

## Ten years on: Royal Commission into Family Violence in Victoria.

It's hard to believe 10 years have passed since the landmark [Royal Commission into Family Violence in Victoria](#) handed down its findings along with 227 recommendations in 2016. The long overdue announcement of the first ever Royal Commission into Family Violence in 2015 was welcomed by Annie North and related family violence service providers.

Along with systemic failures, gaps, and inconsistencies across the family violence system, the Royal Commission findings revealed that gendered stereotypes in policy and system responses can replicate the very patterns of power, control and surveillance that feature in the lives of victim-survivors.

Sadly, the catalyst for the Royal Commission was the death of 11-year-old Luke Batty, murdered by his father in 2014. The collective impact Luke's murder had on the national psyche was profound.

The dignity of Luke's mother – Rosie Batty – and her continued high-profile advocacy or the 'Rosie Batty Effect' as it came to be termed, provided the collective public support that had been missing from policy reform efforts up until that time.

Annie North's dedicated team of advocates see first-hand the impact of systemic failures on the lives of women and children fleeing family violence. These failures often act as an extension of the violence and abuse itself, with those using violence exploiting gaps in justice, policing and child protection to maintain power and control. The result is 'systems abuse' - where the legal and support mechanisms meant to protect women and children instead cause secondary victimisation, re-traumatisation and increased physical danger.

As the Royal Commission found, family violence system responses were often limited and frequently held victim-survivors responsible for the management of their safety and that of their children. In contrast, family violence offenders were subject to little accountability or oversight and only became visible in connection to the justice system, or in their brief interactions with police.

“I dealt with police more than you'll ever know.  
I'd been to counselling, so I'm sick of counselling.  
The only thing that people can suggest is you have counselling.  
The only thing Child Protection insisted on was I had counselling  
and Luke had counselling. No one spoke to Greg.  
If he stopped being violent, I wouldn't need the bloody counselling.”  
(Rosie Batty cited in Coronial Inquest, 2015:55).

## Ten years on, what has changed?

As of 2026, the Victorian Government has acquitted all 227 recommendations. Victorian has moved from a fragmented, crisis-driven system to a more integrated prevention and response framework.

Annie North and others have seen investment in the construction of 22 new ‘core and cluster’ refuges - marking a shift away from the communal, shared-house models of the past. These facilities provide a modern, evidence-based approach, offering self-contained, private accommodation with on-site support and security. A ‘sanctuary without secrecy’, where the dignity of residents is paramount, along with their safety.

## Since Annie North’s core and cluster has opened:

- more than 170 women have stayed in refuge accommodation
- more than 195 children have accompanied their mothers in refuge
- 10 babies have been born during a refuge stay
- over 1000 women, and accompanying children (numbers also exceed 1000) have accessed after-hours crisis support, including crisis accommodation, material aid, transport, safety planning and upgrades.

Building on the past 50 years of grassroots advocacy and reform efforts of feminist, First Nations and community-led initiatives, the family violence system - ten years on from the Royal Commission - reflects a number of strategic, operational and cultural commitments to addressing family violence, notably:

- Dedicated agencies and Peak bodies including [Family Safety Victoria](#), [Respect Victoria](#) and [Safe + Equal](#)
- New [child and family violence information sharing schemes](#)
- Expert integration with the creation of the [Victim Survivor Advisory Council \(VSAC\)](#)
- An unprecedented investment of over \$3.8 billion has been allocated, more than all other states and territories combined.

## Victoria now has in place:

- The [Orange Door Network](#) – a multiagency network providing a single point of entry for safety and support.
- [Mandatory Minimum Qualifications](#) for family violence practitioners in Victoria
- The Family Violence Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework ([MARAM](#))
- Aboriginal-led responses through [Dhelk Dja Agreement \(2018-2028\)](#) and tailored services for LGBTIQ+, multicultural and disability communities.
- [Family Violence Flexible Support Packages](#) – tailored financial assistance for victim-survivors.

## Across the justice system:

- [Specialist Family Violence Courts](#) (SFVCs) with 13 currently operational.
- Legislative expansion with the [Justice Legislation Amendment Bill \(2025\)](#)

While significant gains in the provision of culturally owned and led services has occurred, there is still much more to be done to address systemic issues of racism, inequality and injustice experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

As Aboriginal leader and CEO of Djirra - [Antoinette Braybrook AM](#) highlights, First Nation's women:

- Still experience family violence at disproportionate rates relative to the non-Aboriginal population – Aboriginal women are 34 times more likely to be hospitalised due to family violence than non-Aboriginal women, nearly 11 times more likely to die due to assault and face 3-5 times higher rates of physical or sexual violence ([First Nations Advocates Against Family Violence](#)).
- Are misidentified and criminalised for seeking safety ([Djirra, 2024](#)).
- Experience child removal at disproportionate rates to non-Aboriginal population. For example, Aboriginal children are placed in out-of-home care at a rate roughly 18-20 times higher than non-Aboriginal children ([AIHW, 2025](#)).

Funding of Aboriginal-led services does not match demand, and Annie North, along with Djirra and other frontline family violence services have renewed the call for investment in culturally appropriate responses for Aboriginal women and their children, including calls to fund an Aboriginal Women's Centre to match the scale of the crisis.

## Where to next? The next 10 years.

April marked Sexual Assault Awareness month, and May is Family Violence Prevention Month, a time where we should pause and reflect on “what's next” particularly given ongoing leadership and sector challenges.

Experts, including those with lived experience argue that while response systems are stronger, the next decade requires ‘generational work’ in primary prevention and in the promotion of greater social equity.

Annie North remains aspirational and we know that our efforts at the level of prevention and response continue to make a difference to the lives of the women and children we work with, and across the sector more broadly.

We also know firsthand that refuges offer a sanctuary and a place to heal, and that recovery takes time. Yet, the gap between the intensive time needed for recovery and the realities of short-term funding creates distinct operational challenges for both clients and frontline workers. Annie North – like the broader sector – faces immense pressure from burgeoning demand and chronic funding constraints.

While Annie North welcomes increased federal and state government investment in social and community housing; the current housing and affordability crisis represents considerable challenges for frontline family violence services with limited options to sustainably manage the short- and long-term support and safety needs of women and children in crisis.

Importantly, while inter-personal related offences and mortality have shown a downward trend globally over the past two decades, the progress is slow, uneven and remains a significant public health issue. Violence rates against women and children remain high, with some forms of violence such as sexual violence increasing in numbers and severity ([World Health Organisation – WHO, 2025](#)).

The data published by the [Australian Bureau of Statistics \(ABS\)](#) for the 2024-25 financial year does not illustrate an increase in incidents, rather a spike in charges laid against those accused of family violence.

While early analyses of the 2024-25 period are still being finalised, victimisation trends suggest the annual rate of intimate partner homicide in 2024-25 was among the lowest on record.

However, with Victoria's 10-year framework ending in 2026, and in the context of global-political upheaval and uncertainty, there is an urgent need for renewed vision to ensure all the gains achieved do not erode through political drift. As Rosie Batty noted in her 2024 National Press Club address:

*'Even the smallest step forward is a step closer to ending violence – that's progress. Over the past ten years, we have seen thousands of small steps and it's our job to keep up the momentum and keep up hope. Remember that what we're walking towards is a world where all women and children can lead full, happy, productive lives free from the threat of violence.'*

## About Annie North

From its earliest inception almost 40 years ago, Annie North Inc., a secure family violence women's refuge based in Bendigo, Victoria, has advocated for improved system responses, greater sector investment and prevention efforts to address gender-based violence.

Built on grassroots feminist advocacy, Annie North has witnessed first-hand the devastating impacts of family violence on the lives of women and children, and the need for greater system integration and dedicated funding to bolster prevention and response efforts.

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This article was written by Dr Kylie Cocking, Quality and Compliance Lead at Annie North, May 2026 and represents the first article in a series of quarterly leadership reflections published on [Annie North's website](#).