



Productivity Commission  
31<sup>st</sup> July 2025

## **Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreement Review**

### **Introduction**

ShantiWorks welcomes the opportunity to provide a brief submission to the Productivity Commission on the Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreement Review interim report (the Review).

ShantiWorks is a small feminist, social justice organisation designed to work for equality, peace and justice. We aspire to live these principles through all our work; projects, reflective supervision, workshops, counselling, training advocacy and consultations. Our expertise and focus are within the family violence response sectors.

Safe and Equal, Professor Heather Douglas AM and Stefani Vasil endorse this submission. Safe and Equal is the peak body for Victorian organisations that specialise in family and gender-based violence across the continuum, from primary prevention, early intervention, response and recovery. Professor Heather Douglas AM is based at the Melbourne Law School, The University of Melbourne. She researches legal responses to domestic and family violence and is the coordinator of the National Domestic and Family Violence Bench Book. Stefani Vasil is a lecturer in criminal justice and migration in the Thomas More Law School at Australian Catholic University. Her primary research centres on the intersections between migration and gendered violence, with a focus on citizenship and immigration regimes and the role of the state. Stefani has experience conducting in-depth qualitative and community-based research with victim-survivors of domestic, family and sexual violence, including those from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

### **Suicides in the context of family violence**

We express deep concern about the Review's omission of family violence-related suicides. More established research overseas and emerging research in Australia show that victims and perpetrators of family violence make up a significant proportion of suicides. A national analysis in the United Kingdom shows that 26 percent of women with mental disorders who died by suicide had experienced

intimate partner violence.<sup>1</sup> Data in Queensland suggests that more people die by family violence-related suicides than family violence-related homicides.<sup>2</sup> A Coroner's Court report shows that in almost one in four Victorian suicides between 2009-2016, the deceased experienced family violence.<sup>3</sup> The same report shows that in just over half of Victorian suicides where there was family violence, the deceased was a perpetrator of family violence.<sup>4</sup> While the relationship between family violence and suicides is complex, there is nonetheless a relationship.

It is important to be cognisant of specific tactics used against victims from communities that experience marginalisation.<sup>5</sup> Given the disproportionate rates of family violence in communities that experience marginalisation, it is unclear how many family violence-related suicides there could be amongst missing and murdered First Nations women and children,<sup>6</sup> older people,<sup>7</sup> migrant and refugee women,<sup>8</sup> people with disability,<sup>9</sup> and LGBTIQ+ communities.<sup>10</sup> There is more work

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<sup>1</sup> Pauline Turnbull et al., "Domestic violence and suicide in women under the care of mental health services in the UK, 2015-2021: a national observational study," *The Lancet Regional Health Europe* 55 (August 2025), [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanep/article/PIIS2666-7762\(25\)00142-5/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanep/article/PIIS2666-7762(25)00142-5/fulltext).

<sup>2</sup> "More Queenslanders die from domestic violence-related suicide than homicide each year," *ABC News*, April 10, 2019, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-04-10/more-queenslanders-die-domestic-violence-suicides-than-homicides/10985024>. Note that this figure includes perpetrators. Domestic and Family Violence Death Review and Advisory Board, *2018-19 Annual Report* (Brisbane, Queensland: Domestic and Family Violence Death Review and Advisory Board, 2019), <https://www.coronerscourt.qld.gov.au/dfvdrab/annual-reports-and-government-responses>.

<sup>3</sup> Coroners Court of Victoria, *Experience of family violence among people who suicided, Victoria 2009-2016* (Melbourne: Coroners Court of Victoria, 2024), <https://www.coronerscourt.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-09/Coroners%20Court%20of%20Victoria%20Experience%20of%20family%20violence%20among%20people%20who%20suicided%202009-20016.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> Coroners Court of Victoria, *Experience of family violence among people who suicided*, p.7.

<sup>5</sup> For example, the National Inquiry into dowry abuse found that dowry extortion is 'a direct cause' of murders and suicides in Australia. The Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee, *Practice of dowry and the incidence of dowry abuse in Australia* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2019), [https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Committees/Senate/Legal\\_and\\_Constitutional\\_Affairs/DowryAbuse/Report](https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Legal_and_Constitutional_Affairs/DowryAbuse/Report), p.33.

<sup>6</sup> Claire Bevan, Jane Lloyd and Hannah McGlade, *Missing, murdered and incarcerated Indigenous women in Australia: A literature review* (Sydney: ANROWS, 2024), <https://www.anrows.org.au/publication/missing-murdered-and-incarcerated-indigenous-women-in-australia-a-literature-review/>.

<sup>7</sup> Note that there may be a relationship between elder abuse and assisted dying. Anne Wand et al., "The Nexus between Elder Abuse, Suicide and Assisted Dying: The Importance of Relational Autonomy and Undue Influence," *Macquarie Law Journal* 6 (2018), <https://www.austlii.edu.au/cgi-bin/viewdoc/au/journals/MqLawJl/2018/6.html>.

<sup>8</sup> Manjula O'Connor and Samir Ibrahim, "Suicidality and family violence in Australian immigrant women presenting to out-patient mental health settings," *Australasian Psychiatry* 26, no.2 (April 2018): 224-225, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/29611745/>.

<sup>9</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *People with disability in Australia 2024* (Canberra: Australian Government, 2024), <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/disability/people-with-disability-in-australia/contents/justice-and-safety/violence-against-people-with-disability>.

<sup>10</sup> Adam O. Hill et al., *Private lives 3: The health and wellbeing of LGBTIQ people in Australia* (Melbourne: Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University), <https://www.latrobe.edu.au/arcshs/work/private-lives-3>.

to be done to understand the full extent of the issue across Australia and within communities that experience marginalisation.

We note that the agreement under review prioritises people experiencing or at risk of family and sexual violence.<sup>11</sup> It also expresses an agreement to work with the family and domestic violence sector.<sup>12</sup> We would like the Review to continue this direction and propose recommendations that strengthen policy and practice responses to suicides in the context of family violence.

At a grassroots level, with government and non-government colleagues, ShantiWorks is called upon to support teams, organisations and communities after suicides in the context of family violence. We have also developed workshops to offer learnings for practice in this area. Aligned with evidence-based research and best practice,<sup>13</sup> ShantiWorks contextualises family violence-related suicides in a broader pattern of coercive control and a form of social and systemic entrapment that makes someone fearful and changes their daily routine. A domestic and family violence lens enables systems, policy makers, organisations and practitioners to consider how:

- 1) a perpetrator can weaponise their mental health status to constrain a victim's choices, movement and leaving of the relationship;
- 2) a perpetrator can manipulate systems by constructing or using a victim's mental health status to obscure the family violence; and
- 3) family violence deeply harms victims' mental health and further demeans, depletes and diminishes their life choices and hope for living.

Approaching family violence from a mental health lens alone can place victim-survivors at risk, as it can mask the risk that perpetrators pose and create further entrapment for victim-survivors. For example, in cases of intimate partner suicides when victims sought mental health support due to family violence, they were more likely to be offered prescription medication for anxiety and support rather than

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<sup>11</sup> Federal Financial Relations, *National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreement* (Canberra: Federal Financial Relations, 2022), <https://federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/agreements/mental-health-suicide-prevention-agreement>, p.25.

<sup>12</sup> Federal Financial Relations, *National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreement*, p.A-3.

<sup>13</sup> Jane Monckton-Smith et al., *Building a temporal sequence for developing prevention strategies, risk assessment, and perpetrator interventions in domestic abuse related suicide, honour killing, and intimate partner homicide* (Cheltenham: University of Gloucestershire, 2022), <https://eprints.glos.ac.uk/10579/>, Vanessa E Munro and Ruth Aitken, "From hoping to help: Identifying and responding to suicidality amongst victims of domestic abuse," *International Review of Victimology* 26, no.1 (January 2019): 29-49, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0269758018824160>, Hannana Siddiqui and Meena Patel, *Safe and sane: A Model of Intervention on Domestic Violence and Mental Health, Suicide and Self-harm Amongst Black and Minority Ethnic Women* (London: Southall Black Sisters, 2010), <https://comodino.peacelink.org/tdt/docs/1934.pdf>, Jane Monckton-Smith, *In Control: Dangerous Relationships and How They End in Murder* (London and Dublin: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021), p.13, and Julia Tolmie et al., "Social Entrapment: A Realistic Understanding of the Criminal Offending of Primary Victims of Intimate Partner Violence," *New Zealand Law Review* 2 (2018): 181-217.

family violence support.<sup>14</sup> Doing so cannot prevent suicides as it does not address the ongoing pattern of coercive control enacted by perpetrators that systematically diminish victim-survivors' sense of worth and safety. Further, in cases of coerced or forced suicides (where victims of family violence are forced to death by suicides),<sup>15</sup> the surviving children may be at risk of living with the perpetrator. In cases of tactical suicide (where a perpetrator's suicide prevents a victim-survivor from leaving a violent relationship), the perpetrator's family may blame the victim for their death.<sup>16</sup> A mental health lens alone may also impede death investigations that implicate perpetrators, such as staged suicides.<sup>17</sup>

We emphasise the importance of holding family violence *and* mental health lenses in approaching family violence-related suicides. We note, for example, that after two victim suicides in refuges, the Queensland Domestic and Family Violence Death Review and Advisory Board recommended a targeted suicide prevention framework for practitioners.<sup>18</sup> Responses can be strengthened through coordination and shared comprehensive risk and safety assessment and management. Organisations must be able to identify tactical suicide by assessing and managing perpetrators' risk of suicide as well as victim-survivor safety. The inverse is also true: organisations must be able to identify coerced suicide by assessing and managing victim-survivor safety from suicide and homicide. We note below that the *Rapid Review of Prevention approaches* makes a similar recommendation.

Given the relationship between family violence and suicides, ShantiWorks proposes a few opportunities for the Review to address suicides in the context of family violence.

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<sup>14</sup> Jane Monckton-Smith et al., *Building a temporal sequence for developing prevention strategies, risk assessment, and perpetrator interventions in domestic abuse related suicide, honour killing, and intimate partner homicide*, p.24.

<sup>15</sup> This concept has been legalised in France. Minh Dréan, "'She was already dead inside': Forced suicide and the hidden victims of domestic violence," *Le Monde*, December 29, 2023, [https://www.lemonde.fr/en/police-and-justice/article/2023/12/29/she-was-already-dead-inside-forced-suicides-the-hidden-face-of-femicides\\_6386676\\_105.html#](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/police-and-justice/article/2023/12/29/she-was-already-dead-inside-forced-suicides-the-hidden-face-of-femicides_6386676_105.html#). In England, there has been one conviction for manslaughter after suicide. "Man jailed for manslaughter over ex-girlfriend's suicide," *BBC*, July 29, 2017, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-40758095>.

<sup>16</sup> *Inquests into the deaths of Miss Yunupingu, Ngeygo Ragurrrk, Kumarn Rubuntja and Kumanjayi Haywood [2024]* NTLC 14 (Darwin: Coroners Court of the Northern Territory, 2024), [https://justice.nt.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0010/1463707/74c7ad06daceae11bd2c0534cdc274fe6e61b06e.pdf](https://justice.nt.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/1463707/74c7ad06daceae11bd2c0534cdc274fe6e61b06e.pdf), p.111.

<sup>17</sup> Overseas research and advocacy, including by Advocacy after Fatal Domestic Abuse, #Notjust another..., and Killed Women reveals the great extent of 'hidden homicides', including staged suicides, coerced suicides and tactical suicides. "Home," Advocacy after Fatal Domestic Abuse, <https://aafda.org.uk/>, "#Notjustanother... Campaign," #Notjust another..., <https://pcxheadhotmailcom.wordpress.com/> and "Our mission," Killed Women, <https://www.killedwomen.org/about>. At the time of writing, Lachlan Young pled guilty to Hannah McGuire's murder after an attempt to stage her suicide. Julia Bergin, "Trial hears Hannah McGuire's alleged murderer would plead guilty to manslaughter," *ABC News*, July 9, 2025, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-07-09/lachlan-young-murder-trial-begins-over-ex-partner-death/105510650>.

<sup>18</sup> Domestic and Family Violence Death Review and Advisory Board, *2016-17 Annual Report* (Brisbane, Queensland: Domestic and Family Violence Death Review and Advisory Board, 2017), [https://www.coronerscourt.qld.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0003/723675/domestic-and-family-violence-death-review-and-advisory-board-annual-report-2016-17.pdf](https://www.coronerscourt.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/723675/domestic-and-family-violence-death-review-and-advisory-board-annual-report-2016-17.pdf), p.17.

## Opportunities to address family violence-related suicides

ShantiWorks welcomes the Review's call for a new policy architecture, particularly that the next agreement has stronger links with the broader policy context (draft recommendation 4.3). Family violence policy, such as the *National Plan to end violence against women and children 2022-2032*, should be part of this broader policy context.

### Recommendation:

- 1) The next agreement integrates with the *National Plan to end violence against women and children 2022-2032*.

There is an opportunity for the next agreement to articulate the complexity of family violence-related suicides. Our practice experience and growing research shows that when there is family violence, coerced and/or tactical suicide is often co-occurring. As stated, tactical suicide refers to perpetrators' threats of self-harm or suicide to prevent victim-survivors from leaving violent relationships or to punish them if they do leave.<sup>19</sup> Research has established that such threats are a risk factor for intimate partner homicide and homicide-suicides.<sup>20</sup> A study of high-risk high-harm perpetrators in England and Wales found that their suicide rate is 23 times greater than the highest age-specific suicide rate in the general population.<sup>21</sup> Earlier, we cited that in just over half of Victorian suicides where there was family violence, the deceased was a perpetrator of family violence. It is also notable that the perpetrator was more likely to be a man.<sup>22</sup>

Given the prevalence of men's deaths by suicide, we emphasise the harms of rigid binary gender norms and unhealthy masculine stereotypes. For men, such norms and stereotypes are associated with poorer health outcomes, such as thoughts of suicide and self-harm nearly every day, and a higher likelihood of violence-supportive attitudes and use of intimate partner violence.<sup>23</sup> Research shows that men are willing to prevent and repair the impact of such stereotypes and can be

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<sup>19</sup> We acknowledge the link between intimate partner problems and male deaths by suicides and do not contend that all men who die by suicide are perpetrators. "Risk factors for intentional self-harm deaths (Suicide) in Australia," Australian Bureau of Statistics, <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/health/causes-death/causes-death-australia/latest-release#risk-factors-for-intentional-self-harm-deaths-suicide-in-australia> and "World-first study reveals heartbreaking risk factor in men's suicide," Orygen, <https://www.orygen.org.au/About/News-And-Events/2025/World-first-study-reveals-heartbreaking-risk-facto>.

<sup>20</sup> Family Safety Victoria, *MARAM Practice Guides: Foundation knowledge guide - Guidance for professionals working with child or adult victim survivors, and adults using family violence* (Melbourne: Victorian Government, 2021), <https://www.vic.gov.au/maram-practice-guides-foundation-knowledge-guide>, pp.99-100.

<sup>21</sup> Duleeka Knipe et al., *Suicide rates in high-risk high-harm perpetrators of domestic abuse in England and Wales: a cohort study* (Bristol: University of Bristol, 2023), <https://research-information.bris.ac.uk/en/publications/suicide-rates-in-high-risk-high-harm-perpetrators-of-domestic-abu>.

<sup>22</sup> Coroners Court of Victoria, *Experience of family violence among people who suicided*, p.7.

<sup>23</sup> The Men's Project and Michael Flood, *The Man Box 2024: Re-examining what it means to be a man in Australia* (Melbourne: Jesuit Social Services, 2024), <https://jss.org.au/programs/research/the-man-box/>, pp.12-13.



supported to build their capability and confidence to do so.<sup>24</sup> Individual work with men and boys must be accompanied by wider efforts to change organisations, institutions and structures that foster harmful masculine stereotypes.<sup>25</sup> Transforming gender norms to enable men to seek support, and for perpetrators, to enable behaviour change, is a critical way forward.<sup>26</sup>

ShantiWorks reiterates the importance of seriously attending to threats of suicide and victim-survivor safety. This is reflected in the *Queensland Suicide prevention framework for working with people impacted by domestic and family violence*, which states

the real risk of suicide must always still be considered and appropriately responded to, to safeguard both the perpetrator and others who may also be at risk. This risk is especially heightened during a relationship breakdown and separation... The safety of the perpetrator's partner or children must therefore be considered as well. In some cases, there is a risk that domestic and family homicide may occur at the same time as suicide.<sup>27</sup>

Earlier, we referred to evidence that shows a significant relationship between suicides and family violence victimisation in relation to adults. Family violence is also often overlooked as a contributing factor to youth suicides.<sup>28</sup> The next agreement is therefore an opportunity to situate suicides, including coerced and tactical suicides, in a context of family violence for children and adults.

## Recommendation:

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<sup>24</sup> Respect Victoria, *Willing, capable and confident: men, masculinities and the prevention of violence against women* (Melbourne: Respect Victoria, 2024), <https://www.respectvictoria.vic.gov.au/willing-capable-and-confident-men-masculinities-and-prevention-violence-against-women>.

<sup>25</sup> It is also important to target industries, such as alcohol, technology platforms and gambling, which can contribute to family violence.

<sup>26</sup> "World-first study reveals heartbreaking risk factor in men's suicide," Orygen, "About us: The Drive project," The Drive Partnership, <https://drivepartnership.org.uk/about-us/the-drive-project/>, Tim Woodhouse, *The person most likely to kill a victim of domestic abuse... is themselves: 66 ways to reduce domestic abuse related suicides* (Churchill Fellowship, 2025), <https://www.churchillfellowship.org/ideas-experts/ideas-library/the-person-most-likely-to-kill-a-victim-of-domestic-abuse-is-themselves/>, Scott J Fitzpatrick et al., "Men, suicide, and family and interpersonal violence: A mixed methods exploratory study," *Sociology of health and illness* 44, no.6 (June 2022): 991-1008, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/1467-9566.13476>.

<sup>27</sup> Queensland Government, *Suicide prevention framework for working with people impacted by domestic and family violence* (Brisbane: Queensland Government, 2021), <https://www.publications.qld.gov.au/dataset/not-now-not-ever/resource/ac6ec5c6-3746-4022-a845-5c192e958255>, p.11.

<sup>28</sup> Silke Meyer et al., *Missing figures: The hidden role of domestic and family violence in youth suicide - Current State of Knowledge Report* (Brisbane: Griffith University, 2023), <https://www.berrystreet.org.au/news/youth-suicide-report-reveals-family-violence-risks-for-young-people-being-overlooked-in-australia> and Commission for Children and Young People, *Lost, not forgotten: Inquiry into children who died by suicide and were known to Child Protection* (Melbourne: Commission for Children and Young People, 2019), <https://ccyp.vic.gov.au/news/report-on-suicides-of-children-and-young-people-known-to-child-protection-tabled-in-parliament-today/>.

- 2) The next agreement articulates the complexity of suicides, including coerced and tactical suicides, in the context of family violence for children and adults.

ShantiWorks welcomes draft recommendations 4.6 and 4.8 to increase transparency and effectiveness of governance arrangements and a greater role for the broader sector in governance processes, structures and accountabilities. These present opportunities for the specialist family violence response sector and Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission to collaborate to address family violence-related suicides. This could include progressing recommendations such as those made in the *Rapid Review of Prevention approaches*, including:

- strengthening multiagency approaches to manage risk, including suicide risk for victim-survivors, through nationally consistent risk assessment and management principles
- developing a consistent approach to death review processes and improve knowledge on the relationship between domestic, family and sexual violence and suicide.<sup>29</sup>

**Recommendation:**

- 3) The specialist family violence response sector and Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission are part of governance mechanisms to address family violence-related suicides.

We would also like to propose a nationally consistent approach to data collection and sharing about family violence-related suicidal ideation, self-harm and attempts, and suicides. As stated, the full extent of family violence-related suicides in Australia is unclear. Further, for '[f]or every case of suicide, there are many more women [victim-survivors] needing to feel safe and sane'.<sup>30</sup> Data shows that women are more likely than men to be suicidal and self-harm.<sup>31</sup> Research and data should also include demographic information, such as age, gender and sexual orientation. Victoria is beginning to undertake such work through the *Victorian suicide prevention and response strategy 2024-2034* to inform prevention and response efforts, and a national approach can build on this effort.

**Recommendation:**

- 4) A nationally consistent approach to data collection and sharing about family violence-related suicidal ideation, self-harm and attempts, and suicides.

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<sup>29</sup> Note recommendations 13 and 21. Rapid Review Expert Panel, *Unlocking the Prevention Potential - Accelerating action to end domestic, family and sexual violence* (Rapid Review Expert Panel, 2024), <https://www.pmc.gov.au/resources/unlocking-the-prevention-potential>.

<sup>30</sup> Hannana Siddiqui and Meena Patel, *Safe and sane*, p.17.

<sup>31</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Suicide & self-harm monitoring: Thoughts, ideation and suicide attempts 2024* (Canberra: Australian Government, 2023), <https://www.aihw.gov.au/suicide-self-harm-monitoring/overview/thoughts-behaviours>.

## Conclusion

Understanding the co-occurrence of coerced and/or tactical suicides where there is family violence has implications for policy and practice with victims, perpetrators, their families and communities. While the relationship between family violence and suicide is complex, a more comprehensive, accountable community co-ordinated systems response to prevent suicides in the context of family violence is critical. ShantiWorks thanks you again for the opportunity to shape the future of Australia's mental health and suicide prevention system.