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# gh time for change

By EMMA WATSON

GIPPSLAND representatives are relieved the once hidden issue of family violence has been brought into the open.

After 13 months, spending \$13.5 million and hearing from hundreds of victims and experts, Australia's first Royal Commission into Family Violence last week handed down 227 recommendations to tackle family violence in Victoria.

The State Government has promised to implement all of them.

"The report's fantastic - the devil's now in the detail," Quantum Support Services chief executive Alan Wilson said.

"It's ticking all the right boxes; we certainly see it's addressed, so far, all of the issues we've raised."

The commission's report comes as the Latrobe Valley continues to top the state list of recorded family violence incidents at a rate of 3387.6 per 100,000 population, according to Crime Statistics Agency

That is an increase of 18.7 per cent between December 2014 and December

Although Mr Wilson believes that's a conservative jump, he said it was now a matter of working both locally and with the wider sector to support the growing demand for services.

Gippsland family violence regional integration coordinator Kerry Hamer and Latrobe City Council staff are also keen to see a new model focus on education, prevention and the complexity of regional demographics.

As part of the recommendations, a one-stop safety hub for victims will be set up in 17 areas across the state.

These centres will receive referrals, perform risk assessments and provide access to relevant and nearby services, including specialist support and links to crisis accommodation.

A central information point will prioritise victim safety over privacy, allowing police, the courts, government departments and family violence sup-port services to share information about perpetrators.

Additional funding will be given to family violence support services and after-hours responses, to have the capacity for face-to-face crisis responses when

Victims will be better supported to safely stay or return home, and the perpetrator to leave where possible.

More crisis or emergency accommodation will be made available; behavioural change programs will be reviewed and funded to meet demand; and public hospitals will be resourced to implement a whole-of-hospital response model.

The report acknowledges not all violence is perpetrated by men against women or children, but points to data that shows the overwhelming majority of violence is.

 To see how local groups responded to the commission's report, turn to page 4.



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news

#### **ROYAL COMMISSION INTO FAMILY VIOLENCE**

### The women's health group

GIPPSLAND'S family violence regional integration coordinator is excited about the future.

Kerry Hamer, based at Gippsland Women's Health Service, said the royal commissioners tasked with investigating family violence across the state had "joined the dots" and "listened to where all the gaps" existed.

"We have had some Australianwide policies and worldwide policies around family violence, but I really feel the Royal Commission was necessary," Ms Hamer said.

"It needed to look at what we bring together and join the dots around the gaps of family violence."

She said the provision of stable housing that would allow victims to move past family violence and avoid poverty had been a challenge for some time.

But she felt confident a housing taskforce, at the Royal Commission's recommendation, could address "blockages in the system".



"This is a big step forward," Ms Hamer said.

"That again was a blocker to how we help women. Sometimes women would go back into a violent situation, because they had nowhere to live. This will again address one of those problems." Ms Hamer said the Royal Commission's 227 recommendations demonstrated a state-wide approach that would prioritise regional, rural areas and focus on prevention.

news@lvexpress.com.au

She described the proposed hubs - to take on a centralised intake role in 17 areas across Victoria - as a real commitment to better resourcing a sector that's long been grappling with growing demand.

Ms Hamer highlighted plans to change privacy laws so victims' safety was not impeded, to extend Victoria's specialist family violence courts and to introduce mandatory qualifications for specialist family violence practitioners.

She acknowledged these changes would not occur overnight, as indicated in the staged approach.

But she was gratified to see an emphasis on "educating people about what is family violence and what is not acceptable, to change the culture of family violence and to change a generational thing".

## The local government

LATROBE City Council's community development manager, Steve Tong, said it would be naive of council to think the region's high rates of family violence did not apply to its staff.

That is why his team and Latrobe City chief executive Gary Van Driel took notice when the Royal Commission last week handed down 227 recommendations to effectively address family violence across the state.

"When things come into the light we can deal with them," Mr Tong said.

Mr Tong said.
"That is the best thing about

this Royal Commission - it is being taken seriously and it's allowing the conversation to be had in the community. The facts are appalling and we all need to face up as a community to those facts."

Latrobe City recently introduced family violence policies into its enterprise agreement, has long participated in White Ribbon Day and last year took part in a campaign highlighting ways to combat gendered violence.

Council is part of local family violence prevention networks and is looking to provide a family violence mentoring program for the community.

It is also developing a family violence prevention strategy that looks at ways the local government can contribute to stemming the current tide.

Mr Van Driel described this approach as multi-pronged, with a focus on supporting locals to call out gendered violence or sexist attitudes.

While Mr Tong admitted council was not a victim support service, he said it aimed to influence the community to be "less tolerant of all forms of violence".

## The support service provider

THE primary family violence crisis and outreach provider for Latrobe, Baw Baw and Wellington has been overwhelmed by the sheer demand for its services in successive years.

In the 2014/15 financial year Quantum Support Services received about 2800 police referrals - an average of 230 a month.

From 1 July last year to the third week of March, it received 2784 referrals.

That figure - an average of about 350 a month - is pointing to a jump of more than 30 per cent. "From the sector's point of view,

"From the sector's point of view, our challenge has been dealing with the sheer demand and volume," Quantum chief executive Alan Wilson said.

Alan Wilson said.
"At the same time we've

**TRARALGON** 

actually been trying to work proactively with organisations, local government and other business leaders about having the conversations in the community about family violence and what can we do about it."

Mr Wilson said the Royal Commission's report into family violence - boasting some 2000-plus pages - reflected the complexity of the issue.

complexity of the issue.

He and Quantum project worker Alex Millar were pleased most of the issues they'd raised in their submission appeared to have been addressed.

"It's reassuring in the report there's talk of flexibility and that there will be a greater emphasis on local solutions. In a regional setting that's really important," Ms Millar said.

"In an urban one, one size may fit all. But we have a lot of additional things to consider. We need that flexibility, so we're encouraged that that growth, that flexibility, will be built into the system and how we can respond."

Mr Wilson was particularly pleased with the removal of 'red tape' in regards to changing addresses, waiving fines or moving names off billed accounts.

However, he is keen to see how certain recommendations will be implemented, such as the one-stop safety hub to be established in 17 areas.

"The concept sounds wonderful, but how do you apply that in a rural setting as opposed to a metro setting?" Mr Wilson said.

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