

# Royal Commission into Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence

Response to the Issues Paper: Royal Commission into Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence in South Australia | August 2024

## Response summary

AMES Australia (AMES) welcomes the opportunity to provide a response to the Royal Commission into Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence in South Australia.

As a Victorian statutory entity, AMES is established and informed by the Education and Training Reform Act 2006. AMES vision - *Full participation for all in a cohesive and diverse society* - reflects our focus on settlement outcomes for newly arrived individuals and communities, building from their strengths and aspirations.

In addition to our work in Victoria, since October 2017 AMES has held responsibility for the delivery of the Humanitarian Settlement Program (HSP) in South Australia.

AMES has contributed to federal and Victorian state strategies to reduce the prevalence of family, domestic and sexual violence (FDSV) in multicultural communities since 2016 following release of the first National Plan (*National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022*) and in response to Victoria's Royal Commission into Family Violence, when AMES was commissioned by the federal Department of Social Services (DSS) to undertake research on Violence against Women (VAW) in culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities.

The final report "*Violence against women in CALD communities: Understandings and actions to prevent violence against women in CALD communities*"<sup>1</sup> shone a light on the factors contributing to the causes and experiences of FDSV in multicultural communities in Australia and provided a program of action to prevent such violence. The *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2022-2032* further guides the response trajectory for change.

A recent report, *Primary prevention in migrant and refugee communities: Consultation findings*, Our Watch, July 2024, provides a contemporary picture of primary prevention approaches, and focuses on assisting a better understanding of the compounding drivers of racism, sexism and the particular forms of oppression faced by refugee and migrant background women.

AMES HSP is a prescribed service under the Victorian Government's Family Violence Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management (MARAM) Framework developed in response to its Royal Commission into Family Violence. Participating service providers align their policies, procedures, practice guidance and tools to the MARAM framework and report on outcomes.

Within this context, AMES as a leader in Prevention of Violence against Women (PVaW) for newly arrived and established multicultural communities, pursues the prevention of violence by building on an understanding that only deep attitudinal change among all communities living in Australia will shift entrenched behaviour. AMES contributes to the prevention of violence in refugee and multicultural communities by promoting a capacity for change by supporting leadership and action that provides culturally appropriate impact from within communities, while influencing broader mainstream structures and systems to create genuine intersectional inclusiveness for diverse communities.

---

<sup>1</sup> *Violence against women in CALD communities: Understandings and actions to prevent violence against women in CALD communities*, DSS, 2016

AMES acknowledges the South Australian Government for committing to seeking change to the pervasive issue of violence against women and children through this inquiry. The following summary comments are provided to the Commission for consideration:

1. Primary prevention in settlement services targeting new arrivals that matches the 5-year settlement period is important. Prevention is not a short-term objective and sustained funding for services is required to make an impact.
2. Prevention leadership programs that recruit *from communities for communities* build trust, sustainability and long-term change.
3. Strategies to engage multicultural communities through co-design and working with trusted community members will assist in understanding unique perspectives and underlying causes of domestic, family, and sexual violence.
4. Current resources do not reflect or relate to diverse community members. Community engagement in adapting the messages to make them linguistically and culturally relevant is required - and this takes time.
5. Funding for specialist multicultural and ethno-specific services commensurate to community needs is necessary until capacity for true intersectional service provision is reached in mainstream services.

This submission provides a small snapshot from AMES insights in South Australia, and we welcome the opportunity to provide further information to the Commission.

**For more information, please contact Catherine Scarth, Chief Executive Officer, AMES Australia on [scarthc@ames.net.au](mailto:scarthc@ames.net.au) or 0408 948 537.**

## The challenges and opportunities from South Australia's settlement sector experience

AMES response addresses the Commission's areas of inquiry generally and focuses on examples of practice and considerations for the Commission to influence and impact change in refugee and multicultural communities.

### Primary prevention in refugee and multicultural communities

Settlement and multicultural services are primary points of contact that refugee and migrant communities have after arrival, particularly the HSP in South Australia. There is increasing recognition of the potential for these services to expand reach to, and further support, migrant and refugee women and children experiencing violence and to introduce primary and early prevention strategies.

In South Australia there are various prevention initiatives targeting newly arrived communities with whom the AMES HSP team engage with in seeking support for clients:

- **Australian Refugee Association (ARA) - Community for Change Project** aimed at preventing family, domestic, and sexual violence within refugee communities
- **ARA - Stronger Men Stronger Families** promotes healthy behaviours and relationships while addressing cultural and community concerns regarding domestic and family violence
- **Australian Migrant Resource Centre (AMRC) - Family Violence Prevention Community Education Program and Support**

The limitation for initiatives such as these are their dependency on short-term grant funding. The solution is for **long-term funding for the continuation of programs that match the 5-year settlement period.**

### Prevention that is culturally and linguistically sensitive

AMES has a tested and evaluated prevention program - **Prevention of Violence Against Women (PVAW) leadership program** - delivered in Victoria since 2017. This program is designed to create cultural and attitudinal change within diverse communities to support efforts to reduce the prevalence of violence against women. The program was developed in response to recognising that non-main English-speaking communities were not being reached or engaged by mainstream information, activities or services.

AMES program **proactively targets and recruits directly from community for community**, identifying new leaders, influencers and activists who have the capacity to engage with the issues and information, and the skills and networks to take prevention strategies to their communities.

There are now more than 200 graduates of the leadership program, many of whom continue long past graduation to undertake active prevention work in influencing their communities toward cultural and attitudinal change. **Co-designed, community led actions have proven to be effective.**

## Engagement approaches for refugee and multicultural communities

Key strategies that support violence prevention within refugee and multicultural communities include:

- **Engagement with communities** to integrate the unique perspectives of community when it comes to the underlying causes of domestic, family, and sexual violence. For example, engaging migrant and refugee communities requires adapting mainstream Anglo-centric concepts of individualist models of autonomy and decision-making to more community and collective understandings around responsibility.
- **Communities must be involved in primary prevention responses.** For messaging to be meaningfully understood within a cultural context, programs need to be co-designed and led by multicultural communities themselves, and tailored programs made available. These strategies are intensive and time-consuming but are more effective than mainstream responses which do not resonate with other diverse communities.
- **Early support strategies** provided by AMES HSP team include:
  - Orientation sessions: information on legal aspects of family functioning and domestic violence
  - Domestic violence information kits for new arrivals: multilingual information with emergency contact details
  - Community workshops: separate for men and women within each community to foster open discussions, in collaboration with specialist domestic violence services.
- **Tried, tested and evaluated targeted programs** for refugee and multicultural communities informed by their needs and involving their community members builds trust through culturally sensitive response and support.

## Early intervention in settlement services

AMES HSP team takes an **early intervention approach** to identify newly arrived individuals at high risk of experiencing or perpetrating violence using methods including case management planning, risk assessments, case reviews, and referrals from partner agencies.

Working within the parameters of the HSP contract when responding to a client's disclosure or identification of domestic violence, the AMES team **utilises and contextualises the 'Look, Listen, Assess, and Act' framework**. This framework is a method used across the fields of social work, healthcare and education to guide professionals in their interactions and interventions when responding to needs effectively is a crucial tool.

The South Australian Department of Child Protection also identify and refer cases to AMES directly with information captured in case management systems and shared through multi-agency collaboration.

AMES HSP team works closely with community organisations in South Australia and liaises with Settlement Engagement and Transition Support (SETS) providers to share resources and links to various specialised services targeted at refugee and multicultural communities across the state. For example, ARA provides case management and support for families who have transitioned beyond HSP to more independent settlement; and AMES refers clients to ARA for family counselling on a case-by-case basis. **Such collaborations and forums need to be encouraged and supported to ensure efficiency of resource allocations** so that gaps in service and practice are quickly identified and responsive to needs.

## Challenges and implications in responding to client disclosures

Barriers in responding to, and reporting, domestic, family and sexual violence, or seeking support from specialist services can be complex for CALD communities, and are well documented.

Settlement services providers in South Australia are reporting challenges in responding to disclosure or identification of violence. In AMES experience challenges include:

- **Client refusal to give consent** to being referred to specialist support services. In these circumstances, a client can only be monitored as closely as possible and supported with culturally appropriate educational resources.

*Implication for practice:* staff supporting families who are living with violence have high training, supervision and reflection needs.

- **Client not wanting to pursue an intervention order** as they believe this means they will be fully separated from an abusive partner.

*Implication for practice:* legal literacy training and support is imperative for these families.

- **Case management led or dominated by the male family member** who may be a perpetrator of family violence.

*Implication for practice:* AMES encourages case managers to meet all family members through the case management process to support an accurate assessment of family dynamics. This is difficult to implement and requires culturally informed strategies.

- **Single female clients**, with or without children, who are staying with their sponsor who is exerting control over them.

*Implication for practice:* requires culturally informed strategies.

## The way forward - equity in resourcing

Mainstream services are grappling with the notion of "intersectionality" in being able to equitably provide services to our diverse society. While the sector continues to refer people from refugee and multicultural backgrounds to ethno-specific or multicultural services believing this to be more appropriate, these services are frequently not sustainably funded or equipped with the expertise required to support people experiencing domestic, family and domestic violence.

Until capacity for true intersectional service provision is reached, specialist multicultural and ethno-specific services will require funding commensurate with the needs of their community members. Simultaneously mainstream services need to improve their capacity to equitably provide services to all. This requires collaboration, sharing of resources, and valuing the power and influence of multicultural services to rapidly affect changes that make a difference to all.

AMES look forward to further informing outcomes from the review that drive the change needed to protect people experiencing domestic violence and the support agencies delivering prevention and intervention services and programs.