



## No To Violence

Male Family Violence  
Prevention Association

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## What can be done to strengthen accountability for men who perpetrate family and domestic violence?

*This paper is an adaptation of a submission to the Victorian government concerning the development of a framework for perpetrator accountability. We thought that other readers and audiences, both within and outside Victoria, might be interested in the issues raised in the submission. For further information, contact Policy and Practice Coordinator Rodney Vlasis at [rodney@ntv.org.au](mailto:rodney@ntv.org.au).*

### Terms and scope

This paper privileges the terms “men who perpetrate family violence” and “men who use/choose family violence” over the language of “perpetrators”. For important conceptual and service practice reasons, No To Violence and our member program providers prefer to limit the use of the term “perpetrators” where possible.

The language “women and children” is used in terms of those affected by men’s use of family violence. However, we stress that this is shorthand for “women, children and others affected by men’s use of family violence”, recognising that men are victims of men’s violence too, through IPV and family-of-origin contexts.

While this paper will focus strongly on accountability of men who choose family violence in criminal and civil justice system contexts, a broader range of systems agencies will be considered with equal emphasis. The involvement of child protection and family services agencies will be seen as particularly crucial towards accountability, for example. The concept of the *web of accountability* around the man’s behaviour emphasises the role of multiple systems agencies.

### Overview

Accountability for men who choose family violence needs to be grounded in the service system’s efforts to work towards the safety, well-being and human rights of women and children. Sufficient efforts to support a shared understanding of family violence amongst systems agencies through training, and to support risk management processes in a less patchwork fashion, are required, for example, in order for other efforts towards perpetrator accountability to take effect.

Our views on strengthening accountability focus on seven main themes:

1. Accountability for men who perpetrate family violence is underpinned by a strong family violence service system involving whole-of-government leadership, shared understanding of family violence amongst key systems agencies, coordinated community responses towards risk assessment and risk management, information and data sharing, and strong family violence systems governance at the regional and local levels – all on a statewide, rather than geographically patchy, basis. Without this, other efforts to hold men who perpetrate family violence accountable will fall flat.
2. There is much that governments can do to strengthen a *web of accountability* around men who perpetrate family violence, in ways that place women’s and children’s needs and voices into the centre.
3. The accountability of men who use family violence to their children, and to their children’s needs for safety and safe parenting, is often overlooked or given insufficient attention. This needs to change.
4. There are opportunities to strengthen the involvement of the criminal justice system in the accountability of men who use family violence through equipping Community Corrections Officers to conduct specialised, family violence supervision.
5. Men’s behaviour change programs (MBCPs) work towards perpetrator accountability in a number of ways. Acknowledging these multiple pathways is crucial in order for the place of these programs within coordinated community responses, and the requirement for sufficient resourcing, to be fully understood.
6. There is no research, clinical evidence or anecdotal practice wisdom suggesting that MBCPs might work most effectively with any particular cohort of men who use family violence. While there is a growing industry opinion and research outcomes suggesting that MBCPs – at least in their standard form – might not be an appropriate referral for the most severe 10-20% of family violence offenders, it is not currently possible to pick out a particular cohort of the remaining 80-90% to concentrate government investment in MBCPs towards.
7. There are some key data tracking and research projects which would help inform an evidence base for strengthening coordinated community responses towards the accountability of men who use family violence. Some of these would be best implemented at a state level, rather than waiting for the National Research Agenda related to the National Centre for Excellence to become clear.

## **Service system fundamentals**

Accountability for male users of family violence relies on local, regional and statewide integrated family violence service systems to:

- identify men who use family violence
- effectively engage with men during the ‘windows of opportunity’ in the days and weeks following identification, where men might have more openness to start a behaviour change process due to their sense of crisis resulting from service system identification (for example, exclusion by police from the family home, with Family Violence Safety Notice and subsequent Intervention Order conditions restricting access to their children)
- refer men to appropriate services

- make use of any applicable and appropriate external motivators or mandates to hold men's participation in these services
- support internal motivations towards change
- monitor risk on an ongoing basis, and manage significant risks through coordinated community responses
- share relevant information pertaining to any or all of the above with women's and children's services, police, courts and others involved in supporting women's and children's safety and wellbeing.

Accountability falls down when any one of these steps are not done well by the service system, such as when:

- men are not identified by allied sectors in the health, human services and community sectors
- men's intake services and courts do not have the structures or resources in place to engage men effectively, and at multiple points, in the 2-3 weeks following police attendance at a family violence incident
- men are not able to commence, or lose interest in, attending a MBCP due to lengthy wait times
- men receive unhelpful advice or advice contrary to collaborative efforts to ensure safety of women and children, such as engagement with certain unaffiliated online forums and fathers' rights organisations
- men's participation in these services are not supported by the active involvement of the referrer (Community Corrections Officers, child protection workers, etc.) towards supporting the man's internal motivation towards change, and in identifying barriers limiting participation – thereby missing opportunities to limit program drop-out
- local risk assessment and risk management processes are not in place to enable appropriate information sharing and coordinated community responses.

Crucially, MBCPs cannot be solely responsible for these multiple steps towards perpetrator accountability. Most opportunities to identify men who use family violence rest with a range of allied sectors – family services, child protection, primary health care and community health, mental health, alcohol and other drug services, problem gambling services, child contact centres, etc. Numerous research studies have demonstrated that significant proportions of male clients in these sectors use family violence.

Training practitioners and program coordinators/managers from these sectors in recognising and appropriately responding to men's use of family violence is required to enable these opportunities to be met. To this effect, No To Violence welcomes the state government's commitment towards this through the current two-year training project funded by the Department of Human Services.

Furthermore, once family violence has been identified, systems agencies particularly central to coordinated community responses – police, Community Corrections Officers, Magistrates and Court Registrars, child protection workers – need to have a sufficient and shared understanding of family violence both to take effective steps towards the safety of women and children, and towards the accountability of men who use family violence. These agencies play a vital role not only in identifying perpetrators, but also in participating in many of the subsequent steps outlined previously.

Unfortunately, a sufficient and shared understanding is often not present amongst many, or possibly most workers from these systems agencies. While the Common Risk Assessment Framework training has been delivered to some, this training is insufficient for workers to develop a sufficient understanding of family violence, including how to safely and appropriately engage perpetrators. With the exception of the state government's investment in training for child protection and family services workers through the previously-mentioned DHS funded project, training for other systems agencies on these issues has been sorely lacking. The total training time that No To Violence has been able to deliver to police, Community Corrections Officers, Magistrates and Court Registrars over the past five years – as a total across all these sectors - has not exceeded 60 hours (or 110 hours if a recent training project conducted with Victorian Legal Aid duty lawyers is included).

This does not reflect a lack of desire on our behalf to conduct such training, but rather a lack of opportunities and invitations to do so. This points to the second requirement, related to training, to support strong foundations for perpetrator accountability – strong leadership expressed through a whole-of-government commitment towards family violence.

In our experience, there is considerable goodwill and interest on the ground at a service level – amongst police, Community Corrections Officers, court personnel and child protection workers – to improve their understanding of family violence, and what it means to hold perpetrators accountable. This is a result of the increasing recognition amongst these sectors of the significant proportion of their work associated directly or indirectly with family violence. However, because of intense caseloads and service demand pressures, and due to the scope of training required, the authorisation and legitimisation of their participation in training needs to come from management, and ultimately, from an executive level. Strong leadership through a whole-of-government approach is required here.

Third, No To Violence supports the efforts of Victoria Police, Corrections Victoria and Magistrates Courts Victoria to embark on the difficult process of aligning or consolidating data systems. This is required both for risk assessment and risk management, so that perpetrators do not fall between the cracks (or gaps in the web, which we will outline shortly), and also to provide regional integrated family violence services with the data they need to shape and refine local coordinated community responses.

Fourth, strong regional and local governance is required to coordinate the above-mentioned efforts in training, data and information sharing, and risk assessment and risk management. This requires the developments of partnerships at an agency or service managerial level, and opportunities for collaboration at a service coordination and delivery level.

In our view, there is insufficient investment and support for the crucial role of Regional Integration Coordinators (RICs) in building capacity for systems-level partnership development and service collaboration. RICs require funded project worker and administration support as otherwise their roles will continue to be overloaded, and the opportunities for sufficient regional and local governance supporting perpetrator accountability will be lost.

Training, whole-of-government leadership, data and information sharing, and support for the RIC role are the fundamentals upon which other measures to build perpetrator accountability rely upon. Without these fundamentals, investing in other areas to hold men accountable for their use of family violence will be at least partly wasted.

## Web of accountability

In an article in the forthcoming edition of our new journal, *Ending Men's Violence Against Women and Children*, Joanie Smith, Cathy Humphreys and Chris Laming introduce the concept of a *web of accountability* around men who perpetrate family violence. This concept was based on Joanie Smith's work as part of the SAFER research project, most specifically on her qualitative research with men who use violence in MBCPs, their partners, and program workers. Her research enabled the rich triangulation of data from all three sources.

A web of accountability around a man potentially comprises strands based on:

- attempts to hold him accountable through the formal criminal justice, civil justice and child protection systems (involving informed, consistent and coordinated actions by police, courts, corrections and child protection, where appropriate)
- the actions of non-mandated service systems that attempt to engage him through proactive, assertive outreach (for example, at court through a Respondent Worker, or telephone-based via men's enhanced intake or the MRS After Hours Service)
- women's (and in some cases, a community's) own informal attempts to 'draw a line in the sand' about his behaviour, and to hold him accountable to the promises he might have made to change his behaviour, and to her and her children's needs for safety and dignity.

Joanie's research, in part, focused on perpetrators' experiences of service system efforts to hold them accountable, and their partners' perspectives on what was helpful, or not helpful, towards accountability.

Joanie and her colleagues found that accountability was strongest when formal and informal accountability processes worked together to form a web of accountability around the man. While formal service system accountability processes are crucial, she found that some women, particularly when supported through MBCP partner contact and other community-based support services, became sufficiently empowered over time to make their own demands of the perpetrator, and to take appropriate action if these demands aren't met. These actions could include attempting to confront the man about his behaviour, through to decisions to separate. Joanie found that when the formal service system let women and their children down – for example, through police not taking her reports of family violence seriously, or MBCPs being too under-funded to provide her sufficient and ongoing support – women's attempts to hold her partner accountable were undermined, and that the perpetrator felt vindicated and emboldened to continue his use of violence.

Importantly, Joanie's research does not suggest that women should be held responsible for holding perpetrators accountable for their behaviour. Rather, her research supports other studies demonstrating that women are not passive victims, but engage in deliberate and active attempts to resist the violence they are experiencing, to maximise their children's safety and chances of survival, and to find whatever moments and opportunities of dignity and normality possible for themselves and their children. For some women, this extends towards efforts to hold the perpetrator accountable, and if women are engaging in this struggle out of their own volition, the service system has a responsibility to work with women around these efforts. This is particularly the case given that there can be significant risks for women who attempt to hold their partner accountable, including retribution, escalation of the perpetrator's tactics of control, etc.

In addition to women's efforts towards holding their partner accountable, in some contexts, community-based processes of accountability are present to contribute towards the web. This might be the case with some Indigenous or ethno-cultural communities. While these informal processes of accountability can sometimes act as enablers or barriers towards the safety of women and children, the important point again is the consistency between these formal and informal efforts towards accountability.

Women and children, and the services which support them, therefore perform a central role in this web of accountability. While they are not responsible for holding men accountable, they are not passive victims, and accountability is strongest when their existing efforts to hold men accountable are supported, and not undermined, by formal accountability measures. It is vital for systems agencies to listen to, and understand, women's and children's needs and voices in our efforts so support their struggle against the violence, and their (or our collaborative struggle) towards their safety and perpetrator accountability.

Women's informal efforts towards resistance and accountability vary, and sometimes strengthen, over time. Due to the risks involved in these efforts, family violence support for women and children needs to be of sufficient duration to assist beyond crisis intervention. Joanie's research, and numerous clinical evidence demonstrates that some women feel more confident to draw lines in the sand regarding their partner's behaviour more towards the end of his participation in a MBCP.

MBCP partner contact services, and specialist women's and children's family violence services, therefore need to be sufficiently funded to work with women beyond the crisis intervention phase, and often beyond the man's participation in a MBCP. Without this, the web of accountability can have significant holes that perpetrators can exploit.

Men who use family violence are very adept at making use of whatever gaps or inconsistencies are present in service system responses – gaps in the accountability web – to extend their control over family members. They can threaten to involve the child protection system to 'out' her as a bad mother, draw systems agencies workers into colluding with their violence-supporting narratives, and use evidence of inconsistent responses by systems agencies to convince her that it is all her fault.

A strong web of accountability, built on the fundamentals outlined in the previous section, is crucial to reduce the wriggle room available to men to wriggle out of accountability for their behaviour. Sufficient funding for women's and children's services, including MBCP partner contact, is critical towards placing their voices and efforts more at the centre of perpetrator accountability.

## **Accountability of men as fathers**

The major and harmful impact of men's use of family violence on children is well established, even when children are not directly targeted. This includes many perpetrators' attempts to sabotage their partner's parenting, harm her self-worth and role as a mother, and disrupt the mother-child bond.

Over the past 5-6 years, MBCPs have progressively increased their capacity to assess and respond to children's safety and well-being needs. This has included incorporating specific material related to the impacts of family violence on children in program curriculum, and to men's roles as fathers. A small number of 'fathering' programs (focused on family violence) for men who have completed a MBCP are being trialled, a very small number of programs are piloting the use of a child contact worker to work in an integrated fashion with other MBCP roles, and the *Assessing Children and Young People Experiencing Family Violence Practice Guide* is beginning to be incorporated into some assessment practices.

The unit cost formula established to fund MBCPs, adopted eight years ago and adjusted annually according to CPI, did not include a component to support MBCP work with men as fathers. This is a significant limitation, given that many men require a (generally not available) intervention focusing on their role as fathers as a follow-up to their participation in a MBCP.

Furthermore, the previous section's concept of a web of accountability applies equally to men's behaviour with respect to their children. This not only involves child protection and family services, but also family dispute resolution and other family law services, child contact centres, post-separation parenting programs and other often Commonwealth-funded family and relationships services. Due to the very inconsistent linkages between these sectors, many perpetrators are able to exploit holes in these potential accountability webs, to the detriment of all members of their family.

The Victorian state government is an industry partner to a three-year ARC Linkage Project provisionally titled *Fathers, Family Violence and Intervention Challenges*. This will be conducted through the Universities of Melbourne, Western Australia and South Australia, with approximately thirty industry partners across these three states. This research is likely to provide research-driven implications and suggestions for how to promote the accountability of fathers who use family violence to children's voices and needs.

## Specialised family violence supervision

There is evidence that equipping Community Corrections Officers (CCOs) to provide specialist family violence related supervision can support the accountability of offenders. Specialisation involves CCOs, or probation and parole officers as they are termed in other jurisdictions:

- having a strong focus on victim safety
- having supervision caseloads comprised exclusively or predominantly of family violence offenders
- being trained extensively in family violence, including how to work with offenders
- being guided by documented practice guidance concerning family violence supervision
- supervising offenders on a more frequent basis (even if only slightly more frequently)
- working closely with family violence perpetrator programs, such that the CCO plays an active role in supporting the offender's readiness to change, reinforcing the change process, and managing risk
- responding swiftly to new offenses and technical (non-offense) violations of the probation conditions through recommending re-appearance at court (even though technical offenses might rarely result in incarceration).

One study comparing specialist supervision of domestic violence offenders compared to standard supervision processes, found that specialist supervision resulted in increased detection of offender violation of probation conditions, particularly in terms of holding men accountable for not participating in or completing a perpetrator program. This study also found that specialist supervision, relative to standard supervision, reduced both domestic violence and general offending recidivism amongst offenders who had not been supervised before for domestic violence and who were not sentenced to prison (this effect was not present for particularly high risk offenders, however).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Klein, A.R., & Crowe, A. (2008). Findings from an outcome examination of Rhode Island's specialised domestic violence probation supervision program: Do specialised supervision programs of batterers reduce reabuse? *Violence, 14*(2), 226-246.

There are strong models in other jurisdictions of probation officers and MBCPs working closely together to strengthen accountability of family violence offenders. In the U.K., for example, probation officers undergo extensive family violence training and develop the skills to provide cognitive-behavioural and psycho-educational support to perpetrator programs through their supervision of offenders, backed up by probation orders of two years' duration.<sup>2</sup> In Australia, the strong collaboration between a community-based MBCP run by a specialist women's family violence service and Queensland Corrections, also involving police, child protection and courts, provides a gold start approach towards establishing a web of accountability around family violence offenders, many of whom have breached protection order conditions.<sup>3</sup>

## Men's behaviour change programs and accountability

It is important to understand that MBCPs contribute towards perpetrator accountability in a number of ways. This multiplicity of potential benefits has important implications when evaluating, or considering, the effectiveness of these programs.

Outcome studies of MBCPs (or the equivalent Domestic Violence Perpetrator Programs, or Batterer Intervention Programs, as termed in other jurisdictions) have generally focused on a narrow range of criteria related to police and justice data concerning recidivism. This would seem to suggest an assumption that the fundamental aim of these programs is changing men's behaviour.

As expressed in our work for the NSW Government on the practice guide *Towards Safe Families: A Practice Guide for Men's Domestic Violence Behaviour Change Programs*, NTV does not see changing men's behaviour as the fundamental aim for these programs. Rather, this is one of a number of strategic objectives towards the fundamental aim of working towards the safety, wellbeing, human rights and dignity of women, children and others affected by men's use of violence. We are concerned that outcome studies, and discussions of perpetrator accountability, often do not ground themselves in this fundamental aim, but rather focus predominantly or solely on the success of the program in changing men's behaviour.

Men's behaviour change is indeed a very important strategic objective towards this fundamental aim. However, it is not the only important objective. Others, which can be less or more important depending on the intervention context and particular circumstances, include:

- Risk assessment and risk management work through a coordinated approach involving services to the man, his (former) partner and children, and involving information sharing and multi-agency work with other systems agencies where appropriate.
- Supporting the safety and wellbeing of women and children directly through partner contact work, and in some cases, child contact work or connected children's family violence counselling.
- Supporting women's agency, decision-making, safe resistance and her own informal processes to hold him accountable, and to make decisions for her family.

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<sup>2</sup> Kholia, C. (2013, forthcoming). Managing domestic violence offenders in the U.K. *Ending Men's Violence Against Women and Children: The No To Violence Journal*.

<sup>3</sup> O'Malley, R. (2013, forthcoming). CollaborACTION. *Ending men's Violence Against Women and Children: The No To Violence Journal*. A preliminary and reduced version of this article can be downloaded from <http://ntv.org.au/conference/workshops/nov-14-s2-2/#s2-2j>

- Increasing the scrutiny and monitoring of the man's behaviour, and indicators of risk
- Supporting formal accountability processes including the criminal justice system through information sharing when a violence-related crime has been committed.

Unfortunately, outcome studies rarely give sufficient weight to these other important strategic objectives that work towards the fundamental aim of these programs. Putting all the outcome measure eggs in the one basket - men's behaviour change - runs the risk of making invisible these other important ways that these programs promote the safety of women and children, and strengthen perpetrator accountability, thereby painting a very incomplete picture of the value of these programs.

There are several corollaries of this. First, when a program is successful in implementing the full range of these strategic objectives, as many aspire to do, recidivist measures can actually *increase* as a sign of success. When women feel more supported and connected by the service system, when men's behaviour is more closely monitored, when systems agencies work more closely together, a significantly greater proportion of men's violence-related criminal behaviour, including Intervention Order and Community Corrections Order breaches, can become notified and result in prosecutions. This can be a positive sign that MBCPs are supporting both formal accountability processes through the justice system, and the informal accountability mechanisms of partners and others to draw a line in the sand about the man's behaviour. Hence, expectations that program success must be equated with a decrease in violence-related offending behaviour can be misleading.

Second, equal weight should be given to all of the above-mentioned strategic objectives when considering a program's contribution to perpetrator accountability. The woman, for example, who decides to leave his partner as a result of seeing minimal changes in his behaviour through the program, and who is supported to do so with as little risk as possible, and where the man is engaged in such a way to manage the risk of retaliation, is as equally an important outcome as another man who achieves significant behaviour change through the program. As highlighted previously, through this process the service system supports the woman's efforts to informally hold him accountable by developing a web of accountability around his behaviour.

Third, it is vital that research or considerations of the effectiveness of MBCPs address the *systems* impact of these programs. This can include the extent to which the program has, or hasn't:

- Assisted child protection workers to ensure safe conditions for children of the men participating in the program - for example, is there a reduction in the men's active attempts to sabotage the mother's parenting? Are they becoming more supportive of the mother and her children receiving appropriate social and health services, rather than attempting to isolate them from services? Is he working towards providing more of a safe parenting environment for their children?
- Assisted corrections / probation and parole officers in their supervision work with domestic violence and sexual assault offenders? Has this made the management of offenders easier, and assisted with compliance of probation or parole conditions?
- Assisted generic or specialist family violence courts to use appropriate civil and criminal justice system measures to protect women, children and others affected by the man's violence, and to make appropriate judicial decisions (e.g. regarding bail conditions) based on the assessment of risk contributed to by the program?
- Assisted with local or regional multi-agency high-risk client strategies in managing risk for particularly high risk offenders.

The ability of a men's behavior change program to assist child protection workers, corrections officers, courts, police and specialist women's services to all do their core business is vital in terms of their contribution towards the web of accountability.

An implication of the above considerations is that comprehensive MBCP outcome research is complex, time-consuming and expensive, and in our view needs to avoid the use of control groups for ethical reasons. A longitudinal, multi-site outcome evaluation study that captures these multiple ways in which programs can work towards perpetrator accountability could not be done under \$1m, possibly not under \$1.5m. Research of this kind has never been funded in Australia, and indeed, quality research taking a sufficiently wide view of the strategic objectives of perpetrator programs are rare even on an international scale. Most rely mostly on singular recidivism measures. However, considerably less expensive, more localized action research is possible to tract the contribution of MBCPs to perpetrator accountability, which we will highlight later in this paper.

A second implication of these considerations concerns whether it is possible to target MBCP work most effectively to particular cohorts or groups of men, to which we now turn.

### **Directing MBCP investment**

There is growing clinical evidence, and some research, suggesting that MBCPs might not be beneficial for the most severe of family and domestic violence offenders. These might be men who score particularly highly on certain psychopathy traits, such as narcissism or borderline personality disorder, whose capacity for empathy is exceptionally low. Men who exhibit a long history of generalised violent behaviour (not just in relation to family violence) might also not benefit from these programs. For some cohorts of men such as these, participation in a MBCP might be detrimental in some circumstances.

It is difficult to accurately estimate the proportion of men who use family violence who fall into this particularly severe category. Amongst men who are charged with family violence related offences and enter programs through the Corrections system (either in community corrections or custodial settings), approximately 10 – 20% might fall into this category. Taking into account a broader sample of all perpetrators, including those who do not become involved with the criminal justice system, this proportion is likely to be lower.

It is not possible, however, to divide the remaining 90% or so of perpetrators into particular cohorts based on who might benefit most from participation in a MBCP. There is no research, nor clinical evidence or practice wisdom, to draw any even near consensus conclusions regarding this. The attempted use of typologies to classify family violence offenders, for example, has provided little or no benefit to program planning and practice, and at least at this stage, has not been helpful in predicting intervention outcomes.<sup>4</sup>

The fundamental reason for this comes back to the multiple pathways through which MBCPs work towards the safety of women and children, and perpetrator accountability. While some higher-risk offenders with relatively lower motivation to change, for example, might exhibit less behaviour change through the program, the role of the program in supporting the man's partner and family, and in assisting other systems agencies (corrections, child protection, etc.) in holding the man accountable, might result in important accountability outcomes in other ways.

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<sup>4</sup> See [ntv.org.au/wp-content/uploads/docs/resources/2011-ntv-research-corner-typologies-jun11.pdf](http://ntv.org.au/wp-content/uploads/docs/resources/2011-ntv-research-corner-typologies-jun11.pdf)

MBCPs therefore have a potentially important role to perform with most men who perpetrate family violence who come into contact with mandated or community-based service systems working towards the safety of those affected by their violence. There are no investment short-cuts through streaming particular men into this work, and not others.

Some men, outside of this most severe category, might require a more intensive MBCP response than others. This includes those men who have a range of criminogenic needs that interfere with their capacity to choose nonviolence, such as substantial substance use, mental health issues, or problem gambling. These men require a case management approach coordinating MBCP work with other services to address these criminogenic needs. Furthermore, some men require a one-to-one case management service to address these and other barriers to participation before they can commence a MBCP. However, this does not mean that men who do not fall into this category can be serviced with 'MBCP-lite' – rather, that funding for MBCP work should account for the needs of some men to receive an additional, case management service.

There is also research, particularly from the U.S., that men who have what is called a “low stake in conformity” – that is, who are unemployed, not in a current relationship and have fewer connections with sources of social capital – tend to drop-out from MBCP participation at higher rates than other men. However, this is not a reason to attempt to exclude such men from referral to a program, but rather, implies the need for MBCP providers and systems agency referrers to work more collaboratively and solidly with men to strengthen their internal motivation to change, and to address barriers to participation.

It is not possible to compile this submission without making some reference to the crisis facing MBCP capacity. At the time of compiling this submission, approximately 50% of Melbourne metropolitan's MBCPs are no longer accepting new referrals due to service capacity limitations in the context of escalating demand – some until at least February 2014 – and 14 out of 38 in the state overall. Many of these will be closed to taking new referrals for the remainder of the calendar year.

Furthermore, the requirement for an update to Victoria's minimum standards for running MBCPs is becoming increasingly urgent. For example, while the current minimum standards – published in 2006 based on research in 2004 and 2005 – require programs to be of a minimum of twelve sessions, current industry opinion points to the need for these programs to engage men over a period of at least six months. Furthermore, the now out-dated minimum standard constraining MBCPs from providing information back to referrers about the man's progress in reducing his risk to his family members at the end of his participation in the program (except for risk assessment and risk management processes) is starting to severely hamper efforts of program providers to strengthen collaborative partnerships with other systems agencies.

## **Data tracking and research**

No To Violence supports the suggestions already made for longitudinal data-tracking to measure the effectiveness of particular criminal and civil justice system accountability measures. There are numerous questions that can be addressed through tracking police, courts and corrections records for family violence offenders and respondents, with the assistance of the Sentencing Advisory Council where applicable. These could include, for example:

What are the effects of different sentencing outcomes to Intervention Order contraventions on perpetrator recidivist behaviour?

What effect might prosecutions of Counselling Order contraventions have on the same?

What are the predominant pathways through which recidivist offenders engage with police, courts and corrections, and what combination of accountability measures at which points appear to have an effect (at least on recidivism measures)?

Furthermore, while multi-site, longitudinal MBCP outcome research might be beyond the scope of Victorian Government funding, it is possible to conduct more localised research concerning the contribution of these programs to accountability for male users of family violence within the context of regional integrated family violence service systems. This research would not evaluate the outcome effectiveness of MBCPs, but rather, the ways in which they support service collaboration towards accountability.

This research could track the effectiveness of MBCPs in strengthening the accountability web around perpetrators' behaviour, aligned with efforts to strengthen collaborative working relationships and arrangements with systems referrers such as child protection workers, Community Corrections Officers, police and courts. Within a regional or local context, it could support integrated family violence service systems to address questions such as:

To what extent is increased collaboration between child protection, family services and family violence agencies (including MBCPs) resulting in increased engagement of men who perpetrate family violence within child protection contexts, rather than blaming mothers for 'failure to protect'?

What effect does enhanced collaboration between Community Corrections Officers and MBCPs have on program participation and drop-out rates, compared to baseline rates?

What do women supported by partner contact services report as being most helpful in contributing towards their safety and well-being, and that of their children? What do they report is being most helpful in working towards the accountability of their partner's behaviour?

Relatively small, localised studies involving local, cross-agency data collection, and small-sample qualitative studies that extend existing practitioner contact with victims (for example, through partner-contact), might be considerably more cost effective investments in research than any state-based attempts at a longitudinal, multi-site MBCP study, particularly given the Commonwealth's upcoming investment in the latter. While localised studies would produce data and findings of considerable relevance state-wide, they would also assist coordinated community response efforts towards developing strong webs of accountability around perpetrator behaviour.

These studies would focus on *process evaluation indicators* of the ways in which service collaboration might, and might not, be working in regional and local contexts towards perpetrator accountability. They would build upon some of the research methodologies employed by the SAFER research project, but in a more localised fashion and at a smaller scale.

## Recommendations

The considerations raised in this report result in the following seven recommendations concerning how to strengthen accountability for men who perpetrate family violence:

1. **A significant investment in training is required to promote a shared understanding of family violence amongst systems agencies.** While there is current state government investment in training child protection and family services workers to this effect, workers and practitioners from other systems agencies receive little or no specialised family violence training beyond common risk assessment framework training, which is insufficient to address this need. In particular, training for police, Magistrates and other court personnel, and Community Corrections Officers would significantly enhance their effectiveness in strengthening perpetrator accountability. A whole-of-government commitment is required to support the training, including departmental executive levels.
2. **Family violence Regional Integration Coordinators require increased resourcing to perform their crucial role in supporting regional integrated family violence service systems, and local coordinated community responses, towards the accountability of men who use family violence.** In practical terms, this involves providing each RIC with project worker and administrative support.
3. **Specialist women’s family violence services, and MBCP partner contact services, require more sufficient resourcing to support women’s own informal efforts to draw a line in the sand regarding perpetrator behaviour, and for their voices to be heard.** Women and children need to be at the centre of accountability webs where their own struggle towards safety, dignity and perpetrator accountability is supported by formal accountability measures by the civil and criminal justice systems.
4. **Research-driven suggestions for strengthening the accountability of fathers who use family violence will arise through the three-year ARC Linkage Project *Fathers, Family Violence and Intervention Challenges*,** of which the Victorian government is an industry partner. A component recognising the work of MBCPs in contributing to child safety and well-being also needs to be incorporated into the unit cost model used to allocate funding for these programs.
5. **Specialised family violence supervision by Community Corrections Officers offers significant promise in strengthening perpetrator accountability, in close collaboration with community-based MBCPs.** This involves specialised training, specific family violence caseloads, a strong focus on victim safety, and where appropriate increased frequency of supervision contacts.
6. **Men’s behaviour change programs work towards perpetrator accountability in several ways, beyond behaviour change.** It is important for funders and family violence governance systems at the state-wide and regional levels to understand the multiple pathways through which these programs promote accountability, and support an accountability web.
7. **It is not possible to talk about the accountability of men who use family violence without referring to the service capacity crisis facing Victoria’s MBCPs.** Furthermore, the need for an update of Victoria’s standards for running MBCPs is becoming more urgent, given that the major advancements in industry opinion and research since the current standards were researched some 8-9 years ago.
8. **There are significant opportunities for specific, and targeted, state-wide and localised research to investigate the effectiveness of different criminal and civil justice system interventions in strengthening accountability for male users of family violence.** Much of this research would involve systems to retrieve and pull together data already being collected, and to extend the contact that practitioners already have with women experiencing violence.