



PLV Statement on Domestic and Family Violence

Public Libraries Victoria (PLV) is the voice of Victorian public libraries. PLV leads, shapes and represents the interests of Victoria's 47 public library services and the communities they serve – including the 34 library services operated by individual councils, 11 regional library corporations which provide services for a number of councils, one shared library service operated by the City of Ballarat for itself and six other municipalities, and the Vision Australia Information and Library Service which provides services to the print-impaired.

A united stand against domestic and family violence

Australian governments at all levels are taking a stand against domestic and family violence.

The Commonwealth, state and territory governments have worked with the community to develop a 12-year *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022*. The National Plan's Third Action Plan was launched by the Prime Minister in October 2016, and sets out an ambitious agenda that, with the support of key stakeholders and the community, aims to substantially reduce domestic, family and sexual violence in Australia.

The Victorian *Royal Commission into Family Violence* delivered its report in March 2016 after a 13-month inquiry into how to effectively prevent family violence, improve early intervention, support the victims of family violence and make the perpetrators accountable. The Royal Commission's report identifies strategies to better coordinate community and government responses to family violence, and ways to better evaluate and measure strategies, frameworks, policies, programs and services.

The Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) and local governments across the state are participating in national and state initiatives, and developing local strategies to engage their community in conversations about prevention of domestic and family violence.

Public libraries against domestic and family violence

Public libraries have not, to date, had a formal role in preventing and responding to domestic and family violence – two of the four main focus areas identified by the Royal Commission. However, public libraries possess attributes that provide practical support to the victims of family violence. That is, public libraries are accessible, safe, private, connected, informative and aware.

Accessible. Victoria has a network of 275 public library branches across the state, with 30 mobile libraries that regularly visit hundreds of other small communities. While some branches are only open for a few hours a week, libraries in more populated areas are often open 8 to 12 hours a day during the week, and also open on weekends. Collectively, Victoria's public library network provides almost unparalleled reach and access to a secure public space.

Safe. Public libraries have a community-wide reputation as being a safe welcoming place. They are open to all, free to enter and demand nothing. They are busy community spaces, served by library staff and populated by library users of all ages. They are warm in winter and cool in summer, and a place where communities come together in times of celebration and emergency. Public libraries are also neutral places, open to all. As places for community learning, activity and reflection everyone has a reason to go to the library.

Private. Public libraries offer free access to computers, mobile devices and the internet. Every day tens of thousands of Victorians use library computers to email, communicate, search the internet and access information. They do so without the fear that someone else can see and monitor their search history and web logs. Privacy is assured.

Connected. Many public libraries are located in activity centres – close to shops, banks, cafes and other community agencies. Increasingly, public libraries are collaborating and have formal relationships with a variety of education, information, government and community organisations to inform, promote and facilitate streamlined access to services. Many people come to the library with questions about what services are available and how they can access them, with the library becoming a vital point of connection and referral.

Informative. Libraries have a wide range of materials including books, magazines and online resources that can help people find the assistance they need and also help with coping strategies and life skills. Their collections and programs support capacity building and resilience. Library staff are called upon to provide information about support services and offer referrals to specialised agencies.

Aware. Libraries are involved with awareness raising about family violence in the community including participating in the *One Million Stars to end Violence* Program which is an art installation that will be featured during the Gold Coast 2018 Commonwealth Games.

Victoria's public libraries are all of these things now, and there are examples where libraries are already acting as a place of respite for families experiencing violence and hardship. In the future, without compromising these qualities, there is the potential for the role of public libraries in preventing and responding to family violence to be strengthened to address shortcomings in system capacity and service coordination acknowledged by the Royal Commission.

"We have an opportunity to transform the way in which we address family violence in Victoria. This will require new ways of thinking and collaborating." (Royal Commission into Family Violence)

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