



MEDIA RELEASE

Ombudsman finds gaps in WA response to family violence

More than 60 per cent of 388 family and domestic violence incidents reviewed by the Ombudsman were assessed as posing a high risk of serious harm, yet only 2.5% were escalated for coordinated multi-agency intervention, according to a major report tabled in State Parliament today.

The WA Ombudsman's Review of Family and Domestic Violence in Western Australia examined how government agencies respond after police attend family and domestic violence incidents. It found that processes to identify high risk cases and respond appropriately are not always being followed.

WA Ombudsman Bevan Warner said the findings highlight significant gaps in how agencies coordinate their response to family and domestic violence.

"More people than ever are coming forward in need of protection and response teams are operating in a challenging and high-demand environment. This makes following settled procedures for assessing and acting on risk even more important."

"A key finding of this review is that the Department of Communities and WA Police must be united and working from the same script when assessing risk." Mr Warner said.

The report focuses on the operation of Family and Domestic Violence Response Teams (FDVRTs), multi-agency teams intended to ensure victim-survivors receive timely support and that people who use violence are held accountable.

Key findings include:

- 24% of required risk questions were recorded as unstated or unknown, by Police.
- 61% of cases reviewed met the threshold for high risk of serious harm, but only 2.5% were escalated for extra support and coordinated multi-agency case management.
- Children were present in 40% of incidents but many received no individualised support.
- Perpetrator accountability is still lacking with one perpetrator involved in 81 incidents.

"We have a system that is not working to support victims as well as it should."

"The system relies on risk-based planning and support services need reliable risk assessments to help keep victim survivors safe." Mr Warner said.

The review also drew on insights from the Ombudsman's examination of 237 family and domestic violence fatalities since 2012.

“Our fatality reviews show that many of the warning signs are known before a death occurs. The purpose of this work is to identify those warning signs and strengthen the system so future tragedies can be prevented.”

“Each death represents a devastating loss for families and communities. The responsibility of government agencies is to learn everything possible from those tragedies, so they are less likely to occur again.”

Aboriginal people make up 35% of all FDV fatality victims yet make up just 3.3% of WA’s population.

“This should never be normalised, and solutions will only be found by working authentically with Aboriginal communities.” Mr Warner said.

The report makes nine recommendations aimed at strengthening Western Australia’s response to family and domestic violence.

These include improving how risk is assessed and recorded, ensuring high-risk cases are escalated for coordinated intervention, strengthening responses for children and vulnerable groups, improving data systems and increasing accountability for people who use violence.

“The recommendations in this report are designed to help build a safer and more effective response system for West Australians,” said Mr Warner.

“My office will continue to monitor and report on agencies’ progress to implement the recommendations.”

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