



Family violence and gender equity

Melbourne's north requires better support to end the prevalence of family violence in communities, increase early intervention to support children and young people's wellbeing, and support initiatives to improve gender equity.

Specifically, the region needs:

- commitment to improving the service system in each Council area through investment, integration and collaboration
- commitment to four years of funding to establish a Northern Councils Violence-Free Team that will strengthen, streamline and co-design early intervention programs, men's change management, multi-agency risk assessment and pathways for the north
- commitment to four years of funding to deliver Gender Equity Action Plans (GEAPs) and Gender Impact Assessments (GIAs).

For the 12-month period ending March 2022, police attended 13,126 incidents of family violence in Melbourne's north. Family violence is preventable, and Councils must be funded to respond to the current unacceptably high levels in local communities.

Urgent investment in early intervention initiatives will change the landscape in the north, support women and families to remain safe in the community and put an end to the deep and lasting impacts on those affected by family violence. This includes strengthening the focus on children and young people's wellbeing through early intervention.

Support for community is needed

The seven Councils in Melbourne's north are calling for increased action from The Orange Door in responding to family violence and support for the wellbeing of children and young people.

Communities within the region have high family violence incident rates, with two Councils (Mitchell and Hume) experiencing family violence incidents that are substantially above state incident rates.¹

¹ NCA Family Violence Data 20/4/22, Presentation: Mitchell Shire



Council	Family violence rate
Mitchell	2,515.5
Hume	1,696.9
VICTORIA	1,399.3
Whittlesea	1,384.6
Darebin	1,133.6
Merri-bek	1,036.2
Banyule	1,033.0
Nillumbik	779.5

Melbourne's north is growing and changing. Today the region is home to over one million people. Even the most conservative forecasting has its overall growth increasing by around 44 per cent by 2036. By then, the regional population will be just under 1.5 million people, with most new residents accommodated across the northern growth corridor.

This region is known for its diversity. A total of 35 per cent of residents speak a second language, approximately 30 per cent were born overseas in non-English speaking countries, 40 per cent of the population are under the age of 29 and 60 per cent are of working age.

Councils from Melbourne's north are united in addressing the primary or underlying drivers of family violence. Our Watch, the national leader in the primary prevention of violence against women and their children, confirms there is an explicit link between levels of family violence and gender equity (or a lack of gender equity).

Addressing gender inequity presents many opportunities to improve relative and systematic disadvantage, and create system change for the current and next generation. Building community resilience, particularly in new and emerging communities, is important for the liveability and connectedness of communities. Growth Councils recognise that the physical, social and economic facilities and infrastructure services are not yet established when families first being to move into new growth areas.



Changing the landscape: putting the prevention of violence against women and children, and children and young people's wellbeing, first

Action

Fund four-year positions at each Council to establish a Northern Councils Violence-Free Team that will coordinate and streamline early intervention for family violence support services, with a focus on co-design of a multi-agency response.

Commit to increase funding for direct service provision focused on:

- child and family wellbeing
- men's behaviour change
- recovery response for victims.

The need

Councils across Melbourne's north want to build better systems to support early intervention and increase the wellbeing of children and young people. Service responses to support children, young people and their families are different to historical responses from Child First. Communities in the north are changing, and it is time to invest in, evaluate and improve the current system.

Councils want better co-designed integration, collaboration, and risk and safety management to ensure that family violence risk, safety and client outcomes are optimised for their communities. They want to work with all services, including family violence, homelessness and mental health, to prepare for the changes that are coming for current and future communities.

The shared focus is on co-design that will strengthen the service system across the region, including timely access to early interventions. Children and young people, family violence victim survivors and those who choose to use violence must be able to access timely support close to their homes.

Councils have identified that a co-designed and coordinated process will enable better integration and ultimately support families and children who are at risk of family violence.

A commitment to increase funding for co-designed service provision and a coordinated approach for local government pathways into family violence services (including The Orange Door) across Melbourne's north, will enable:

- early intervention for child and family wellbeing, and victim/survivor support
- behaviour change programs for perpetrators
- multi-agency risk assessment and pathways, through Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management (MARAM) alignment across all organisations and services
- system change intervention programs within each Council.



A commitment is sought from Family Safety Victoria to partner in co-designing with the seven councils that are served by The Orange Door (Northern and Goulburn) early intervention programs, men's change management, multi-agency risk assessment and pathways through MARAM alignment.

The investment

Northern Councils Violence-Free: 1 FTE \$120,000 x 7 Councils x 4 years = \$3,360,000

Commitment to improving the service system and direct service provision in each of the seven Council areas (not costed)

Achieving Gender Equity Action Plans and Gender Impact Assessments

Action

Fund four-year positions at each of the seven Councils in Melbourne's north to deliver on GEAPS and GIAs

The need

Local government is committed to driving gender equity and addressing systemic disadvantage. Increased gender equity will positively impact the levels of family violence present in the community.

Councils have legislative obligations to develop and deliver GEAPS and GIAs but are not funded to deliver on this critical work. Without adequate funding, GEAP and GIA goals will not be achieved and family violence will not be reduced.

Committed to the goals of gender equity and reducing family violence, the seven Councils in Melbourne's north have endorsed their GEAPs without funding. Significant work to progress GIAs is now required and is critical to breaking the cycle of structural and systemic discrimination and gender inequality that drives violence against women and children. This work will also support diversity and inclusion across communities. Without adequate funding, GIAs will be a missed opportunity to change the fabric of society and support gender equity. The ask is for a funded resource at each Council to work on local GIAs and to form a community of practice that will analyse all seven GEAPs and continue to collaborate on efforts.

Also, Free from Violence funding must be ongoing. Free from Violence is Victoria's 10-year plan to break the cycle of family violence and violence against women. This funding is essential to support localised family violence primary prevention activity and can be pursued as part of broader project work.

The investment

Gender impact initiative for Melbourne's north: 1 FTE \$120,000 x 7 Councils x 4 years = \$3,368,000