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Urgent Action Needed to Keep Family Violence Survivors Safe in Hospitals

Women's Health Victoria (WHV), the Women's Mental Health Alliance and mental health consumer peak the Victorian Mental Illness Awareness Council (VMIAC) have ongoing concerns about the high costs of mental health misdiagnosis to family violence survivors and the increased risk this creates to their safety.

In light of recent [news reports](#) of recommendations made by the Mental Health Complaints Commissioner (MHCC) to Mercy Public Hospital in Werribee the three groups urge immediate action be taken to prevent further risk and harms to family violence survivors already experiencing trauma.

Dianne Hill, CEO of Women's Health Victoria said, "we note the 36 complaints to the MHCC between 2020 -2021 by family violence survivors' about their experiences in the public mental health system, but we know this is really the tip of the iceberg". She went on to say, "many people in acute crisis or who are suffering trauma are prevented from speaking up because of risks to their safety and their human rights within the mental health system."

Women's Mental Health Alliance Chair Mischa Barr said, "We welcome the public scrutiny of hospitals where complaints are made, but much more needs to be done to build a more family violence aware, gender sensitive and trauma informed mental health system that listens to people about the *cause* of their distress. This should be a priority for the new Victorian Mental Health Workforce Strategy recommended by the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System, as well as the new National Mental Health Workforce Strategy."

VMIAC CEO Craig Wallace said, "Stereotypical assumptions about mental health and family violence within the general community are also reflected among mental health professionals. Health systems that are intended to support people in trauma and crisis should never facilitate more violence towards them from perpetrators or reduce the rights of victims of crime further".

WHV, the Alliance and VMIAC agreed that research findings identifying low confidence levels among health practitioners in metropolitan hospitals working with victim-survivors of family violence reflected the experiences of consumers they worked with.

Furthermore, they said the expertise of victim-survivors of family violence and people with lived experience as mental health consumers needs to shape and drive the development of health sector training on family violence and structural and inter-personal violence and lead more innovative service responses.

"There are consumers who have lived through family violence and trauma; they have much to contribute. Consumer and advocacy organisations are here ready to work side by side with governments, family violence services and the health system to make this happen," Mischa said.



Media inquiries and interviews

For further information or media commentary from Women's Health Victoria or the Women's Mental Health Alliance, please contact Kylie Inserra, Communications Coordinator at Women's Health Victoria: kylie.inserra@whv.org.au, (03) 9664 9316 or 0409 119 101.

About the Women's Mental Health Alliance

The Women's Mental Health Alliance was established by Women's Health Victoria in 2019. The Alliance is made up of more than 35 organisations and individuals who provide expert advice to policy makers and health services on the mental health of women and girls and undertake advocacy to ensure all women have access to evidence-based, gender-sensitive and trauma-informed mental health support. The Alliance works to ensure the voices of women with lived experience are centred in policy, advocacy and service delivery.

For more information, please visit <https://whv.org.au/our-focus/womens-mental-health-alliance>

About Women's Health Victoria

Women's Health Victoria (WHV) is a not-for-profit, state-wide women's health promotion, advocacy and support service, focused on improving the lives of Victorian women. WHV collaborates with women, health professionals, policy makers and community organisations to influence and inform health policy and service delivery for women. The work of WHV is underpinned by a social model of health and a commitment to reducing inequities in health which arise from social, economic and environmental determinants.

For more information, please visit whv.org.au

About the Victorian Mental Illness Awareness Council

VMIAC is the peak Victorian organisation for people with a lived experience of mental health or emotional challenges across all of Victoria, both in metro, rural and regional communities. We're run by consumers, for consumers.

For more information, please visit <https://www.vmiac.org.au/>