

In Confidence

Office of the Minister of Justice

Office of the Parliamentary Under-Secretary to the Minister of Justice (Domestic and Sexual Violence Issues)

Chair, Cabinet Business Committee

Action plan for family violence and sexual violence in response to COVID-19

Proposal

- 1 This paper seeks agreement from the Cabinet Business Committee for the Joint Venture on Family Violence and Sexual Violence to undertake key actions now to minimise the impact of any violence which could occur over the pandemic response period.

Background

- 2 In 2018 a Joint Venture of the Social Wellbeing Board was established to bring ten government agencies together to work in new ways to reduce family violence, sexual violence and violence within whānau. Its role is to lead, integrate and provide support for everyone involved, to ensure an effective, whole-of-government response to family violence and sexual violence. The Joint Venture (JV) consists of the Ministry of Social Development (MSD), ACC, Ministry of Health, Te Puni Kōkiri (TPK), Department of Corrections (Corrections), Ministry of Justice (MoJ), Police, Oranga Tamariki (OT), Ministry of Education and the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.
- 3 Evidence indicates that family violence and sexual violence (FVSV) escalates in times of crisis, including isolation. For example, in France there was a 30 percent increase in police call outs, and other countries facing isolation are also showing increases in call outs to FVSV episodes. The nature of FVSV means that people may not be able to contact the authorities or access the support they need because it is not safe to do so from the place they are isolated. In time, services may become less accessible (e.g. offices are closed, phonedines are busy, staffing is reduced, or service providers lack equipment). This is not the case so far in New Zealand, where most NGOs report they are able to provide the service and have adapted swiftly to remote modes of delivery. Their funding has been secured through Cabinet and through baselines.
- 4 It is too early to determine the impact COVID-19 has had on FVSV episodes (the rate and severity). In various parts of the system there are reports of fluctuations, for example in police call outs. Some NGOs are just now detecting an increase in demand. Interim Te Rōpū (ITR) has signalled an increase in FVSV for their member organisations. The JV would expect some lag and demand is likely to increase as we intensify FVSV messaging and access to help. The JV has concerns about the potential exacerbation of underreporting of FVSV episodes, especially for cases of child abuse. The JV is also considering how withdrawals from alcohol and other drugs could lead to an escalation in FVSV.
- 5 There is an increased probability that children and young people will take additional risks when online for longer periods at home, like accessing or viewing inappropriate content such as online pornography. The largest online pornography site (Pornhub) has shown an increase in usage in New Zealand, and other countries, as we moved into Alert Level 4. This usage is up over the same period last year.

- 6 The JV is building a system dashboard based on data to understand how COVID-19 is impacting across the FVSV system. This is a key tool to inform our response and make sure government is targeting messages and supports where they are most needed and better prepare the sector. The dashboard will evolve as we obtain more data and information and start to identify trends over time. Its value will extend beyond the current pandemic period as it will continue to provide an evidence base for the work of the JV. The JV will provide the system dashboard to FVSV Ministers on a regular basis.
- 7 The JV is working with MSD who are leading the all-of-Government response for Cabinet on the social impacts of COVID-19 self-isolation measures.
- 8 The JV is working within the broader COVID-19 response to complement actions and reduce any FVSV. The main focus is through the Welfare Pillar, which is connected with the Civil Defence Emergency Management (CDEM) local emergency responses. The JV has a newly formed COVID-19 NGO sector representative group, the ITR and issue triage system that connects us with data, information and initiatives from within the sector in real time. All work the JV does is designed to complement and not take resources away from the highest priority COVID-19 essential services.

The Joint Venture already has important work underway to support the COVID-19 response

- 9 Since 23 March 2020, the JV has already developed COVID-19 core messages about where people can access support, while also ensuring that:
 - 9.1 FVSV responses are considered an essential service and guidance for FVSV workers during level 4 is developed
 - 9.2 \$12 million has been available for existing FVSV services, alongside repurposing many existing FVSV contracts with NGOs, to ensure those services can operate during the lockdown
 - 9.3 vulnerable people can access funding they need
 - 9.4 there is nationwide access to the Hey Bro helpline (to support men to be violence-free) and information on all help lines accessible
 - 9.5 there are dedicated resources for crisis intervention
 - 9.6 funding within the Whānau Centred Facilitation Initiative is reoriented towards whānau with medium risk of FVSV
 - 9.7 there is support for people's psychosocial, mental health and wellbeing needs
 - 9.8 data and information flows help give us real-time information and insight.

The Joint Venture recommends further priority actions for the Government to take now and over the next three to six months, building on the work already being done by agencies

- 10 Intelligence from agencies and the sector suggests there are several key actions that the Government could take now and over the pandemic response period to minimise the impact of any violence which could occur. Isolation can exacerbate family violence situations for the more vulnerable members of our communities, such as seniors/older New Zealanders whose situations may also be increasingly difficult due to their vulnerability to COVID-19. The aim of identifying the six areas of action is to enable alignment across government's response to COVID-19 in relation to reducing the impact of violence. Each action area will look into who is

particularly at risk and what is needed to support the different cohorts and communities that make up our society. This work will need to continue in the months following the alert level 4 response, given the short to medium term impact COVID-19 will have on people's lives.

11 These insights particularly relate to:

11.1 increasing the focus on prevention and early intervention, including messages about promoting the right behaviours and supporting people to ask for help as well as for people to provide help -

11.1.1 The JV hears that people in violent situations may not be able to safely access helplines.

11.1.2 There is also greater stress on families as the lockdown affects people's mental health and economic circumstances, which increases the risk of violence over the coming weeks, and this increase in risk may continue after the lockdown period while people continue to adjust to the social and economic impact of COVID-19.

11.1.3 Children and young people may become particularly vulnerable, especially to underreported abuse, online predatory behaviours and witnessing violence in the home.

11.2 providing direct support at the time of crisis and immediately afterwards, including the need for essential supplies

11.2.1 The NGO sector informs us that there are immediate material needs related to FVSV episodes, such as access to emergency housing, sanitation products, clothing and food.

12 The initial actions taken to respond to COVID-19 have been effective in reaching many people in various situations. However large gaps have been identified during this process revealing that there is a lack of recognition of the increased risks to our senior/older New Zealanders in our overall response to FVSV and particularly during COVID-19 restrictions.

13 We seek your agreement to direct the JV to build upon existing FVSV work to undertake six key actions that respond to emerging information about what people, families, whānau and communities need during this time. The coordinated approach across the JV will enable a coherent approach that can agilely work to address the significant risks of FVSV during the COVID-19 alert levels and subsequent months.

Action 1: Prevention

14 The JV proposes coordinating existing or potential FVSV prevention campaigns as part of COVID-19 messaging at all alert levels, to ensure there is targeted information to people at risk of using or experiencing violence (Māori, Pacific, parents, children and young people, seniors and disabled people) to promote services, discuss healthy and safe relationships, encourage help-seeking and help-giving, and with the support of community led campaigns.

15 There are already a range of proposed and current campaigns that exist across government including:

15.1 '#CatchYourself – Respect your bubble' by Le Va is delivering a Pasifika focussed social media campaign during alert level 4 to ensure people 'stop things from getting out of hand' and to maintain healthy and respectful relationships in their bubble.

15.2 OT's SKIP (Strategies for Kids Information for Parents) which provides encouragement through positive parenting.

s9(2)(f)(iv)

16 The JV will coordinate across the government agencies to ensure there is a consistency of messaging from current and proposed campaigns and there is a strong theme encouraging 'help seeking'. s9(2)(g)(i)

Action 2: Early intervention: Guidance for frontline staff

17 The JV will develop further guidance and resources for the front-line emergency workforce, to complement the COVID-19 response.

18 MSD has worked with the Pandemic Working Group along with other JV agencies to develop draft guidance for frontline FVSV workers to use during alert level 4. The guidelines developed cover a range of topics, including health and safety practices, Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), staff wellbeing, safe houses, Police Safety Orders (PSO), and children in shared care.

19 OT and Police have also been providing guidance to their frontline staff during this time.

20 CDEM has also been conducting outbound calls and staff undertaking these are provided with guidance on referrals to services should someone raise a safety concern during these calls.

21 The JV will also develop guidance for the FVSV workforce to use under different alert levels to further support this work.

Action 3: Early Intervention: Link FVSV services with other essential services

22 It is important that the response to FVSV is also connected up with other essential services to ensure those who are experiencing or at risk of family or sexual violence can get a full range of support.

23 CDEM is coordinating essential services locally and across regions, and many community providers are likely to be already connecting FVSV services with essential services.

24 The JV will initially get a clear indication of what is already happening to connect FVSV and essential services, and then respond accordingly to facilitating connections where there are gaps.

Action 4: Early Intervention: Resourcing for FVSV

25 Resourcing FVSV crisis intervention agencies, including NGOs and kaupapa Māori providers, to do outreach for vulnerable people and families in relation to FVSV is critical during this time.

26 Additional funding to FVSV services has already been allocated through MSD, ACC, OT and TPK. This includes:

26.1 \$12 million from MSD for essential family violence and sexual violence services providing safety to women, children/whānau and older people. s9(2)(f)(iv)

26.2 MSD is also open to discussions with providers, should they have a need for additional COVID-19 funding. To date, funding has been flexible and able to be used for a range of needs, including alternative accommodation, ad-hoc support (e.g. groceries), phone credit, and funding for alternative ways of working which reduce face-to-face contact.

26.3 The MSD Community Awareness and Preparedness Grant Fund supports community outreach to vulnerable communities.

26.4 s9(2)(i)

26.5 TPK has reoriented funding within the Whānau Centred Facilitation Initiative. This is targeted towards whānau with medium risk of FVSV.

26.6 OT has allocated \$1.4 million towards increasing the funding rates for providers who work with children in care.

27 Across JV agencies, this action will involve integrating and coordinating resources, which includes developing a national picture of available resources in local communities that may be linked together through local CDEM groups.

Action 5: Supporting the rollout of essential needs packages for those experiencing FVSV

28 CDEM groups are coordinating the provision of essential needs. There are 16 CDEM groups across the country which will begin needs assessments or those requiring urgent help, including with access to food.

29 MSD has also been supporting these organisations where CDEM is unable to help, and prior to CDEM groups' activation.

30 MSD is working with key NGOs to establish best practice guidelines for CDEM in working with foodbanks and food rescue. CDEM is also enabling direct deliveries of food to vulnerable groups, including consideration of Women's Refuge clients who are sole parents and do not find it easy to leave the home.

31 The Community Awareness and Preparedness Grant funded through MSD is being used by community groups to provide packs for vulnerable people. Funding has been used to provide food and care packages, online counselling, and online community support. A large proportion of these grants go to Māori and Pacific peoples.

32 Whānau Ora commissioning agencies are also providing essential packages, including hygiene food and children's packs.

33 Work and Income also provides financial help to people experiencing or at risk of FVSV, such as providing specialist staff to help with:

33.1 benefit payments help with accommodation costs, special needs grants and other assistance

33.2 help to find somewhere to live - including information on housing options in specific areas and, if necessary, an assessment for social housing

33.3 referrals to other support services and agencies.

34 Some people and families may prefer to get assistance through MSD rather than care packages, as it enables them to choose to spend funds on their highest priorities.

35 The JV will ensure efficient action given the number of agencies already operating in this space, which will include performing a stocktake of what is available in order to link FVSV providers to activity underway.

Action 6: Supporting coordination of emergency accommodation in relation to FVSV episodes.

36 Across government there has been an increase in the use of motels as a form of temporary accommodation.

37 The additional funding MSD is providing towards FVSV services can be used flexibly, including for accommodation. MSD has also allocated funding to contribute to a national response to accommodation required when people are issued with a PSO. MSD is coordinating this work together with Ministry of Housing and Urban Development (MHUD) and Police.

38 The All of Government Accommodation and Shelter Group is working through issues around coordination of emergency housing.

39 MSD tracks motel use to ensure agencies know what motels are being used by which agency or client group. This allows government to manage cross-use of motels by various client group.

40 MSD is also working closely with MHUD, Police, Corrections and Women's Refuges to ensure there is enough supply of emergency and transitional housing available for clients who need to self-isolate but may otherwise not have the access to resources. Police and MoJ continue to work together on accommodation solutions for people unable to live at home due to PSO or protection orders.

41 The JV will integrate and coordinate work across agencies in relation to FVSV emergency accommodation, where possible, to ensure a coherent approach.

Contributing actions

42 The JV will explore what data can be captured to provide insights about workforce capacity to support planning for recruitment, retraining and/or redeployment to ensure the workforce for the future.

43 The JV considers that as well as responding to the crisis these actions could contribute to an evidence base about what works for New Zealand in crisis.

44 The JV has a number of initiatives that will contribute to these outcomes under development. These include:

- s9(2)(i) [REDACTED]
- **further investment to support the psychosocial response** - The Ministry of Health is finalising the package of initiatives utilising the \$15 million allocated by the Government to support the psychosocial response. In addition to the *Getting through together* campaign, the package also focuses strongly on ensuring people have free access to trained counsellors.
- **Delivery of Mates & Dates** -TOAH-NNEST Taiwi Caucus is supporting ACC to develop recommendations for safe and appropriate delivery of the Mates & Dates programme and opportunities for the Mates & Dates workforce to upskill or retrain.

Our action plan builds on feedback from the sector

- 45 The JV is working with representatives of FVSV providers, through an ad-hoc working group to develop and deliver these actions. ITR has also provided their view on priorities and will contribute to the action plan.
- 46 The JV considers that these groups will support the initiatives and are prepared to help shape these responses with government.
- 47 The proposed action plan priorities build on the existing FVSV work by the JV, specifically:
- 47.1 two multi-agency Integrated Safety Response (ISR) pilot sites and 14 Whāngaia Ngā Pā Harakeke sites, which are adapting to the COVID-19 circumstances and developing insights
 - 47.2 implementation of the Budget 2019 initiatives within the COVID-19 constraints with a focus on groups at higher risk of experiencing or using FVSV.
- 48 As we move forward under pandemic conditions it is possible that new actions might be identified. Our intention would be to use the mechanisms described in this paper to test and develop these ideas: the NGO working group, agencies own information/tracking, the central COVID-19 structure and Family Violence and Sexual Violence Ministers' considerations. This would help ensure that any new initiatives are carefully considered and are only taken if they are absolutely needed and would be done in a way to align with the core COVID-19 work.

Financial Implications

- 49 The JV will prioritise existing resources to deliver this action plan, working with the wider government response to COVID-19.
- 50 s9(2)(i) [REDACTED]
- 51 MSD is responding to COVID-19 and the potential increase in demand for FVSV services by providing additional funding to providers that deliver essential FVSV services. The providers include Women's Refuges, sexual violence crisis services, perpetrator services and abuse services for older people. MSD is also supporting Māori and Pacific communities through E Tū Whānau and Pasefika Proud networks. These networks provide support and assistance including through pastoral care and care packages.
- 52 OT has allocated \$1.4 million to increase the funding rates for providers who work with children in care.

- 53 There is also cross-government coordination on the management of funding contracts to ensure the continuity of services. For example:
- 53.1 the Department of Corrections has already committed to funding current community programme providers to enable them to continue supporting people that are serving sentences for harmful sexual behaviour against children and for family violence.
 - 53.2 OT will be paying all NGOs until the end of June 2020 as if service delivery had continued at current levels, whether or not they are providing essential services. It will also be maintaining current funding levels to NGOs for these services until December 2020.
 - 53.3 MoJ has guaranteed its funding for providers contracted to deliver non-violence programmes and safety programmes connected to court proceedings until the end of June, regardless of the levels of service delivery.

Timing and Publicity

- 54 We propose that Government deliver and manage all publicity and communications through the COVID-19 channels, in the first instance, supported by the JV.

Consultation

- 55 Several agencies provided feedback on the paper and were generally supportive of the six proposed actions, including the MSD, Office for Seniors, ACC, Ministry of Health, TPK, Corrections, MoJ, Police, OT, Ministry of Education, the State Services Commission, Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, Department of Internal Affairs, and the Ministry of Civil Defence and Emergency Management. The Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet has been informed of this paper.
- 56 The Judiciary and the MOJ are ensuring that all urgent family violence related Family Court services (e.g. parenting orders and protection orders) as well as non-violence and safety programmes remain available. FVSV criminal proceedings are limited to the same essential services as other criminal offences. MoJ is working with other agencies of the JV to support the whole of government response, including meeting emergency accommodation needs for parties to protection orders and people bound by Police Safety Orders.

Recommendation

We recommend that the Committee:

1. **Note** that the evidence indicates there is likely to be an escalation in family violence and sexual violence episodes during the pandemic response period, and there are potential barriers to people reporting episodes to authorities and accessing the support they need
2. **Note** that the Joint Venture is leading government's response to family violence and sexual violence as part of the overall COVID-19 response
3. **Note** that intelligence from agencies and the sector suggests Government could increase the focus on prevention and early intervention for family violence and sexual violence while also providing direct support during the crisis and immediately afterwards

s9(2)(i)

5. **Note** that the Department of Corrections has already committed to funding current community programme providers to enable them to continue supporting people that are serving sentences for harmful sexual behaviour against children and for family violence
6. **Note** that to ensure that essential services continue and can respond to increased demand as a consequence of COVID-19:
 - 6.1. The Ministry of Social Development is providing up to \$12 million to strengthen existing FVSV services delivered by NGOs so they can continue to support individuals, families, whānau and communities at risk through uncertain circumstances and respond to increased demand
 - 6.2. The Ministry of Social Development is providing up to \$3.5 million to support Māori and Pacific Communities through its Etū Whānau and Pacific Proud networks
7. **Direct** the Joint Venture to prioritise the following six actions to minimise the impact of family violence and sexual violence during the response period:
 - 7.1. undertaking a FVSV prevention campaign as part of COVID-19 messaging at all alert levels, with targeted information to audiences (Māori, Pacific, parents, children and young people, seniors and disabled people) to promote services, discuss healthy and safe relationships, encourage help-seeking and help-giving, and with the support of community led campaigns
 - 7.2. providing FVSV guidance and resources to the front-line emergency workforce, to complement the COVID-19 response
 - 7.3. connecting the FVSV response with essential services currently operating
 - 7.4. resourcing FVSV crisis intervention agencies, including NGOs and kaupapa Māori providers, to do outreach for vulnerable families in relation to FVSV, which may involve access to the necessary equipment, workforce capability and guidance
 - 7.5. developing an essential needs pack for people who experience violence (e.g. food, clothing, phone and data, and resources for children and young people)
 - 7.6. coordinating nationally and locally to plan for emergency accommodation in relation to FVSV episodes.

Authorised for lodgement

Hon Andrew Little

Minister of Justice

MP Jan Logie

Parliamentary Under-Secretary to the Minister of Justice (Domestic and Sexual Violence Issues)

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