

Ombudsman's Foreword

As Western Australian Ombudsman, I undertake an important responsibility to review family and domestic violence fatalities. Arising from this work, I identified the need to undertake a major own motion investigation into issues associated with violence restraining orders (**VROs**) and their relationship with family and domestic violence fatalities.

To undertake the investigation, in addition to an extensive literature review and stakeholder engagement, my office collected and analysed a comprehensive set of de-identified state-wide data relevant to family and domestic violence and examined 30 family and domestic violence fatalities notified to the Ombudsman.

I have found that a range of work has been undertaken by state government departments and authorities to administer their relevant legislative responsibilities, including their responsibilities arising from the *Restraining Orders Act 1997*. I have found, however, that there is important further work that should be done. This work, detailed in the findings of this report, includes a range of important opportunities for improvement for state government departments and authorities, working individually and collectively, across all stages of the VRO process. I have also found that Aboriginal Western Australians are significantly overrepresented as victims of family violence, yet underrepresented in the use of VROs. Following from this, I have identified that a separate strategy, specifically tailored to preventing and reducing Aboriginal family violence, should be developed. This strategy should actively invite and encourage the full involvement of Aboriginal people in its development and be comprehensively informed by Aboriginal culture.

Furthermore, this investigation has identified nine key principles for state government departments and authorities to apply when responding to family and domestic violence and in administering the *Restraining Orders Act 1997*. Applying these principles will enable state government departments and authorities to have the greatest impact on preventing and reducing family and domestic violence and related fatalities.

Arising from my findings, I have made 54 recommendations to four government agencies about ways to prevent or reduce family and domestic violence fatalities. I am very pleased that each agency has agreed to these recommendations and has, more generally, been highly co-operative, responsive and positively engaged with our investigation.

Importantly, my office will actively monitor the implementation of these recommendations and report to Parliament the results of this monitoring.

In undertaking this investigation, I acknowledge the employees of state government departments and authorities, including police officers and child protection workers, as well as non-government organisations, who, on a day to day basis, work to keep victims safe and hold perpetrators accountable.

Finally, I acknowledge, and express my deepest sympathy to, the families and communities who have been affected by family and domestic violence fatalities in Western Australia. Throughout this report we have sought to ensure that the victims of family and domestic violence are heard, including through a number of case studies titled 'A victim's voice'.