



## Family Violence and Sexual Assault Reforms

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# Background

- Women's Safety Strategy;
- Victoria Police Violence Against Women Strategy;
- Statewide Steering Committees comprised of Government, judicial and sector stakeholders;
- Victorian Law Reform Commission Reports

# Why is family violence reform needed

- Reporting to police increasing by 45% over previous 3 years.
- Demand for services exceeding supply.
- Repeat incidence rate 30-60%.
- Children present at 65% of Victoria police attendances (40% under 4 years of age).
- Economic cost to Australia \$8 bill p.a - \$2bill p.a Victoria

## Aims of a reformed system

- Increased safety for women and children
- Improved accountability for those who use violence
- Supporting women's right to have control over their lives and future

# Reform Initiatives

- Victoria Police Code of Practice
- 10 Family Violence Advisors
- Police holding powers
- Family Violence Court Division at 2 Court sites
- Family Violence Court Intervention Project (mandated men's behaviour change)
- Family Violence Specialist Services - at 3 Court sites
- Male Adolescents at Risk Project

# Reform Initiatives

- Enhanced support for women and women with children, experiencing family violence
  - Outreach support
  - Increased after-hours support
  - Intensive case management
  - Women's and Children's Support Programs
- Housing options for Women
  - Private rental brokerage and support
  - Short term crisis accommodation

# Reform Initiatives

- Housing options for men
  - Short term crisis accommodation for men - an intervention order with an exclusion provision
- Men's Referral Service
- Men's Behaviour Change Services

# Reform Initiatives

- Workforce development
- Risk Assessment Framework
- Family Violence Legislation
- Prevention Framework

# System Leadership

- Five Ministers overseeing reform
- Responsibility with lead Government agency
- Interdepartmental Committee
- Partnership between Government and non Government sectors
- Regional/subregional integrated partnerships

# Indigenous Family Violence

Indigenous women are:

- five times more likely to call police to attend a family violence incident;
- 20% more likely to call police to re-attend subsequent incidents; and

Family violence is present in 64% of notified cases of Indigenous child abuse. Indigenous children are around 10 times more likely to be victims of abuse – usually emotional abuse or neglect.

# Indigenous Family Violence Strategy

- Ten Indigenous Family Violence Regional Action Groups
- Community Initiative Fund
- Four Healing and Four Time Out Services
- Culturally competent mainstream services
- Indigenous Family Violence Partnership Forum

# Sexual Assault Reform in Victoria

*Mid 1990's - only one quarter of defence and prosecution solicitors & barristers and magistrates would unconditionally advise a rape victim to report the incident to police (Rape Law Reform Evaluation Project)*

*2003 - Only one third of judicial officers and lawyers interviewed would want their child to use the justice system if the child was sexually assaulted. (The experiences of the child complainants of sexual abuse in the criminal justice system. Australian Institute of Criminology, Trends and Issues No 250 (2003))*

*'It took me longer to get over the court experience than the actual rape' (VLRC, Sexual Offences Interim Report, 2003)*

# Background

- 2006-07 Budget: \$34.2 million to the Sexual Assault Reform Package
- Implements recommendations from the 2004 Victorian Law Reform Commission Report *Sexual Offences: Law and Procedures*
- System wide reform
- Additional initiatives (not funded through the package) add strength to systemic approach

# Aim & Objectives

## **Aim**

- To improve the effectiveness of the system response to sexual offending and victims of sexual assault

## **Outcomes**

- Improved criminal justice experience for complainants and those accused of sexual assault
- Improved health outcomes for sexual assault victims
- Increased reporting rate of sexual assault
- Decreased attrition rate in sexual assault complaints
- Reduced rates of appeal/re-trial in sexual assault cases
- Improved effectiveness of system response to sex offenders and those accused of sexual offending

# Legislative reforms

- Crimes (Sexual Offences) Act 2006
- Crimes (Sexual Offences) Further Amendment Act 2006

## Improved criminal justice system response to sexual assault cases

### **Multidisciplinary Centres for Sexual Assault**

- Specialised police investigation units (SOCITs)
- Forensic medical examinations
- Counselling services from CASAs
- Two centres Frankston and Mildura

### **Specialist prosecutors at the OPP**

- Specialist sex offences unit
- Training program

# Improved criminal justice system response to sexual assault cases

## **Specialist sex offences court lists**

- Melbourne Magistrate's Court and County Court
- More efficient trial process, more responsive to the needs of participants
- Expansion to regional areas

## **Education- Judicial College of Victoria**

- Sexual assault manual for use by the judiciary, legal practitioners, court staff and the general public.  
Available online at <http://www.judicialcollege.vic.edu.au>
- Legal education program

# Improved support for sexual assault victims

## **Victim's Charter**

- Treating victims with courtesy, respect and dignity
- Victims' information needs
- Victims' entitlements

## **Child Witness Service**

- Specialist support to child witnesses and their families whilst they are providing evidence in court proceedings
- Will allow child witnesses to give evidence at the service via CCTV
- Located in Melbourne with regional services to follow

# Improved support for sexual assault victims

## **Sexual assault support services**

- Enhanced funding for existing counselling services
- New rural sexual assault crisis care
- Workforce development for sexual assault agencies

## **Forensic Nurses (Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine)**

- Specialist nurses trained for forensic examinations
- 14 students commenced the Graduate Certificate of Nursing (Forensic) at Monash University in March 2007, and will commence work in March 2008

# Prevention and early intervention of sexual assault

## **Sexual assault treatment programmes**

- Early identification and treatment of children under 10 displaying concerning sexual behaviour
- Young people aged 10 years to 14 years engaging in sexually abusive behaviour towards other
- Young persons aged 15 to 18 years old displaying inappropriate sexualised behaviour

# Prevention and early intervention of sexual assault

## **Community safety and sex offenders**

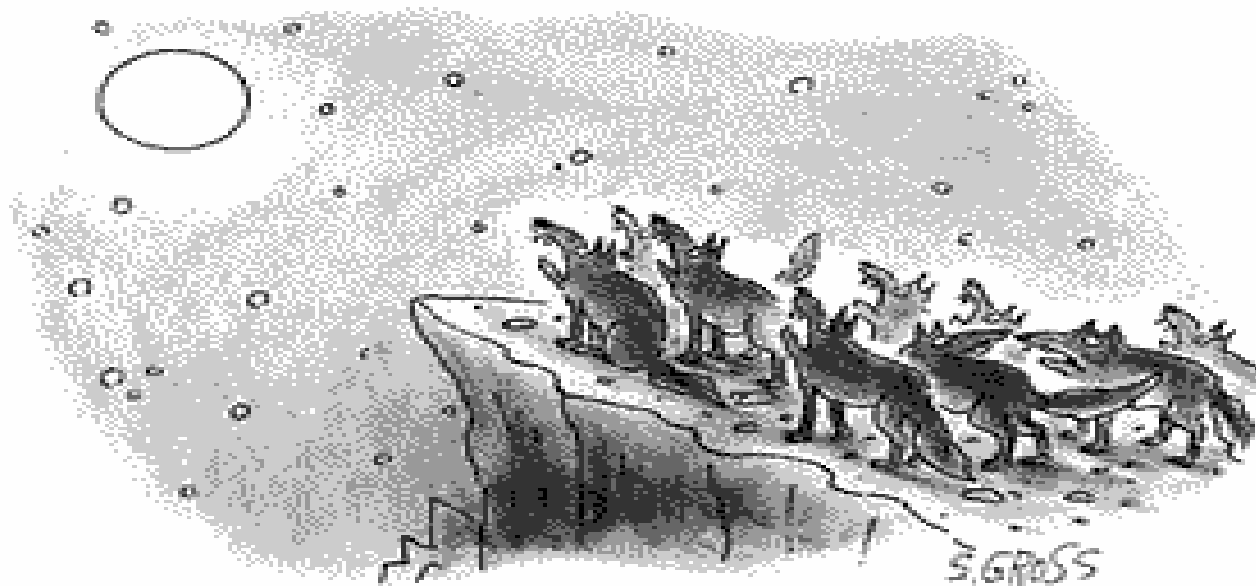
- Voluntary treatment program service delivery model
- Extended supervision capacity for offenders on Extended Supervision Orders
- Post-release support programs and housing for offenders

## Governance and coordination

- Sexual Assault Advisory Committee, chaired by Secretary, Department of Justice
- Statewide Steering Committee to Reduce Sexual Assault, chaired by Victoria Police and Office of Women's Policy
- Coordination by Department of Justice

# Drivers for the Reforms

## Working Together is Rocket Science



*"My question is: Are we making an impact?"*