

## Fact Sheet 5: Increase Access to men's behaviour change programs - reducing recidivism

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**Whittlesea Community Futures is seeking State and Federal Government support for dedicated culturally appropriate and language specific men's behaviour change programs and to adjust the Heidelberg Family Violence Court boundaries to include the entire municipality.**

### What is happening right now?

- The rate of family violence in the City of Whittlesea is at a critical new high at 1249 per 100,000 people, compared to 1071 for Victoria<sup>i</sup>. This is the highest rate of reported family violence in the Victoria Police Northern Division 5<sup>ii</sup>.
- Over the past five years the number of incidents reported to police in the Whittlesea LGA has almost doubled (see WCF Family Violence Fact Sheet 1) leading to local agencies declaring family violence a critical public health issue for our community and establishing the Whittlesea Family Violence Taskforce to address this.
- In 2012-13, 2110 family violence incidents were reported to Victoria Police including one homicide (an increase of 35% on the previous year); in 743 of these incidents children were present<sup>iii</sup>;
- An average of 40 incidents of family violence are reported to Victoria Police every week;
- More than half (56%) of all assaults arose from family violence;
- Family violence was the context for 46% of all rapes and 15% of all other sex offences (95% of the victims were female; 100% of the alleged offenders were male)<sup>iv</sup>;
- Berry Street Northern Family and Domestic Violence Service have received significantly more referrals for women (3618) from the Whittlesea municipality than from any other municipality in the northern metropolitan region (NMR);

### Demand for men's behaviour change programs

The Whittlesea municipality has the highest rate of recidivist offending for the Victoria Police Northern Division 5. In September 2013, Victoria Police attended 170 call outs to family violence incidents in the municipality. Of these, 84% were to recidivist addresses (where police have attended three or more times in the past 12 months). However; the Heidelberg Family Violence Court boundaries do not include the entire municipality. Our residents are systemically excluded from court-mandated processes such as participation in behaviour change programs.

Local evidence reveals existing service responses in the municipality are not meeting the complex needs of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse communities experiencing family violence. Thirty-four per cent of residents in the municipality are born overseas and over forty per cent speak a language other than English at home.

The local settlement service Whittlesea Community Connections (WCC), reports that from April 2012 to June 2013, 362 individual clients presented at the service experiencing family

violence. The majority (79%) of these clients reported to the community legal service and for just under half of these clients (44%), this was the first time they had ever reported the violence<sup>v</sup>. WCC are not alone, many agencies anecdotally report similar experiences.

Despite the increasing demand there has not been a proportionate increase to the workforce or, program funding or additional resources in the family violence sector. Already-stretched services supporting women and children and holding men accountable for their violence are unable to continue to offer services. Kildonan Uniting Care has closed its waiting list for the Men’s Behaviour Change Program until February 2014 to deal with the backlog of clients<sup>vi</sup>. Closing this program means they also cannot offer the partner contact, leaving women and children vulnerable to escalating violence as perpetrators assume their behaviour is vindicated. There is limited access to behaviour change programs for CALD men due to cultural or language barriers in mainstream programs.

The Northern Metropolitan Region receives Department of Human Services funding for 127 Men’s Behaviour Change Program positions<sup>vii</sup>. In 2012-13 in this region there were 9861 incidents of family violence reported to police; in the Whittlesea LGA alone there were 2110 incidents. The demand for Men’s Behaviour Change Programs far exceeds the current resources provided to deliver the programs.

### How can we build a better future?

Whittlesea Community Futures requests the State government to:

- i. Increase access to men’s behaviour change programs through funding and dedicated resourcing for culturally appropriate and language specific men’s behaviour change programs.
- ii. Adjust the boundaries of the Heidelberg Family Violence Court to include the entire Whittlesea municipality to enable equitable access for our residents.

### How much will it cost?

Item	Cost (per annum)
Reduced recidivism through increasing access to Men’s Behaviour Change programs	\$126,000
<b>TOTAL (per annum)</b>	<b>\$126,000</b>

Adjust the boundaries of the Heidelberg Family Violence Court to include the entire Whittlesea municipality	<i>As determined by the Department of Justice</i>
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### How will the community benefit?

Including the entire municipality in the Heidelberg Family Violence Court boundaries will enable more equitable access to court mandated counselling orders and behaviour change programs for all perpetrators of family violence and has the potential to reduce the high rates of recidivism. Family violence is an issue for all communities however behaviour change programs for CALD men will have a profound impact on the number of men being held accountable for their violence and ultimately aims to reduce recidivism through engaging these men to change their behaviour.

Family violence occurs in all communities; it is critical to provide specialist family violence services with a CALD focus in the City of Whittlesea given the high CALD population, the current and projected growth rate as well as the geographic isolation of some areas due to the urban/rural interface. The high rates of family violence incidents also require a comprehensive approach to not only address the critical issues arising currently but to position the City of Whittlesea into the future. The cost may be significant in the short-term but the benefits will be extremely beneficial and the programs and proposed changes cost-effective in the long term.

Element	Immediate impacts	Longer term benefits
<b>Reduced recidivism through increasing access to MBC programs</b>	-Inclusive and equitable access to men's behaviour change programs for CALD men	-Reduced recidivism by offenders (and costs associated policing, courts) -Improved supports for women and children through partner-contacts for CALD communities -Safety for women and children -Reduced violence against women and children
<b>Adjust the boundaries of the Heidelberg Family Violence Court to include the entire Whittlesea municipality</b>	-More equitable access for residents in the Whittlesea LGA	-Increased accountability of perpetrators -Reduced recidivism by offenders

### What objectives does this help us to achieve?

#### Federal Government

- National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and Their Children 2010-2022
- National Plan First Action Plan 2010-2013: Building A Strong Foundation

#### Victorian Government

- Everyone Has A Responsibility To Act – Victoria's Action Plan to Address Violence Against Women and Children 2012-2015

#### City of Whittlesea

- Council Plan 2013-2017
- Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2013-2017
- Connect: A municipal plan for children, young people and their families 2013-2018
- Building a Respectful Community A Strategy for the Northern Metropolitan Region 2011-2016
- Department of Justice North Metropolitan Region Regional Community Safety Plan 2011

#### City of Whittlesea

- Whittlesea Community Futures Partnership Action Plan 2011-2016

## Key Messages

- The City of Whittlesea has the highest rate of recidivist family violence offending for its Victoria Police division.
- The majority of the municipality is systematically excluded from mandated counselling orders including men's behaviour change programs due to restrictions on court boundaries.
- The City of Whittlesea has one of the highest reported incidences of family violence in the Northern Metropolitan Region.
- There has been a 249% increase in reported incidences of family violence in the municipality since 1999.
- Family violence in the City of Whittlesea is at an unacceptably high level and will continue to increase as the population grows. The rate of family violence in the City of Whittlesea is 1249 per 100,000 people compared to 1071 for Victoria.
- Over 40% of residents in the municipality speak a language other than English at home, compared to the Melbourne average of 29%.

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<sup>i</sup> Banyule, Darebin, Nillumbik and Whittlesea

<sup>ii</sup> Victoria Police, October 2013

<sup>iii</sup> Department of Justice have now included Epping (3076) and South Morang (3752) in the postcodes for court-mandated counselling orders (November 2013)

<sup>iv</sup> Whittlesea CALD Communities Family Violence Scoping Exercise Report 2012

<sup>v</sup> Whittlesea Community Connections Family Violence Monitor, July 2013

<sup>vi</sup> Kildonan Uniting Care, October 2013

<sup>vii</sup> 91 are allocated to Kildonan Uniting Care; 36 to Plenty Valley Community Health Men's Active Referral Service