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# Improving Family Violence Support for Women in Victoria's Criminal Justice System

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Knowledge Translation and Exchange (Guidelines)



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May 2024

# Guidelines for Policy and Practice

Underpinned by evidence outlined in the Final Report and aligned to the four research questions addressed by this project, the Bouverie Centre advises the Victorian Government to consider the following opportunities to promote the protective factors for women involved in the criminal justice system who have experienced FV. Further, we propose short-, medium- and long-term time horizons in which this work can be undertaken.

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# 1. Addressing Identified Gaps in FV Support for Women in Prison



## Short-term

### 1.1 Routine FV screening at, or soon after, prison entry.

- Use of a validated, culturally safe and MARAM-aligned risk-screening tool and process.
- FV screening ideally to be completed with, or followed up by, a specialist FV worker.
- Adjust timing and format of FV screening to meet the needs of different women/groups of women.

### 1.2 Explore prison-specific barriers to engagement in support services.

Barriers include communication gaps and coordination between prison officers, programs and services and external/ community service providers.

## Medium-term

### 1.3 Further consultation with lived experience advisors to improve general prison processes.

For example, explore opportunities for:

- Further lived experience advocacy and input regarding modifications to prison processes to reduce the potential for traumatisation and re-traumatisation in the prison system.
- A lived experience mentor within the prison to help women to feel more comfortable and safe engaging with a FV service, while also creating meaningful and empowering professional opportunities for the woman providing support.

## Longer-term

### 1.4 Decarceration and justice reinvestment

to prevent the traumatising, retraumatising, and/or stigmatising experience of incarceration, particularly for the many women who are imprisoned for non-violent crimes and would not pose a threat to community safety:

- Advocate for governmental targets for women's decarceration in Victoria to support a reduction in the women's prison population.
- Advocate for justice reinvestment for women who have experienced family violence.



## 2. Improving FV Services for Women in Prison



### Short-term

#### 2.1. Ensure continued availability of tailored, flexible delivery and mode of FV services.

For example, programs that:

- Accommodate trauma and diverse learning needs.
- Have flexibility in the timing of delivery, i.e., can offer support closer to release, provide throughcare upon release, or can be engaged when safety concerns arise.
- Increased frequency of program offerings so that women on short sentences can access them in a timelier way.

#### 2.2. Ensure continuous improvement in culturally safe and culturally specific support.

- Continue to deliver FV programs to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women that have been developed with, continuously improved with, and delivered by First Nations women.
- Explore pathways for First Nations women to become peer support workers or mentors.
- Continue to review and address any service gaps for women from minority cultural or language group backgrounds (e.g., Sudanese women).

### Medium-term

#### 2.3. Prioritise the delivery of existing programs that are gender-responsive, intersectional, and designed with lived experience

in mind at all levels of program governance, design, and delivery.



# 3. Strengthening Protective Factors that Improve Safety Upon Release from Prison



## Short-term

**3.1. Continued development of Corrections Victoria (2023) post-release assessment pilot to identify the impact of post-release supports in addressing any outstanding transitional needs at the end of a support period.** Findings of this project suggest that optimal post-release needs assessment could be extended to include the woman's:

- Need for weather appropriate clothing.
- Need for financial assistance.
- Housing and location requirements (e.g., court location vs available accommodation).
- Work responsibilities (e.g., ability to provide flexible support for women who work full time).
- Caring responsibilities and whether reunification with children is likely to be a goal post-release.
- Disability/accessibility requirements.
- Transport/reliance on public transport .
- Access to, or awareness of, a range of services/resources encompassing housing, crisis relief, food banks, community meals and multicultural events.

**3.2. Continued development of programs, services and prison initiatives that incorporate systemic approaches that:**

- Strengthen healthy relationships (e.g., parenting programs, or programs that assisting women to regain custody of their children post-release).
- Address structural and systemic barriers to safety from FV upon release (e.g., housing, employment, education).

# 3. Strengthening Protective Factors that Improve Safety Upon Release from Prison - cont.



## Medium- to Longer-term

### 3.3. Explore opportunities to secure safe and stable housing for women who have experienced FV upon exit from prison, including:

- Assessing women's needs for housing support prior to release.
- Provision of rent support during and immediately after a period of incarceration.
- Investment in future research to explore the structural and institutional barriers to addressing the gap in securing and maintaining safe housing for women at the intersection of FV and involvement with the criminal justice system.
- Exploring options that could lead to increased capacity for existing services to provide safe, accessible, stable, and affordable housing options for women upon exiting prison.



# 4. Addressing Support Needs for Staff Delivering Services



## Short-term

**4.1. Develop opportunities for program staff to receive peer support.** For example, the establishment of Communities of Practice.

## Medium-term

**4.2. Explore strategic funding opportunities that promote:**

- Job security for FV prison workers.
- Longevity in the development and delivery of FV prison support programs.

## Longer-term

**4.3. Explore opportunities for additional training and development for prison officers,** in particular the sociological risk factors leading to the incarceration of marginalised groups.

**4.4. Advocate for additional on-site trained case managers and specialist FV practitioners** that are available to support women who have experienced FV.



**For more information about the Bouverie Centre**



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