/7) safesteps.org.au
1800 RESPECT	National counselling helpline available 24/7 with support services and resources, available in 28 languages other than English. Has a 'quick exit' button redirecting to Google	Phone: 1800 737 732 (Avail 24/7) 1800respect.org.au
In-touch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence	Victorian multilingual multicultural support service and resource centre for women from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities	Phone: 1800 755 988 www.intouch.org.au
Lifeline	National website giving support services and resources for those suffering from mental health issues, as well as those experiencing domestic and/or family violence	Phone: 13 11 14 (Avail 24/7)
Mensline Australia	Mensline Australia is the national telephone and online support, information and referral service for men with family and relationship concerns. Mensline provides 'male-friendly' counselling both online and by telephone	Phone: 1300 789 978 (Avail 24/7) mensline.org.au

4.7.2 Generalist Counselling and Information

Resource	Description	Contact
Yarra Valley Water EAP – The Three Seas Psychology Group	Free counselling service available to all YVW employees which has several established practice locations across Melbourne. Employees can make appointments at their practices from 8am to 9pm Monday to Friday, and from 8am to 5pm on Saturdays. To make a booking please contact The Three Seas Psychology Group directly	Phone: 03 9809 1000 thethreeseas.com.au
Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service Victoria	For Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples living in Victoria to access culturally safe and appropriate support services and resources	Phone: 1800 737 732 www.fvpls.org
Another Closet — LGBTIQ Domestic & Family Violence	National website for LGBTIQ people in relationships who are or may be experiencing domestic and family violence	Phone: 1800 737 732 www.anothercloset.com.au

Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria	Victorian support service and resource centre, with a clickable map giving support services and resources for different regions in Victoria. Has a 'quick exit' button redirecting to Google	Phone: (03) 9486 9866 (9am-5pm M-F) www.dvrcv.org.au
Eastern Domestic Violence Services Inc	The specialist family violence service in Melbourne's eastern metropolitan region and covers the municipalities of Boroondara, Manningham, Whitehorse, Knox, Monash, Maroondah and Yarra Ranges. They provide an integrated range of services to empower women and children who are responding to family violence: support, advice, information, case management, safety planning, community education, programs for pet safety and a strong network of referral pathways to other services that can assist	Phone: (03) 9259 4200 www.edvos.org.au edvos@edvos.org.au
Eastern Metropolitan Region Regional Family Violence Partnership	The mission of the Region Family Violence Partnership (RFVP) is to provide an integrated service response that prioritises safety for women and children and accountability of those who use violence (www.easternfamilyviolencepartnership.org.au)	Phone: (03) 9259 4200
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Men's Referral Services (MRS)	The MRS takes calls from Australian men dealing with family and domestic violence matters. They offer anonymous and confidential telephone counselling information and referrals to help men	Phone: 1300 766 491 mrs.org.au
Our Watch	Aim is to drive nation-wide change in the cultures, behaviours and attitudes that underpin and create violence against women and children	Phone: (03) 8692 9500
Mobile Apps	Aurora Live Free (Rotary) Daisy (Medibank Private) Aspire News (Created by Robin McGraw (wife of Dr Phil) Invisible app to help victims of domestic violence)	

4.7.3 Legal and Financial Assistance

Resource	Description	Contact
Kildonan UnitingCare	Kildonan UnitingCare is an innovative and trusted community service organisation within one of Australia's largest welfare networks.	Phone: 1800 002 992 www.kildonan.org.au
Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service Victoria	For Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples living in Victoria to access culturally safe and appropriate support services and resources	Phone: 1800 737 732 www.fvpls.org
Department of Human Services	Centrelink can provide extra financial support if you are in, have left, or are preparing to leave a situation where you are affected by domestic and/or family violence. Has an 'exit' button banner at the bottom of the page. Call to speak to a Centrelink social worker, or find out about extra financial support	Phone: 132 850
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Safesteps	National website with safety planning, risk assessment and further support services. Can arrange refuge for women. Has a 'quick escape' button redirecting to Google	Phone: 1800 015 188 safesteps.org.au
WIRE	Provides support, information and referrals to women throughout Victoria who may be experiencing any type of issues in their households: domestic violence, health, relationships, family, housing, legal and money issues. It's a free and confidential service, they will listen and provide support where needed	Phone: 1300 134 130 (9am-5pm M-F) wire.org.au
Women's Legal Service	National network of community legal centres specialising in women's legal issues. They aim to promote a legal system that is safe, supportive, non-discriminatory and responsive to the needs of women.	Phone: 1800 133 302

Document History

Date	Reviewed/ Actioned By	Version	Action
20/02/2017	Estelle Tzanabetis	1.0	First published version.
09/03/2017	Estelle Tzanabetis	1.1	Updated the referrals with better contact details. Added further information from the Kildonan training including guidelines for talking to a perpetrator.

Title:	Customer Family Violence Guidelines
Doc Type:	Work Instruction
Division:	Retail Services
Owner:	Ciara Sterling

Yarra Valley Water

Customer Family Violence Guidelines

1. PURPOSE

Family violence is a serious issue that poses substantial risk to the health and wellbeing of our communities. Yarra Valley Water, as an essential service provider, actively endorses measures to support customers experiencing family violence, with the safety of our customers being paramount.

It is now widely recognised that Government, corporate and community sector all have a responsibility to work together to support those experiencing family violence. A collaborative and integrated response is essential in order to effect long term systemic change.

Yarra Valley Water has developed a comprehensive process to support our customers that are experiencing family violence. We will treat customers in a respectful and sensitive manner, with a focus upon on the customer's safety and wellbeing and supporting customers with any debt or payment difficulties.

This guideline outlines the support available to all customers experiencing family violence, regardless of their current financial capacity. Further, Yarra Valley Water seeks to create a supportive environment where customers are aware of the support available and are comfortable in requesting assistance for family violence related concerns.

2. SCOPE

These guidelines apply to all Yarra Valley Water customers who experience family violence and who require assistance.

The key elements that are covered within this policy guideline include:

- How to access to support at Yarra Valley Water
- Confidential and respectful conversations
- Training and awareness for staff
- Protecting customer's privacy and safety
- Financial assistance available
- Referral to support networks

3. DEFINITIONS

Family or Domestic
Violence

Behaviour by a person towards a family member of that person if that behaviour

(i) is physically or sexually abusive; or

(ii) is emotionally or psychologically abusive; or

(iii) is economically abusive; or

(iv) is threatening; or

(v) is coercive; or

(vi) in any other way controls or dominates the family member and causes that family member to feel fear for the safety or wellbeing of that family member or another person;

or

behaviour by a person that causes a child to hear or witness, or otherwise be exposed to the effects of, behaviour referred to above.

4. GUIDELINES SUMMARY

Where a customer is identified as experiencing family violence, the customers will be referred to the Customer Support Team to be case managed and their supply will not be restricted, and no legal action or additional debt recovery costs will apply, while engaging with the Customer Support programs.

The Customer Support Case Manager undergoes ongoing training, including training focused specifically on family violence. This is due to the complexity and sensitive nature of the customer's circumstances and the possible increase risk to their safety.

Yarra Valley Water has an internal process to identify these customers and ensure their details are managed with the highest degree of privacy and sensitivity. All staff in the Customer Contact Centre, Customer Debt Management and the Customer Support Team, are trained to look for identifiers and indicators of family violence.

5. FAMILY VIOLENCE PROCESS DETAILS

Types of support available to customers experiencing family violence

Protecting the safety and privacy of our customer – YVW family violence process

All customers who identify as experiencing family violence will automatically enter into our Customer Support Team to be supported by the YVW family violence process which includes:

5.1 How to access support at Yarra Valley Water

- **Minimising repeat disclosures of family violence**

Single Point of Entry

If a customer is experiencing family violence they can contact our Customer Support Team directly on free call number **1300 637 316**.

We understand that customers who are affected by family violence may experience difficulties and trauma in repeating their story multiple times, we also understand that due to the complexity of these circumstances, they may not be able to always safely disclose this information.

As a result, our process ensures that those affected by family violence can have dedicated phone line that ensures they have one point of contact within our Customer Support Team, where the team members are trained and understand that these customer need:

- To feel safe and have time to consider their options
- Have their privacy protected
- Feel listened to and not have to repeat their story each time they call
- Time to sort things out
- Links into specialised support networks
- Financial support and assistance

5.2 Confidential and Respectful Conversations

- **Taking people at their word**

To ensure our customers are safe and to not add any stress to their complex circumstances, we do not require proof of family violence. We will take people at their word and work towards supporting customers in a timely manner.

- **Case management - One point of contact**

The customer will be assigned to a Customer Support Case Manager. Case Managers have a dedicated phone line available to the customer which prevents the customer from having to re-tell their story to another person, which assists in protecting the customer's safety.

- **Confidentiality**

All personal information concerning family violence will be kept confidential in line with the Yarra Valley Water's policies and relevant legislation.

5.3 Training and Awareness for staff

- **All of business training and awareness**

- All Staff are trained to gain awareness and understanding of issues that are related to family violence and Yarra Valley Waters processes.
- All front line staff receive additional training around the internal processes we undertake to protect the privacy and safety of customers who may be experiencing family violence.

- **Specialised trained staff - “people who get it”**

All staff in the Customer Support Team continue to be specially trained in identifying and responding to the complex issues associated with family violence, so that they can work with customers in a respectfully and appropriate manner.

5.4 Protecting customer’s privacy, safety and confidential information

We understand the importance for customers who are affected by family violence to feel confident about the security of their personal information and they are not at risk of deliberate or inadvertent disclosure, particularly when the perpetrator is or has been a joint account holder. Where there is or has been a joint account, we understand the perpetrator may have access to personal information to enable them to pass routine privacy protections and obtain new contact details.

We acknowledge the importance of customers having confidence that information they share with Yarra Valley Water about their family violence, is not disclosed to the perpetrators, and that any information they provide is accessible only to authorised staff.

To support this, we have implemented the following processes:

- **Safety flag – protecting customer safety**

A safety flag will be applied to accounts when a customer, or their family, are at risk due to family violence. The flag restricts the account to only be visible to the Customer Support Team and will disable the YVOW online functions to ensure no one can access information via the customer’s online portal.

Having the flag is an additional reminder to staff that personal information on the account is sensitive and can only be discussed with the customer once the additional information is verified.

- **Additional privacy and identification checks**

When an account has the safety flag applied, extra points of identification will be activated to enhance privacy and safety precautions. The extra identification will be based on the customer’s individual needs and may include:

- Password
- Secret question/answer password
- SMS verification
- Email verification

- **Immediate safety risk**

If there is an immediate safety concern or risk for the customer, their children or staff, we will contact local police or call triple zero (000) for assistance.

5.5 Financial assistance available

Yarra Valley Water understands that perpetrators often avoid responsibility for debts, and leave their partners or former partners with substantial liabilities. It is also recognised that debt incurred through jointly held accounts can cause a series of difficult issues for those affected by family violence to resolve. Yarra Valley Water is committed to supporting those who have experience family violence with a suite of financial assistance options.

To support this, we have implemented the following processes:

- **A flexible approach to payment difficulty**

Yarra Valley Water recognises that family violence can sometimes lead to or enhance financial challenges. The Customer Support Case Manager will tailor a support program which will suit the customer's individual circumstances. Support the customer may be eligible to access include:

- Affordable payment arrangements
- Debt relief
- Access to government grants
- Referrals to support networks such as CareRing including free and confidential financial counselling
- Protection from further debt recovery action in relation to their water and sewerage bill

5.6 Providing customers with referrals to expert support networks

Yarra Valley Waters staff are trained in awareness of family violence and the associated risks on customers, however we understand we are not experts in the field of family violence and therefore should not provide a counselling service. We are aware of the importance of the need for specialist family violence referrals given the complexity of the issues victims of family violence face and we recognised we are well placed to provide information to customers regarding appropriate referral pathways.

To support this, we have implemented the following processes:

- **Referrals to family violence support services**

Yarra Valley Water staff have access to a number of support services and their contact details, we will ensure that those experiencing family violence can be referred into external support networks and resources as outlined in the resources sections of this document.

6. Ensuring customers are aware of assistance available

Yarra Valley Water understands the importance of ensuring customer's awareness of our family violence policies so they can quickly and easily access information on the assistance available to them.

To address this, we have implemented the following processes:

- **Create awareness of assistance available**

- Promotion of the assistance available for those experiencing family violence to customers, community and advocate organisations and family violence support services and financial counsellors.
- Display the assistance available on the Yarra Valley Water and WaterCare websites.
- Promotion of a direct phone number for those experiencing family violence and the community organisations that support them
- Have copies of this family violence policy available on our website which can also to be sent out to customers or community organisations on request

7. A whole of organisation approach - Additional business family violence training

Yarra Valley Water has a commitment to supporting our customers and our staff who have experienced family violence and in accordance with this we have family violence policies and process guidelines for both staff and customers.

Yarra Valley Water understands that providing our staff with guidance and training in understanding, identifying and responding to family violence is critical and that this training also ensures a more positive customer experience for those who are impacted by family violence.

To address this, we have implemented the following processes:

- **Companywide training to improve responses to those impacted by family violence**

Awareness, training and support resources are provided to employees in relation to family violence on an ongoing basis:

- All employees undergo training on recognising the signs of family violence and how to respond and support customers appropriately.
- All managers are provided with training on recognising the signs of family violence and responding appropriately.
- All manager of front-line contact staff provided with training in how to support staff who are affected, or at risk of being affected by vicarious trauma relating to the calls or contacts where family violence has been disclosed

8. Continual Improvement

The Customer Family Violence Policy Guideline and associated programs are reviewed on an ongoing basis in consultation with our key partners to ensure they remain appropriate and adequately meet our customer needs. It is a document that is flexible to community needs as well as external social environment, improvements are ongoing.

YVW is part of the customer safety net, recognising that customers may have more than one issue and need a variety of support and information provided.

We will continue to work closely with our community agencies and financial counselling partners to develop appropriate, customer focused support for customers experiencing family violence

8.1 Resources

Customers can be referred into external support networks and resources including:

8.1.1 Immediate Support (for both men and women)

Resource	Description	Contact
Safesteps	National family violence support service available 24/7 with safety planning, risk assessment and further support services. Can arrange refuge for women. Website has a 'quick escape' button redirecting to Google	Phone: 1800 015 188 (Avail 24/7) safesteps.org.au
1800 RESPECT	National counselling helpline available 24/7 with support services and resources, available in 28 languages other than English. Has a 'quick exit' button redirecting to Google	Phone: 1800 737 732 (Avail 24/7) 1800respect.org.au
In-touch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence	Victorian multilingual multicultural support service and resource centre for women from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities	Phone: 1800 755 988 www.intouch.org.au
Lifeline	National website giving support services and resources for those suffering from mental health issues, as well as those experiencing domestic and/or family violence	Phone: 13 11 14 (Avail 24/7)
Mensline Australia	Mensline Australia is the national telephone and online support, information and referral service for men with family and relationship concerns. Mensline provides 'male-friendly' counselling both online and by telephone	Phone: 1300 789 978 (Avail 24/7) mensline.org.au

8.1.2 Generalist Counselling and Information

Resource	Description	Contact
Yarra Valley Water EAP – The Three Seas Psychology Group	Free counselling service available to all YVW employees which has several established practice locations across Melbourne. Employees can make appointments at their practices from 8am to 9pm Monday to Friday, and from 8am to 5pm on Saturdays. To make a booking please contact The Three Seas Psychology Group directly	Phone: 03 9809 1000 thethreeseas.com.au
Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service Victoria	For Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples living in Victoria to access culturally safe and appropriate support services and resources	Phone: 1800 737 732 www.fvpls.org

Another Closet — LGBTIQ Domestic & Family Violence	National website for LGBTIQ people in relationships who are or may be experiencing domestic and family violence	Phone: 1800 737 732 www.anothercloset.com.au
Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria	Victorian support service and resource centre, with a clickable map giving support services and resources for different regions in Victoria. Has a 'quick exit' button redirecting to Google	Phone: (03) 9486 9866 (9am-5pm M-F) www.dvrcv.org.au
Eastern Domestic Violence Services Inc	The specialist family violence service in Melbourne's eastern metropolitan region and covers the municipalities of Boroondara, Manningham, Whitehorse, Knox, Monash, Maroondah and Yarra Ranges. They provide an integrated range of services to empower women and children who are responding to family violence: support, advice, information, case management, safety planning, community education, programs for pet safety and a strong network of referral pathways to other services that can assist	Phone: (03) 9259 4200 www.edvos.org.au edvos@edvos.org.au
Eastern Metropolitan Region Regional Family Violence Partnership	The mission of the Region Family Violence Partnership (RFVP) is to provide an integrated service response that prioritises safety for women and children and accountability of those who use violence (www.easternfamilyviolencepartnership.org.au)	Phone: (03) 9259 4200
In-touch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence	Victorian multilingual multicultural support service and resource centre for women from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities	Phone: 1800 755 988 www.intouch.org.au
Men's Referral Services (MRS)	The MRS takes calls from Australian men dealing with family and domestic violence matters. They offer anonymous and confidential telephone counselling information and referrals to help men	Phone: 1300 766 491 mrs.org.au
Our Watch	Aim is to drive nation-wide change in the cultures, behaviours and attitudes that underpin and create violence against women and children	Phone: (03) 8692 9500
Mobile Apps	Aurora Live Free (Rotary) Daisy (Medibank Private) Aspire News (Created by Robin McGraw (wife of Dr Phil) Invisible app to help victims of domestic violence)	

8.1.3 Legal and Financial Assistance

Resource	Description	Contact
Kildonan UnitingCare	Kildonan UnitingCare is an innovative and trusted community service organisation within one of Australia's largest welfare networks.	Phone: 1800 002 992 www.kildonan.org.au
Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service Victoria	For Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples living in Victoria to access culturally safe and appropriate support services and resources	Phone: 1800 737 732 www.fvpls.org
Department of Human Services	Centrelink can provide extra financial support if you are in, have left, or are preparing to leave a situation where you are affected by domestic and/or family violence. Has an 'exit' button banner at the bottom of the page. Call to speak to a Centrelink social worker, or find out about extra financial support	Phone: 132 850
Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria	Victorian support service and resource centre, with a clickable map giving support services and resources for different regions in Victoria. Has a 'quick exit' button redirecting to Google	Phone: (03) 9486 9866 (9am-5pm M-F) www.dvrcv.org.au
Safesteps	National website with safety planning, risk assessment and further support services. Can arrange refuge for women. Has a 'quick escape' button redirecting to Google	Phone: 1800 015 188 safesteps.org.au
WIRE	Provides support, information and referrals to women throughout Victoria who may be experiencing any type of issues in their households: domestic violence, health, relationships, family, housing, legal and money issues. It's a free and confidential service, they will listen and provide support where needed	Phone: 1300 134 130 (9am-5pm M-F) wire.org.au
Women's Legal Service	National network of community legal centres specialising in women's legal issues. They aim to promote a legal system that is safe, supportive, non-discriminatory and responsive to the needs of women.	Phone: 1800 133 302

ATTACHMENT 2

ESSENTIAL SERVICES COMMISSION'S FAMILY VIOLENCE POLICY

Includes toolkits for managers and employees.

RESPONSE TO FAMILY VIOLENCE

HOW CAN THIS POLICY HELP ME?

This policy outlines how employees and their managers within the Essential Services Commission can find support related to family violence issues. This document covers support services for people experiencing family violence, leave options (including paid family violence leave), flexible work arrangements, other workplace support, and returning to work.

If you are experiencing family violence, the Commission can support you and help you find a wide range of resources. If you have any questions regarding this policy or the accompanying toolkits, contact the human resources team (contact details are available on the intranet).

If you are concerned about your own behaviour in relation to family violence, you can seek confidential help from the Commission's Employee Assistance Program. You can find contact information for this program on the 'HR' section of the intranet.

This policy applies to all Commission employees.

WHAT IS FAMILY VIOLENCE?

Family violence includes physical, sexual, financial, verbal or emotional abuse by a family member. This is defined in the *Family Violence Protection Act 2008 (Vic)*.

Family violence includes the use of violent, threatening, coercive or controlling behaviour by an individual against a family member or someone with whom they have, or have had, an intimate relationship. Anyone can experience family violence, regardless of gender or age.

A central element of family violence is behaviour aimed at power and control through fear. Family violence takes a number of forms, including physical and sexual violence; threats and intimidation; psychological, emotional and social abuse; and economic deprivation.

The Commission recognises that employees sometimes face situations of violence or abuse in their personal life that may affect their attendance or performance at work. The Commission is committed to providing support to staff that experience family violence and promoting a workplace free from all forms of violence.

YOUR PRIVACY IS ALWAYS RESPECTED

All information provided to the Commission under this policy will be treated in line with the *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014 (Vic)* and the *Health Records Act 2001 (Vic)*.

The Commission respects the privacy of employees who are experiencing family violence. When a matter is raised in connection to this policy, the Commission follows certain privacy guidelines:

- All personal information regarding family violence will remain confidential, in line with Commission policies and relevant legislation. No information will be kept on an employee's personnel file without their express written permission.
- Other sensitive information relating to family violence (for example, an employee's workplace support plan) is securely stored in a records management folder and only used for purposes relating to this policy.
- There may be times when there is a safety risk to the affected employee or other employees. In order to maintain safety in the workplace, relevant information will be disclosed on a strict 'need to know' basis. It is only disclosed by an appropriate person (such as the relevant human resources team member or your senior manager). The Commission will ensure you are kept up to date about any necessary disclosure of personal information.
- Commission employees who need to be involved must respect privacy requirements relating to an employee's personal information and any sensitive matters.

If you are concerned about how this information is collected, used or disclosed, you can contact the Commission's General Counsel. You can find this person's contact details on the intranet under the phone list (filter by role to find the position and contact number).

WHERE CAN I FIND SUPPORT?

Your manager and a human resources representative can help you find support services to address family violence issues.

The Commission has family violence toolkits for employees and managers. These documents ensure that people experiencing family violence can find all key resources and organise suitable working arrangements with the help of their manager.

If you are an employee experiencing family violence, use the document entitled ‘Employee’s toolkit: for people experiencing family violence’.

If you manage someone who is experiencing family violence, use the document entitled ‘Manager’s toolkit: supporting people experiencing family violence’.

These documents can be downloaded from the intranet’s ‘policies’ page or requested from the human resources team.

LEAVE OPTIONS RELATING TO FAMILY VIOLENCE

If you are a non-casual employee who is experiencing family violence, you can access a variety of leave options, including:

- paid family violence leave
- accrued personal/carer’s leave
- annual leave (also at half pay)
- long service leave (also at half pay)
- purchased leave.

All employees (including casual employees) can access ‘leave without pay’ entitlements to address issues related to experiencing family violence.

If you are supporting someone who is experiencing family violence, you can also apply for other leave in accordance with the Commission’s leave of absence policy. You can find this policy on the intranet or request it from human resources.

You will not be penalised if your attendance or performance at work suffers as a result of experiencing family violence.

PAID FAMILY VIOLENCE LEAVE

Paid family violence leave can be used by employees to perform activities related to experiencing family violence. For example, family violence leave can be used to attend medical appointments or legal proceedings, or seek safe housing.

You can apply for paid family violence leave at any time. You do not need to use up other leave entitlements first.

Paid family violence leave provides you with up to 20 days of leave per year. This type of leave is not cumulative (it does not accrue year on year). If you exhaust this provision, human resources can help you arrange leave that continues to meet your needs.

The Commission must consider certain factors in order to approve additional family violence leave. These factors include the impact of family violence on the staff member, parental or other family commitments, available leave, and financial circumstances.

UNSCHEDULED FAMILY VIOLENCE LEAVE

The Commission supports any employee who needs to take unscheduled family violence leave. It is important that you focus on your personal safety and wellbeing.

To take unscheduled family violence leave, let your manager or a human resources representative know that you will not be available to work. You do not need to go into detail about your personal circumstances in order to take this leave.

The Commission can help you find support services while you are on leave.

When you are able, the Commission will ask you to complete a 'special leave' form with help from your manager, a more senior manager, or a human resources representative (whoever makes you the most comfortable). This will enable you to apply for paid family violence leave that covers your unscheduled leave period. All information supplied on this form is kept private in line with the Commission's privacy responsibilities.

HOW DO I APPLY FOR PAID FAMILY VIOLENCE LEAVE?

Before requesting family violence leave, the Commission recommends that you discuss your leave intentions with someone within the organisation. An appropriate contact might include your manager, a more senior manager, or a human resources representative.

To apply for family violence leave, you should:

1. complete a 'special leave' form (found in the employee toolkit for this policy)
2. supply supporting documentation (refer to the next section for more information).

You do not have to complete the 'special leave' form yourself. Your manager or a human resources representative can also complete the form on your behalf.

If you prefer, you do not need to list a reason for your leave request in the 'special leave' form, as long as you are able to have a discussion with a relevant manager or human resources representative.

Paid family violence leave requests are approved by your director or the CEO.

WHAT SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION DO I NEED?

To apply for paid family violence leave, you may need to provide supporting documentation. This documentation is kept private in line with the Commission's privacy responsibilities.

A human resources representative can help you source appropriate documentation, which may be issued by:

- the police
- a court
- a registered health practitioner
- a district nurse
- a family violence support service
- a maternal or health care nurse
- a lawyer.

A signed statutory declaration may also meet supporting documentation requirements. If you have questions about supporting documentation, contact the human resources department for a private discussion.

FLEXIBLE WORK, OTHER WORKPLACE SUPPORT, AND RETURNING TO WORK

APPLYING FOR FLEXIBLE WORK ARRANGEMENTS

You may find that flexible work arrangements help you address issues relating to experiencing family violence, or supporting someone experiencing family violence. This could include time off for appointments relating to health, legal or financial matters, to attend court, or to care for children.

You can apply for flexible work arrangements by talking to your manager or contacting a human resources representative.

ORGANISING OTHER WORKPLACE SUPPORT

For employees experiencing family violence, the Commission can approve requests including:

- changing your work contact details (such as your telephone number or email address) to avoid harassing contact
- updating your banking and personal details
- a temporary or ongoing change to your span of hours or pattern of hours
- a temporary or ongoing job redesign or changes to duties
- a temporary or ongoing relocation to suitable employment
- any other appropriate measure.

Contact a human resources representative if you need these measures completed urgently.

Workplace support arrangements can be reviewed at agreed periods. Once you are ready, the terms and conditions of your employment can revert to your substantive position.

DEVELOPING A WORKPLACE SUPPORT PLAN

The Commission is committed to ensuring that all of its employees can work in a safe, secure environment. If you are experiencing family violence, the Commission can help you implement a workplace support plan that may include:

- programming mobile phones with emergency and contact numbers
- screening incoming calls
- changing work phone numbers, email addresses, working hours and nature of work
- ensuring you are in a security restricted area where possible
- any other appropriate measure.

This plan can be developed in consultation with your manager and a human resources representative. It should reflect your specific needs and consider your role and workplace environment.

RETURNING TO WORK

Following any paid or unscheduled family violence leave, you may find it helpful to develop a 'return to work' plan to make your return as smooth as possible. The Commission recommends you contact your manager to develop a plan, which may also be developed in consultation with a human resources representative and a health practitioner (if appropriate).

DISPUTE RESOLUTION

You may find that you are dissatisfied with the way your requests are processed. Where possible, the Commission recommends discussing any issues with your manager first.

You can find more information on this topic by reading the 'grievance resolution' policy, which you can find on the intranet or request from human resources.

THE COMMISSION'S RESPONSIBILITIES

The *Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004* (Vic) requires the Commission to immediately notify Worksafe Victoria about serious workplace incidents, including assault or abuse.

The Commission will notify police when someone commits (or threatens to commit) a criminal act on the Commission's premises.

When supporting someone experiencing family violence, Commission staff must maintain appropriate confidentiality and privacy in relation to disclosures of family violence. The human resources team must also:

- provide advice to employees and managers about this policy and related documentation
- coordinate support for employees in conjunction with their managers and the Commission’s occupational health and safety advisory service
- meet mandatory reporting requirements of incidents and accidents in consultation with the employee’s manager.

LEGISLATION AND OTHER RELATED RESOURCES

This policy should be read in conjunction with the family violence leave provisions contained in the *Victorian Public Service Enterprise Agreement 2016*. Legislation, standards and industrial instruments related to this policy are listed in the following table:

LEGISLATION

<p>Legislation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Fair Work Act 2009</i> (Cth) • <i>Equal Opportunity Act 2010</i> (Vic) • <i>Carers Recognition Act 2012</i> (Vic) • <i>Family Violence Protection Act 2008</i> (Vic) • <i>Health Records Act 2001</i> (Vic) • <i>Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004</i> (Vic) • <i>Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014</i> (Vic) • <i>Crimes Act 1958</i> (Vic) <p>This policy is consistent with the <i>Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006</i> (Vic).</p>
<p>Standard</p>	<p>Code of Conduct for Victorian Public Sector Employees 2015</p>
<p>Industrial instrument</p>	<p>Victorian Public Service Enterprise Agreement 2016</p>

DOCUMENT HISTORY

This document history covers the policy and the employee and manager toolkits.

Owner(s): Human Resources

Last reviewed: October 2016

Next review date: October 2019

MANAGER'S TOOLKIT

SUPPORTING PEOPLE EXPERIENCING FAMILY VIOLENCE

HOW CAN THIS DOCUMENT HELP ME?

You may manage someone who is experiencing family violence or supporting someone experiencing family violence. As a manager, you can help your direct reports find a wide range of resources and ensure their privacy is respected.

This toolkit gives you everything you need to support employees experiencing family violence. It can be used by all managers in the Commission and includes a checklist, a list of useful resources, a special leave form (for paid family violence leave), and a workplace support plan.

The toolkit also aligns with the Commission's family violence policy, which you can find on the intranet or request from human resources.

If you have any questions regarding the policy or this toolkit, contact the human resources team (contact details are available on the intranet).

WHAT IS FAMILY VIOLENCE?

Family violence includes physical, sexual, financial, verbal or emotional abuse by a family member. This is defined in the *Family Violence Protection Act 2008* (Vic).

Family violence includes the use of violent, threatening, coercive or controlling behaviour by an individual against a family member or someone with whom they have, or have had, an intimate relationship. Anyone can experience family violence, regardless of gender or age.

A central element of family violence is behaviour aimed at power and control through fear. Family violence takes a number of forms, including physical and sexual violence; threats and intimidation; psychological, emotional and social abuse; and economic deprivation.

The Commission recognises that employees sometimes face situations of violence or abuse in their personal life that may affect their attendance or performance at work. The Commission is committed to providing support to staff that experience family violence and promoting a workplace free from all forms of violence.

THE IMPORTANCE OF WORKPLACE SUPPORT

Creating a supportive and flexible workplace for your employees helps people take action against family violence. By providing financial stability, paid work plays a critical role in enabling people to leave abusive relationships and recover from abuse.

Managers may be an initial contact point for employees who are experiencing family violence. As a manager, you can ensure the workplace provides appropriate safety measures and support to affected employees.

YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES

As the manager of an employee experiencing family violence, you must:

- make reasonable efforts to provide a safe workplace for the employee, other employees and workplace inhabitants
- respect employee privacy in line with the family violence policy's privacy guidelines
- develop a supportive environment that encourages employees to come forward for help and support
- encourage employees to use Commission resources and policies that help staff members experiencing family violence
- ensure that any incidents, hazards or risks that occur in the workplace are reported to the human resources team
- notify the human resources team and the police when someone commits (or threatens to commit) a criminal act on the Commission's premises.

MANAGER'S CHECKLIST

Tick off items on this checklist to make sure employees affected by family violence can find the information and support services they need.

If you need help completing this checklist, contact the human resources team for a private discussion. You can find their contact details on the intranet.

TASKS

CONTACT HUMAN RESOURCES AND ENSURE AFFECTED STAFF ARE AWARE OF AVAILABLE SUPPORT SERVICES.

You may suspect or be informed of an employee's family violence situation. In these cases, contact the human resources team. You can also contact the Employee Assistance Program's 'Manager assist' service. Both options can be accessed through the standard program phone number listed on the 'HR' section of the intranet.

Ensure affected employees are aware of the support services available to them:

- This toolkit contains a contact list of support services across Victoria (**attachment 1**). Your employee may find this list useful.
- The Employee Assistance Program provides counselling and support to any employee or their immediate family member seeking assistance with a challenging issue or to improve their health and wellbeing. You can find contact information for this program on the 'HR' section of the intranet.
- The human resources team can also offer valuable support. Their details can be found on the intranet.
- Employees may also prefer to speak to their union delegate. In these cases, refer your employee to the contact details supplied by their delegate.

I have completed this task:

ENSURE YOUR EMPLOYEE UPDATES THEIR EMERGENCY CONTACTS AT THE COMMISSION.

Ensure that your employee's emergency contact person is outside their immediate family (and not exposed to family violence).

I have completed this task:

ENSURE YOUR EMPLOYEE’S PRIVACY NEEDS ARE MET.

The Commission respects the privacy of people experiencing family violence. The Commission’s family violence policy contains detailed information regarding how the organisation addresses the privacy of people experiencing family violence.

Use the following list as a reference point when addressing the privacy requirements of employees experiencing family violence:

- If an employee discloses that they are experiencing family violence, assure them that their information will be kept private in line with the Commission’s family violence policy and legal responsibilities (for example, reporting serious workplace incidents to the police or Worksafe Victoria).
- An employee may prefer to discuss their family violence experience with a more senior manager or a human resources representative. If they indicate that this is their preference, ensure you provide them with the appropriate contact information. Managers once removed can approve leave relating to family violence.
- There may be times when there is a safety risk to an employee at the Commission (for example, an aggressive spouse attempting to enter the workplace). In these cases, assure the employee that the Commission will only disclose relevant information on a strict ‘need to know’ basis in order to maintain safety in the workplace.
- If an employee has any concerns about the way their information will be collected, used, disclosed or secured, refer them to the Commission’s General Counsel. You can find this person’s contact details on the intranet under the phone list (filter by role to find the position and contact number).

If you would like to discuss employee privacy further, contact the human resources team.

I have completed this task:

RECOMMEND THAT YOUR EMPLOYEE KEEP COPIES OF ANY INTERVENTION ORDERS.

If your employee has obtained an intervention order (including a family violence intervention order), recommend that they keep a copy on hand at all times.

Ask your employee to consider providing a copy of the intervention order to you and the human resources team. Explain that doing this will enable the Commission to understand the conditions, call police if necessary, or provide additional security at reception.

I have completed this task:

RECOMMEND THAT THE EMPLOYEE READ THE COMMISSION'S FAMILY VIOLENCE POLICY.

There are times when an employee who is experiencing family violence may need time away from work for a range of reasons, for example to address health, legal, child care, housing or other personal matters.

The Commission's family violence policy covers an employee's leave options relating to paid family violence and other workplace support options. Employees and managers should familiarise themselves with this policy. Managers should also seek assistance from the human resources team regarding leave options.

This toolkit contains a 'special leave' form (**attachment 2**). Ensure that your employee is aware that they can use this form to apply for paid family violence leave.

I have completed this task:

SUGGEST THE EMPLOYEE COMPLETE A WORKPLACE SUPPORT PLAN (WITH YOUR ASSISTANCE).

An employee may indicate they are experiencing family violence and are concerned for their safety in the workplace. Managers can help them develop a workplace support plan (in consultation with the human resources team) to reduce risks relating to workplace safety. You can find a copy of the workplace support plan at **attachment 3**.

You can find more information on developing a workplace support plan in the family violence policy. Managers should seek assistance from HR if they have any concerns about approving a request.

I have completed this task:

CONSIDER THE IMPACT OF FAMILY VIOLENCE DURING PERFORMANCE OR ATTENDANCE REVIEWS.

Employees are not penalised if their attendance or performance at work suffers as a result of experiencing family violence. Ensure that your employee understands this.

As a manager, consider the impact that violence can have on an employee's ability to perform and attend their job. This is particularly important when addressing attendance or performance issues.

I have completed this task:

EMPLOYEE'S TOOLKIT

FOR PEOPLE EXPERIENCING FAMILY VIOLENCE

HOW CAN THIS DOCUMENT HELP ME?

If you are experiencing family violence, the Commission can help you find appropriate resources and ensure your privacy is respected.

This toolkit gives you everything you need to find support related to experiencing family violence. It includes a checklist, a list of useful resources, a special leave form (for paid family violence leave) and a workplace support plan.

The toolkit also aligns with the Commission's family violence policy, which you can find on the intranet or request from human resources.

If you have any questions regarding the policy or this toolkit, contact the human resources team (contact details are available on the intranet).

WHAT IS FAMILY VIOLENCE?

Family violence includes physical, sexual, financial, verbal or emotional abuse by a family member. This is defined in the *Family Violence Protection Act 2008* (Vic).

Family violence includes the use of violent, threatening, coercive or controlling behaviour by an individual against a family member or someone with whom they have, or have had, an intimate relationship. Anyone can experience family violence, regardless of gender or age.

A central element of family violence is behaviour aimed at power and control through fear. Family violence takes a number of forms, including physical and sexual violence; threats and intimidation; psychological, emotional and social abuse; and economic deprivation.

The Commission recognises that employees sometimes face situations of violence or abuse in their personal life that may affect their attendance or performance at work. The Commission is committed to providing support to staff that experience family violence and promoting a workplace free from all forms of violence.

EMPLOYEE PRIVACY

The Commission's family violence policy contains detailed information regarding how the organisation addresses the privacy of people experiencing family violence.

If you disclose a family violence situation to the Commission, your information will only be used in line with the privacy guidelines listed in the policy.

If you are concerned about how this type of information is collected, used or disclosed, the Commission's General Counsel can discuss this matter with you. You can find the contact details for General Counsel on the intranet under the phone list (filter by role to find the position and contact number).

EMPLOYEE'S CHECKLIST

The Commission can help you find information and support services relating to family violence. This checklist outlines ways you can access available information and resources.

You may like to work through this checklist during a private discussion with your manager or a human resources team representative. The contact details of the human resources team are listed on the intranet.

TASKS

READ ABOUT THE SUPPORT SERVICES YOU CAN ACCESS.

There are several groups you can contact if you are experiencing family violence or supporting someone experiencing family violence:

- This toolkit contains a contact list of useful support services across Victoria (**attachment 1**).
- The Commission's Employee Assistance Program provides counselling and support to any employee or their immediate family member seeking assistance with a challenging issue or health concern. You can find contact information for this program on the 'HR' section of the intranet.
- The human resources team can also offer valuable support. Contact details for this team can be found on the intranet.
- You may wish to discuss this issue with your manager. In this case, you may prefer to book a meeting room in order to have a private discussion.
- If you have a union delegate, refer to the contact details they have supplied.

I have completed this task:

UPDATE YOUR EMERGENCY CONTACTS AT THE COMMISSION.

Ensure that your emergency contact person is outside your immediate family (and not exposed to family violence).

I have completed this task:

KEEP COPIES OF ANY INTERVENTION ORDERS.

If you have obtained an intervention order (including a family violence intervention order), keep a copy on hand at all times. Consider providing a copy to your manager and to the human resources team so they can understand the conditions, call police if necessary, or provide additional security at reception.

I have completed this task:

READ THE COMMISSION'S FAMILY VIOLENCE POLICY.

The Commission's family violence policy covers leave options relating to paid family violence and other workplace support options. You can find this policy on the intranet or request it from human resources.

This toolkit contains a 'special leave' form (**attachment 2**). You can use this form to apply for paid family violence leave.

You will not be penalised if your attendance or performance at work suffers as a result of experiencing family violence.

I have completed this task:

COMPLETE A WORKPLACE SUPPORT PLAN (WITH YOUR MANAGER'S ASSISTANCE).

This plan reflects the workplace needs of a person experiencing family violence. It takes into account the nature of your role and your workplace environment, and considers the safety of you and your colleagues. This toolkit contains a workplace support plan (**attachment 3**).

You can complete this plan with the support of your manager and a human resources representative. A workplace support plan may include:

- programming mobile phones with emergency and contact numbers
- screening incoming calls
- changing your work phone numbers and email addresses
- ensuring you are in a security restricted area (where possible).

I have completed this task:

ATTACHMENT 3

UNITYWATER'S WORKPLACE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE POLICY

OP8065 - Workplace Domestic Violence Policy

Policy Sponsor	Executive Manager People, Culture & Safety
Policy Author	Employee Relations Manager
Supporting Legislation & Documents	<i>Work Health and Safety Act 2011</i> <i>Work Health and Safety Regulation 2011</i>
Documents Directly Related	Pr8161 Workplace Domestic Violence Procedure BP8036 Code of Conduct BP8063 Equity and Diversity Policy OP8064 Bullying, Sexual Harassment and Discrimination Policy BP8734 Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Policy

1. Policy Statement

Unitywater recognises that some employees may face situations of domestic violence in their personal life and this may affect their attendance and performance at work. Unitywater is committed to providing timely and appropriate support to staff that experience domestic violence at home or in their personal relationships and ensure they are not treated adversely or unfairly in their employment.

2. Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this Policy is to outline Unitywater's commitment to supporting employees experiencing domestic violence, and how the organisation will respond to those who perpetrate acts of violence against others.

Unitywater will provide leadership and resources to implement this Policy across the organisation. Below are the objectives of this Policy.

2.1. Non-Discrimination and Non-Retaliation

An employee who discloses he/she is experiencing domestic violence will not be treated adversely or discriminated against.

2.2. Maintenance of Employment

Unitywater understands that staying employed is critical to overcoming situations of domestic violence. Flexibility and support will be provided in dealing with any disruption to normal work performance and in certain circumstances, the staff member may be able to access special leave arrangements.

2.3. Confidentiality

An employee's disclosure of domestic violence will be treated as confidential and only shared with those who 'need to know' in order to maintain safety in the workplace or elsewhere.

OP8065 - Workplace Domestic Violence Policy

2.4. Awareness

Unitywater will build staff awareness of its Policy to support staff experiencing domestic violence. Unitywater will work with its Charitable Partners to deliver information sessions that help staff recognise signs of domestic violence and how to access support.

3. Policy Scope/Coverage

This Policy applies to all employees of Unitywater.

4. Roles and Responsibility

This Policy will be implemented, monitored, reviewed and improved by Executive Manager People, Culture and Safety.

4.1. Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and Executive Leadership Team (ELT)

The CEO and ELT are responsible for establishing the expectations to assist in embedding a culture consistent with this Policy

4.2. The Executive Manager People, Culture and Safety

The Executive Manager People Culture and Safety is responsible for establishing and maintaining processes to provide assurance to the CEO that this Policy is being followed.

4.3. The Employee Relations Manager

The Employee Relations Manager is responsible for:

- Arranging information sessions to build skills among all people managers and HR Business Partners; and
- Coordinating all ongoing communication activities to build staff awareness of Unitywater's stance on Domestic Violence and the availability of this policy.

4.4. HR Business Partners and people managers

HR Business Partners and people managers are responsible for:

- Having a working understanding of this policy and the *Workplace Domestic Violence Procedure* so that they are able to respond appropriately to staff experiencing domestic violence;
- Raising awareness among staff of Unitywater's stance on Domestic Violence, the availability of support and the means of accessing it.

4.5. All Employees of Unitywater

All employees of Unitywater are responsible for:

OP8065 - Workplace Domestic Violence Policy

- Being aware of this Policy and the *Workplace Domestic Violence Procedure*; and
- Promoting respectful relationships and reporting all instances of violence, abuse and harassment to their manager or HR Business Partner.

5. Definitions

Term	Meaning
Domestic violence	<p>Any behaviour or pattern of behaviours used by one person to establish and maintain power and control over a person with whom they are in a relevant relationship (a current or former partner, family member or a person with whom the perpetrator shares a child in common). It includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical violence - causing personal injury to a person or threatening to do so for example pushing, punching, kicking, slapping; damage to property; intimidation; • Sexual violence – demands or force to participate in sexual activity; • Psychological and emotional abuse - for example constant criticism, put-downs, blame, sulking, making out the other person is crazy; • Verbal abuse – name-calling, shouting, swearing and insults; • Economic abuse - controlling money and access to money; • Social abuse – depriving a person of the person’s liberty or threatening to do so, control over freedom and choice, isolation and restrictions on contact with friends and family, monitoring phone calls and emails, stalking; • Threatening a person with the death or injury of the person, a child of the person, family members, friends, or someone else; • Threatening to commit suicide or self-harm so as to torment, intimidate or frighten the person to whom the behaviour is directed; • Unauthorised surveillance of a person; • Unlawfully stalking a person. <p>May also be referred to as <i>family violence</i> or <i>intimate partner violence</i>.</p>
People Manager	<p>This refers to anyone who directly manages another person and may include: Branch Manager; Section Manager; Unit Leader, Site Planning Officer; Crew Leader; and other people who have specific people management responsibilities as part of their role.</p>
Employee	<p>Refers to anyone who is employed directly by Unitywater.</p>

ATTACHMENT 4

SA WATER'S COMMUNITY HELP REFERRAL GUIDE

Community Help Referral Guide

Following a call from a customer threatening self harm, ensure you debrief with a senior/manager, alternatively contact the Employee Assist Program, Davidson Trahaire Corpsych by phoning 1300 360 364.



Beyondblue

☎ 1300 224 636

Beyondblue works to reduce the impact of **anxiety**, **depression** and **suicide** in the community by raising awareness and understanding, empowering people to seek help, and supporting recovery, management and resilience.



Mental Health Triage Service

☎ 13 14 65

Operates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week
Main point of access into mental health services
Can provide advice and information in a mental health emergency or crisis situation
Staffed by mental health clinicians
Will assess and refer to acute response teams where appropriate



Suicide Call Back Service

☎ 1300 659 467

The Suicide Call Back Service is a 24-hour, nationwide service that provides telephone and online counselling to people 15 years and over.
Assisting people suicidal, caring for someone suicidal or people bereaved by suicide
Health professionals supporting people affected by suicide



National Sexual Assault, Domestic Family Violence Counselling Service

☎ 1800 737 732

National counselling helpline, information and support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
Is the customer experiencing sexual assault or domestic and family violence?
Access counselling delivered by qualified, experienced professionals



Lifeline

☎ 13 11 14

Provides all Australians experiencing a personal crisis with access to online, phone and face-to-face crisis support and suicide prevention services.
Trained Telephone Crisis Supporters will answer the call and:
Listen to the persons situation
Provide immediate support
Assist to clarify options and choices available
Provide that person with referral information for other services in their local area.



Rural Financial Counselling Service

☎ 1800 836 211

The Rural Financial Counselling Service (RFCS) Program delivered through Rural Business Support (RBS) provides free, confidential and impartial business support and information to primary producers including fishers and small rural business owners who are experiencing financial difficulties and have no alternative source of impartial support.
<http://www.ruralbusinesssupport.org.au/rural-financial-counselling-service/>

Community Help Referral Guide

The following welfare agencies have free financial counselling available across South Australia, alternatively visit the SAFCA website: <http://www.safca.org.au/get-help/find-a-financial-counsellor/>



Centacare
Catholic Family Services

- 11 McKenzie Street **Ceduna** ☎ 8625 3810
- 32 Mortlock Terrace **Port Lincoln** ☎ 8683 0733
- 28 Head Street **Whyalla Stuart** ☎ 8645 8233
- 6 Gibson Street **Port Augusta** ☎ 8641 2379



LUTHERAN
community care

- Peachey Place Living Skills Centre
20 Heytesbury Road **Davoren Park** ☎ 7070 6711
- 26 Second Street **Nuriootpa** ☎ 8562 2688
- 309 Prospect Road **Blair Athol** ☎ 8269 9300



- 10 Pitt Street **Adelaide** ☎ 8202 5180
- 107 Dyson Road **Christies Beach** ☎ 8202 5010
- 2B Morialta Drive **Smithfield** ☎ 8202 5980

ANGLICARE SA

☎ 1800 759 707

- 111 Beach Road, **Christies Beach**
- 35A Whitmore Square **Adelaide**
- 159 Port Road **Hindmarsh**
- 9 Mary Street **Salisbury**
- 91 -93 Elizabeth Way **Elizabeth**
- 34-36 Galpin Street **Whyalla Stuart** ☎ 8649 3267



Kapunda

Church Street **Kapunda** ☎ 8566 2125

Wesley Bowden

77 Gibson Street **Bowden** ☎ 8245 7100

Wesley Country SA

60 Florence Street **Port Pirie** ☎ 8633 8600

Wesley Port Adelaide

70 Dale Street **Port Adelaide** ☎ 8440 2284

Copper Triangle

8 Digby Street **Kadina** ☎ 8821 0300

UCare Gawler

10 Tod Street **Gawler** ☎ 8522 4522

and 24 Barwell Street **Eudunda**

Wesley Country SA

Shop 3-5 Eyre Street **Port Lincoln** ☎ 8682 7900

Wesley Country SA

36 Stirling Road **Port Augusta** ☎ 7628 3101



Aboriginal Legal Rights Movement

- 321-325 King William St **Adelaide** ☎ 8113 3777
- Regional offices are located:
Ceduna, Port Augusta and Murray Bridge

Riverland

7 Wilson Street **Berri** ☎ 8582 2344

Murraylands

11-21 Kennett Road **Murray Bridge** ☎ 8532 6303

Limestone Coast

22-24 Ferrers Street **Mount Gambier** ☎ 8723 0540

Northern Community Legal Service, 26 John Street Salisbury

☎ 8281 6911

Offers free legal information and a referral service to people living in the northern Adelaide metropolitan area.

Ongoing legal assistance is only provided to those people who are on low incomes and who are not eligible for legal aid.

A free financial counselling service is also available to members of the northern community.

Lifeline South East SA, 5 Mark Street Mount Gambier

☎ 8723 2299

St Vincent de Paul Society, 4 Austin Place Port Willunga

☎ 8557 6792