Future-proofing Safety

COVID-19 and family violence in Victoria 2020–2021

Contents

Acknowledgement

The **Future-proofing Safety** consortium respectfully acknowledges the Kulin Nation as Traditional Owners of the land where we operate. We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders as the first peoples of Australia. Sovereignty was never ceded, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders remain strong in their connection to land, culture and in resisting colonisation.

Background

Crises and disasters are becoming increasingly common both internationally and locally. Crises are not one-off events – many are ongoing and intersecting.

This ***Future-proofing Safety: Surfacing inequality and building service capacity for crisis-ready responses*** (Future-proofing Safety) Crisis Readiness Framework aims to support frontline staff, organisations, sector leaders and peak bodies from across family violence and sexual assault service system, and the Victorian Government to effectively prepare for and respond to future crises and shocks.

Crisis readiness and response need to consider the overlapping cycle of preparation, response, aftermath and review. This framework is designed to help all levels of crisis-response through this cycle, with a particular focus on how crises can impact on family violence use and experiences. It sits alongside and is informed by Future-proofing Safety's Final Report and [Interactive Report](#).

About Future-proofing Safety

Future-proofing Safety explored how family violence in Victoria changed during the COVID-19 pandemic. The project examined Victoria's family violence and sexual assault service system to understand what issues emerged during the crisis and how services responded. Future-proofing Safety was led by Drummond Street Services' Centre for Family Research and Evaluation (CFRE), with research partners RMIT University's Centre for Innovative Justice (CIJ) and the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS). The project was funded by Family Safety Victoria (FSV).

Research findings

There were a number of key findings from the Future-proofing Safety project in relation to service user experiences and service and system level barriers to support. These included a rise in demand and complex client needs, coupled with a service system struggling to respond.

Service User Experiences

Key research findings related to service user experience highlighted the ways in which client need increased during the pandemic. These included:

- A surge in the number of people seeking family violence and sexual assault services and support during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- An increase in the complexity of client presentations, co-occurring risk and need that clients were presenting with, requiring a broad range of specialist support.

- Changes in family violence presentations themselves during COVID-19, highlighting new areas of emerging risk.

Service and System Responses

At the service and system level, while there were some innovative service responses developed to address changing client need, the researchers overwhelmingly heard about service system barriers and the many ways in which the family violence and sexual assault service system was not able to respond effectively during the pandemic. This included multiple examples relating to how some of the most vulnerable members of society, including children, sexual assault victims, people with cooccurring needs and people from marginalised communities were not provided with appropriate service support. Key findings related to:

- **Telehealth engagement** – While telehealth service provision had many benefits, including increased participation among some cohorts, it was problematic when used as the sole method of service delivery. Many people struggled with online service provision, with some groups particularly disadvantaged by this mode of delivery including children, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander clients, clients from diverse multicultural communities and people with disabilities.

  There were also barriers for people to engage safely in telehealth service provision, including difficulties in properly assessing or managing risk, particularly child risk issues. There were also specific risks associated with delivering family violence support when people were at home during lockdowns and were not able to safely engage with services.

- **Responding to material need** – many services were able to respond to the material needs of their clients through providing food and essential supplies, mobile phones, computers and data, facilitated by additional brokerage funding within the service system during the pandemic.

  Practitioners from across multiple sectors also highlighted key fault lines within current service provision which were exacerbated during and in the aftermath of the pandemic, including the lack of available safe accommodation options for people fleeing violence.

- **Withdrawal of services** – While many practitioners thought that their organisation had done well to support most clients, they were more critical of the broader service system's response. Practitioners from across a broad range of services provided examples of the ways in which long waitlists, delays in service responses and the withdrawal of some services impacted service delivery. This not only put people seeking support at risk but also put immense pressure on the workforce, with people from across a broad range of sectors holding complex risk that often sat outside their area of expertise.

   Several services and sectors highlighted the impacts that the withdrawal of services delivered by Child Protection had on vulnerable children and families and the service system as a whole.

- **Impact on the workforce** – While some practitioners highlighted certain benefits relating to flexibility in working from home, the vast majority emphasised some fundamental gaps in providing family violence support via telehealth. This was particularly challenging for workers who were:
   - caring for children who were at home during school closures
   - from marginalised communities and felt an added responsibility to respond to the complex needs of their communities at all hours of the day and night
   - grappling with a range of complex issues in their own lives
   - unable to separate their living and working spaces – including many staff members from across sectors who were forced to deliver services from their bedrooms.

The need for crisis readiness responses

The report highlights the need for crisis readiness planning at all levels (for practitioners, organisations, peak bodies and government) to learn from and support recovery from the current crisis and plan for future crises. Multiple examples in the final report speak to the myriad ways that a lack of crisis preparedness impacted some of the most vulnerable in the community. This includes children and young people in particular, whether through the move to telehealth service provision, the withdrawal of some Child Protection services and capacity, and a blindness to child risk within the broader family violence and sexual assault service system.

About this framework

The crisis readiness framework combines:

- findings from **Future-proofing Safety**

- a scan of crisis readiness and disaster preparedness models in Australia, and where relevant, internationally.

This framework forms part of the recommendations of **Future-proofing Safety**.

As crisis readiness is an expanding and developing field, the authors advise that material in this framework should be regularly adapted and updated to suit specific contexts.

> "The [COVID-19] crisis has highlighted the importance and need for upfront contingency planning."
>
> Liesel Wett FAICD (AICD & GIA, 2020, p. 29)

The framework is designed to complement existing policies, frameworks and tools that are in place. Most notably, this includes the Victorian Government's social services sector emergency management policy and resources. These apply to services funded, delivered or regulated by the Victorian Department of Families, Fairness and Housing. The resources also include:

- a family violence framework for emergency management focused on the Victorian Government and emergency management sector

- a vulnerable people in emergencies policy

Questions to guide crisis readiness responses are outlined in this framework. These questions should act as a prompt to help practitioners, organisations, peak bodies and government to develop comprehensive crisis readiness plans so that they are better prepared to respond to people in need during crises.

Crisis readiness principles

The principles for this Crisis Readiness Framework align with the **Future-proofing Safety** project's six foundations that support the consortium's approach and underlying principles. They are also based on the recommendations of the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission and the resulting disaster preparedness work (Teague et al., 2010). These foundations include:

1. **Prioritising clients and being client-centred.** This includes identifying, planning for and centring priority cohorts among those experiencing and using family violence, to acknowledge and account for intersectional experiences of marginalisation and disadvantage that are exacerbated during crises.

2. **Acknowledging that good crisis responses are local.** Local connections, coordination, and communication are needed to enable strong coordinated responses across services, emergency management, local government and state government. Big picture coordination at the state level also needs to take place for accessible communication, responsive planning, funding, and more.

3. **Ensuring that disaster responses are strengths-based.** This means that victims and survivors are empowered to make the best decisions for their particular context.

4. **Building capacity and integrating responses** across all relevant sectors, organisations and emergency responses, incorporating a system-wide examination and genuine commitment to better support victims and survivors and respond to family violence during crises.

5. **Normalising crisis readiness and embedding it in a cycle of regular review** before, during, and after immediate crises.

Why are crisis readiness and response so important?

Crises have often been regarded as outlier events, with organisations not always prioritising crisis readiness. Crisis preparation can become seen as a 'nice to have' rather than a 'need to have'. As the observation below suggests, however, it is less effective to develop a response in the middle of a crisis than it is to have a plan in advance.

> "There should be no complacency that [contingency planning and stress-testing] can be 'workshopped' in real time."
>
> **Australian Institute of Company Directors and the Governance Institute of Australia (AICD & GIA, 2020, p. 7.)**

Crisis readiness can help to mitigate some of the less obvious risks that surface during crises, particularly major crises. Failing or lacking to prepare for crises incurs substantial costs – whether economic, social or both – as this project highlights.

What are the stages of a crisis?

Crises do not always unfold in a simple, linear way. Five common stages across the lifecycle of a crisis, however, and these general overlap (see right, adapted from Crandall et al., 2009; Pearson & Mitroff, 1993).

1. **Signal detection:** Identifying and listening to warning signs among all the noise and ensuring that signs can be reported and are taken seriously.

2. **Preparation and prevention:** Comprehensively preparing and actively searching for and addressing risks factors.

3. **Containment:** Limiting the impact of the crisis.

4. **Recovery:** Resuming some operations (adapted or as normal) in the short-term and normal operations in the long-term

5. **Learning:** Reflecting on lessons learned and what can be taken forward into the other stages in future crises.

Pre-crisis

Signal detection

Preparation and prevention

During crisis

Containment

Recovery

Post-crisis

Learning
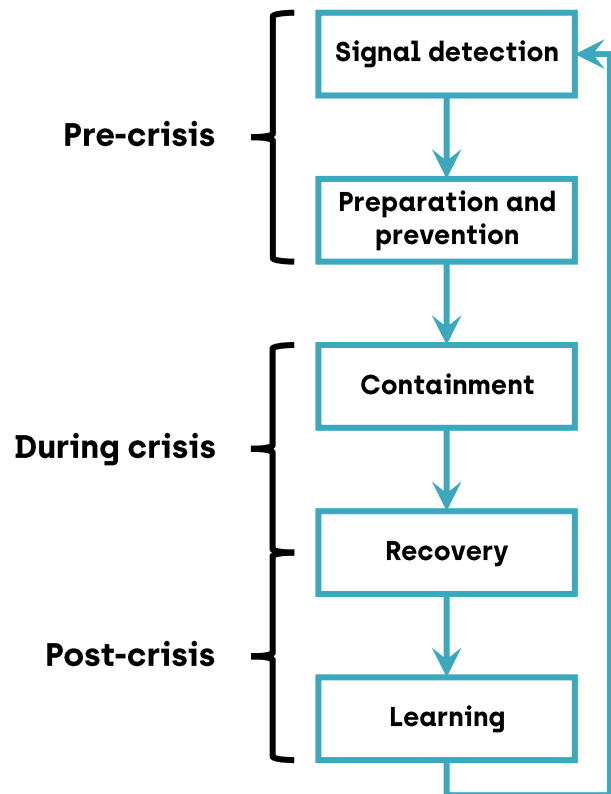
Steps of readiness across levels of responsibility

This section provides five stages of readiness and then expands on each of these to provide reflective questions to guide actions across four levels of the local-to-state spectrum, including:

• frontline service staff

• organisations

• peak bodies

• government

While emergency services are not discussed in the steps below, the broad level questions across each step are still applicable. Further, all levels of responsibility should consider coordination, communication, and planning with emergency services, particularly in contingency planning.

Crisis readiness and response are ongoing and iterative processes. Disasters or crises, like bushfires or floods, may have an initial devastating impact as well as many longer-term consequences. Others, like COVID-19, may have multiple 'peaks' of impacts that compound and extend the crisis over multiple years.
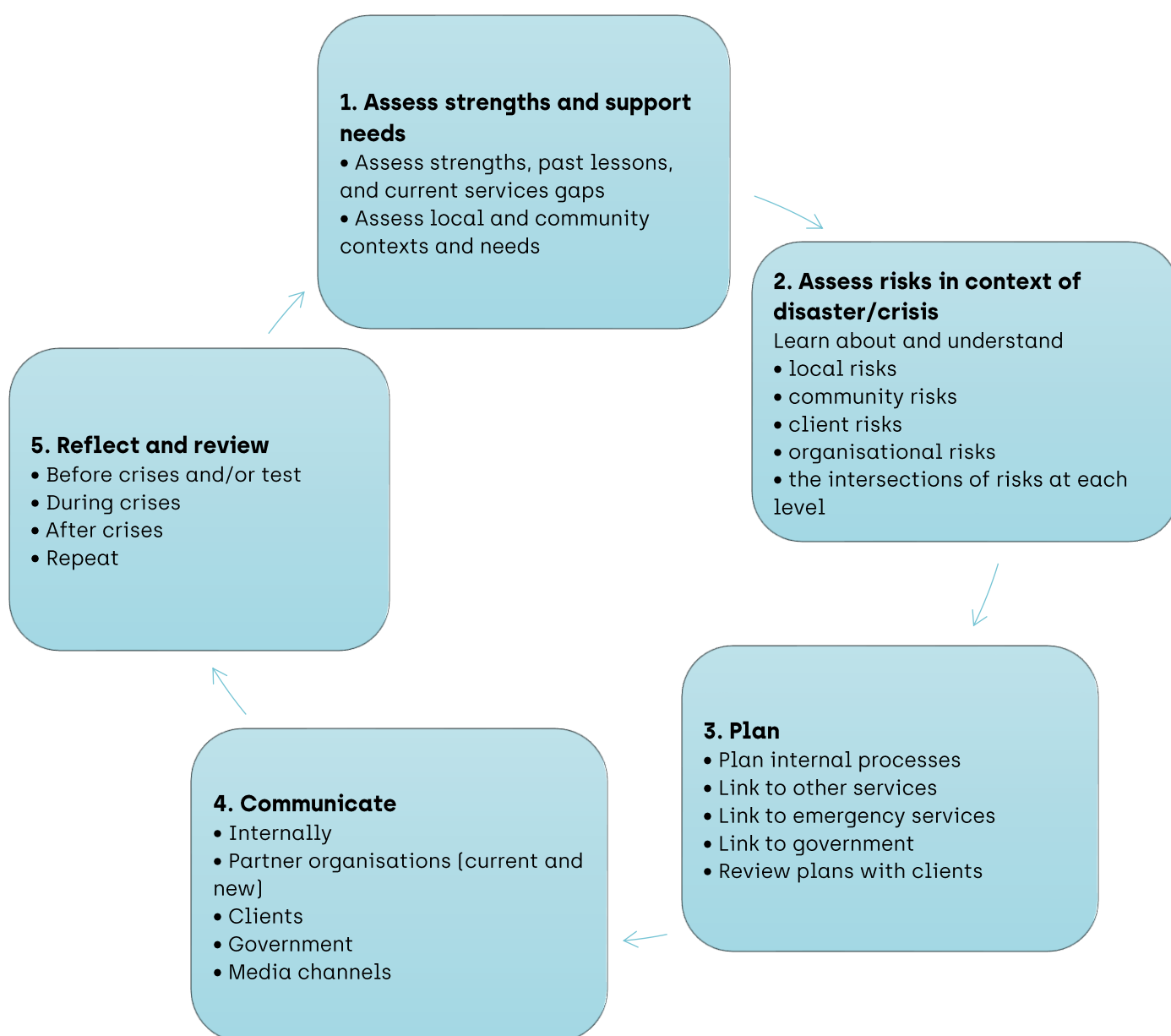
Aligning with the principles that guide this framework, the intention is to work through questions and actions in an integrated manner, collaborating with and across:

- clients, taking into account their specific needs

- key staff (at the organisational level)

- networks, local governments, emergency services[1] and other service providers (at the sector level)

- key contacts through key agencies (at the Victorian Government level)

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[1] While emergency services play an important role in crisis readiness and response, the Victorian Government already maintains and updates a family violence framework for the emergency management sector (State of Victoria, Department of Health and Human Services, 2019).

It is important to work through these proactively and, where possible, in non-crisis environments. To note, the questions provided are not a comprehensive list of all considerations for each level during a crisis. Rather, they are a starting point, based on the findings from **Future-proofing Safety** and other crisis readiness and disaster preparedness frameworks. Further questions will likely need to be considered at each level, based on local factors and specific contexts. The best crisis responses, however, are never workshopped in the moment. Workshopping these questions and actions ahead of time, in collaboration across levels and with a range of scenarios in mind, can assist responses at all levels to be better prepared and to respond more appropriately.

1. Assess strengths and support needs
• Assess strengths, past lessons, and current services gaps
• Assess local and community contexts and needs

2. Assess risks in context of disaster/crisis
Learn about and understand
• local risks
• community risks
• client risks
• organisational risks
• the intersections of risks at each level

5. Reflect and review
• Before crises and/or test
• During crises
• After crises
• Repeat

3. Plan
• Plan internal processes
• Link to other services
• Link to emergency services
• Link to government
• Review plans with clients

4. Communicate
• Internally
• Partner organisations (current and new)
• Clients
• Government
• Media channels

Step 1: Assess strengths and gaps

Initial crisis readiness planning should assess and review current organisational readiness and reflect on lessons learned from previous crises. This review process should map internal, local, regional, sector and network landscapes. Network maps developed ahead of time are crucial to ensuring that connection within and between organisations, communities and individuals does not break down during times of crisis and emergency.

Crisis readiness planning should also assess and understand communication and relationships with clients, other services in the sector or region, and emergency services, These partnerships can be formalised through agreements such as a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to both strengthen connections and improve collaborative response to crises.

The following table summarises actions and considerations across the different levels of responsibility in Step 1:

	Frontline staff	Organisations	Sector peak bodies	Government
What are strengths that can be leveraged during crisis?	• What are our clients' strengths and protective factors? How can these be leveraged to support them in a crisis? • What are our clients' support, accessibility and communication needs? How can we ensure that these are met? • What should family violence safety plans consider during crisis? What additional provisions can we include in risk assessments and safety plans in the event of a crisis?	• What are our organisation's strengths? Are there strengths in certain teams or in our internal communication channels? • How can different strengths be deployed across different areas to ensure continuity of service delivery to meet client needs? • What strengths are there across our partnerships with other organisations? • How can our partnerships strengthen responses to crises to support complex client needs?	• What strengths can be leveraged to support member organisations and the broader sector? • What resources can we leverage to support organisations and government in responses to crises? • How can the collaboration and connection between member organisations be leveraged to support increasing complexity of client needs that often accompany times of crisis?	• What are our strengths within and across departments and agencies? • What connections and resources can we leverage or deploy quickly in the event of a crisis? • How can we support a multi-sectoral response to a crisis to ensure that increased risk and complexity of need can be addressed for clients who may need services from multiple sectors? • How can we support practitioners outside of specialist family violence sectors to leverage skills outside of their normal area of work to support clients experiencing or using family violence during crisis?
What is the local and community context? What considerations are specific to these?	• What are our clients' context-specific needs? How will this impact them in a crisis?	• What local resources, networks or partnerships exist? How can we participate in or leverage them?	• What is the local and community landscape for our member organisations?	• What infrastructure is in place and what resources are available within and across geographical areas of the state?

	• What community resources can clients leverage during disasters? • How will we leverage community strengths and existing grassroots organisations to support clients during crises more effectively? • What other aspects of our clients' lives could magnify or add complexity to their experiences or use of family violence? What would be the impact of a crisis on these factors? What aspects of their lives are protective in times of crisis?	• Who are our key contacts and connections in our region and/or sector? • Are there existing arrangements in place around local area coordination during crises or disasters? • What pockets of local knowledge, connections and networks exist in our organisation?	• How can we support member organisations to build and maintain local connections and partnerships?	• How can resources be deployed effectively and rapidly to meet specific local community needs? • How can we work with and leverage off the existing strengths of community (such as grassroots community organisations) to report back during crises and support messaging?
What are some past lessons during crises that can be applied to future planning?	• What alternative or complementary service options might there be for clients during crises? • What worked well for each client during previous crises or emergencies? What could have been done differently?	• What temporary or permanent adaptations have worked (e.g., remote service delivery)? • What information and communication technology needs have emerged? • What would have helped us respond to the changes we encountered in previous crises (e.g., resources, networks or partnerships)? • How can any additional demand or complexity be dispersed or shared across the workforce, rather than carried by particular individuals or teams? • How has service demand changed in past crises and what characteristics of those periods lead to these shifts?	• What would have helped us support our member organisations (e.g., around coordination, communication, advocacy, resources)? • What were the needs of member organisations during past crises?	• What have we heard from clients, local communities, broader communities, organisations, and peak bodies? How can we respond to this feedback? • How can resources be more effectively and rapidly deployed? • How can cross-sector and cross-departmental recommendations be adopted to support clients seeking services across the family violence service system as a whole? • How can we support organisations to respond to growth in service demand that often occurs during crises? • Given that most crises see rate of family violence increase, how can we support organisations and individuals to prevent family

			violence and support those experiencing it?
What are some current or past crisis-related gaps?	• What service gaps have we noticed during past crises or emergencies? (These could be in the team, in the organisation or elsewhere in the service system.) • What existing gaps might be exacerbated by crisis? How can we support clients around these issues?	• What service gaps have emerged during crises or emergencies? • How strong are our relationships with other organisations and agencies (e.g., emergency services, police)? • What existing gaps might be exacerbated by crisis? How can we advocate for these gaps or barriers to be addressed? • How can staff and practitioners who work outside of the specialist family violence space be trained to respond to elevated demand for family violence services and increased presentations from clients experiencing or using family violence during crises?	• What gaps have emerged during crises or emergencies for our sector? • What gaps have emerged in relation to communication with other sectors and how might these be addressed? • What existing gaps might be exacerbated by crisis? How do we support the sector to advocate for these gaps or barriers to be addressed?	• What gaps have emerged during crises or emergencies across the service system? • How can gaps be addressed to better support people seeking family violence and sexual assault support in future crises? • What existing gaps might be exacerbated by crisis? How can we overcome these gaps or barriers? What supports should be put in place early? • How can organisations that do not specialise in family violence be supported to accommodate any crisis-driven increases in demand for family violence services or from clients using or experiencing family violence?

Step 2: Assess risks

Familiarity with the risk landscape is crucial to crisis readiness planning. Risks can exist at and across multiple levels including individual, community, local and sector-wide. As well as identifying, reporting and proactively addressing risk, organisations should foster environments that enable these actions.

The following table summarises what each level of responsibility should consider in Step 2 when learning about and understanding risk profiles:

	Frontline staff	Organisations	Sector peak bodies	Government
What are the risks that exists across the different contexts and levels? What are the intersections of risks?	• What specific risks and needs are in our clients' lives? How might these be exacerbated in a crisis or emergency (e.g., safety, material security, etc.)? • What are the safety, wellbeing or other risks we might face as staff? How can these be addressed? • What are the risks to effective and ongoing communication with clients (particularly if there are phone, internet, transport or power disruptions)? • What are the risks related to partnerships or local coordination? How will we communicate with other organisations and sectors to better support complex client risks and needs? • What are the risks relevant to our own context (e.g., natural disasters)?	• What are the risks to the organisation (e.g., funding, staff safety and wellbeing)? • What are the risks to service delivery (e.g., capacity, continuity, disruptions or cessation, increased demand)? • Are there changes to service demand (e.g., increased complexity or intensity of presenting needs or risk factors among existing and/or new clients)? How does this impact organisational risk? • What are the risks related to partnerships or local coordination? • What are the risks to effective and ongoing communication with clients and staff (particularly if there are phone, internet, transport or power disruptions)? • What are the risks in our local area or relevant to our context (e.g., natural disasters, funding and support environments)?	• What are the risks to member organisations and partnerships? • What are the sector-wide impacts of risks to organisations and their service delivery? • What are the risks to effective communication and coordination within and between sectors to streamline client responses? • How do these risks interact and overlap?	• What are the risks to the overall service system capacity? • What are the risks to infrastructure and access to essential services, homes, offices, and places of safety? • What are risks to effective communication with, and coordination of peak bodies, organisations and communities? • What are the risks of economic or financial impacts on communities and government-funded organisations? • How coordinated and collaborative is our signal detection work around new, emerging and potential risks? • How do these risks interact and overlap?
How can we foster and reinforce a culture and environment that is aware of and sensitive to risks?	• How do we communicate risk with colleagues and with clients? • What are our practices around risk assessment and safety planning?	• How can we encourage and enable strong risk identification and management processes (e.g., training, regular check-ins)?	• Do we have processes in place to collaborate with member organisations and government around risks and issues?	• How can we resource and prioritise risk assessment and management that is responsive to emerging needs and best practice?

	Are there additional risks that need to be considered during crises? How will these risks be recorded? • What opportunities are there for collaborative and reflective practice opportunities with our colleagues (both within our organisation and within and across sectors) around risk?	• Do we have processes in place to monitor risks and issues such as risk registers and issues logs? • How will we respond to risk at an organisational level? How will we capture risks that are emerging on the ground? How do we do these in ways that centre clients within organisational decision making?	• How can we drive sector-wide risk assessments and management strategies that respond to emerging needs and best practice? • How can we capture risks emerging at the client and member organisation level? How can we communicate these back to government in a timely and coordinated way?	• How can we leverage existing consultation groups and networks to get timely updates about changes in risk and need at the service level? • How can we ensure that lived experiences and client voices are empowered and heard during crises to inform client-centred responses? • How can we support the service sector in response to changing risks and needs during crises? • How can we fill current service gaps to better support organisation's surge capacity during crises? How can this be done collaboratively across departments and agencies?
How can we establish a risk profile?	• What tools do we use to analyse risk? • How can we learn with colleagues about identifying risks and likelihood of their impacts? (These can go beyond family violence risk or client risk to look at workplace risks that might get exacerbated during a crisis.)	• What areas of concern, pressure or need emerged among clients during previous crises or emergencies (e.g., wellbeing, safety, material security)? • What areas of concern, pressure or need already exist that may be exacerbated during crises? • What areas of concern, pressure or need emerged among staff during previous crises or emergencies (e.g., burnout, moral injury)? • What risks might there be in how our organisation responds to crises or emergencies?	• What areas of concern, pressure, or needs have emerged among member organisations? • What risks are involved in how we respond to crises? • How do we support member organisations and staff within these organisations to respond to emerging risks in a timely manner (e.g., the development of timely guidance materials for managing new risks)?	• What areas of concern, pressure, or need have emerged among clients, organisations and peak bodies during previous crises? Is this pressure or need felt disproportionately for some groups, communities, organisations or sectors? • How can government support the recovery from the current crisis and address emerging risk issues in order to future-proof the family violence service system? • What can be done to better support the family violence service system and associated sectors to better collaborate and coordinate?

				How can we support the establishment of collaborative networks to support future crisis readiness responses?
How can we assess and address complexity among diverse clients, particularly intersectional and marginalised?	• What are some specific risks, particularly in relation to structural barriers, that clients face that are unique to their individual circumstances, identity, and contexts? • How can we work with clients and their whole-of-identity to assess and manage risk? • How can we work with established community groups and build trust with people from diverse communities to facilitate timely service responses and enhanced help-seeking during crises? • How does a crisis impact the risks and needs of children and how can we support them as victims and survivors in their own right?	• What are the service experiences of people from marginalised and intersectional cohorts? Are there specific risks or needs that should be addressed? • How can we effectively engage clients and people with lived experience, in shaping risk assessment and management tools to be appropriate and meet the needs of diverse and intersectional cohorts during crises? • How can we support and advocate for clients who face structural forms of discrimination and barriers to support? • How do our services and programs support and protect children as well as their needs and risks, particularly when they diverge from those of their other family members and carers?	• How can we support organisations and clients to assess and manage risk across intersectional and marginalised cohorts? • How can we support member organisations to leverage best practice and intersectional service responses to support the needs of people from diverse communities more effectively?	• What are some specific risks that clients face that are unique to their individual circumstances, identity, and contexts? • How have multiple and complex intersecting needs been considered in the context of this risk? • How can government effectively engage organisations, peak bodies, community groups (including grassroots organisations and service users across marginalised and intersectional cohorts) in effective risk assessment and management?

How can we address common barriers to service access, particularly during increased demand from existing and/or new clients?	• What are the unique barriers that our clients face? What are the common barriers that they face?
	
	• How can we work with clients to help them access our service? How can our practice shape and impact client service experiences?
	
	• How can we support clients to access other services that they
		• What barriers, challenges or issues exist relating to:
		
		   o client access to technology
		
		   o online mode of delivery not appropriate/consistent with best outcomes for client
		
		   o client preference for face-to-face service delivery
			• How can we support organisations to remove barriers to service access during increased demand or complexity? What resources can we mobilise to support member organisations with this task?	• What resources are available to respond quickly and effectively to increases in demand? How can we support organisations and local responses?
				
				• Have we identified and mapped barriers to service engagement among priority cohorts that may

		o insufficient accommodation options to meet client demand	prevent emergency measures from being effective?

might need as part of their support/care plan?

- How can changing accessibility of other services during crisis impact the risk profile of our clients?

o insufficient accommodation options to meet client demand

o insufficient resources (staff or funding)

o lack of appropriate options for client referral/s

- How can we support clients to seek help during crises when conventional pathways to services break down?

prevent emergency measures from being effective?

- How could legislative, legal and policy changes during crises increase family violence risk, support the emergence of new forms of violence or inhibit or prevent help-seeking? What considerations are needed to prevent this?

Step 3: Plan for readiness

With an assessment of both resources, risk and barriers to crisis readiness complete, organisations should develop plans for emergency that outline strategies for responding to new or different crises, including the impacts of the risks identified in Step 2, and how to leverage the local and organisational or sector networks identified in Step 1.

A summary of questions to consider during Step 3 are distinguished across the different levels of responsibility in the table below:

	Frontline staff	Organisations	Sector peak bodies	Government
What are the risk mitigation strategies, plans, and processes in place? What gaps are there? Are we considering all the risks identified in Step 2?	• What processes are in place to discuss and document crisis-focused safety plans with clients? (This includes how to maintain contact, ensure safety, and deliver services during crises.) • What needs and risk factors are in clients' lives that might need planning or actioning during a crisis? • How can we support clients to develop a set of questions for disaster preparation as part of risk assessment processes?	• What processes are in place to discuss and document crisis-focused safety and wellbeing plans across the whole organisation (including clients and staff where appropriate)? • How will we manage and document delegation and responsibility for actions across the organisation and locations (if applicable)? • How can we explore and set up referral pathways or agreements with other organisations? • How can we explore and implement knowledge sharing and case	• What processes are in place to support coordination responses to crisis across the sector? • Where are the process and planning gaps? What needs to be created? • How will we manage and document delegation and responsibilities? • How equipped is the sector to respond to an increase in family violence presentations during a crisis?	• How can government support coordination of crisis planning resources and training across the service system? (This includes funding, resourcing, coordination, and surge capacity.) • How can government collect real-time data to support responsive funding allocation sensitive to changes in service demand? • How can we support organisations to provide prevention-focused services early on during a crisis?

- What additional questions do we need to ask? How do we make sure that client risks are also highlighted?

- What risk mitigation strategies are there within and across our colleagues and teams? How do we monitor and manage these?

- How would a crisis change the predominant forms of violence experienced by my clients? What should I be anticipating in the wake of a crisis?

coordination/consultation across teams and partnerships?

- How can we assess the strength of our relationships with other organisations and agencies (including police)? How can we strengthen these?

- What is our family violence capacity and knowledge? How equipped are we to respond to an increase in family violence presentations?

- How would we respond if there was an increased demand, severity, or complexity?

- How can we adapt and plan for contingencies around:

  o other services ceasing or withdrawing

  o other services becoming overburdened or withdrawing (e.g., similar service providers, health services, emergency services)

  o elevated levels of family violence risk, including serious and/or lethal violence for clients

  o Increased potential for empathy fatigue, vicarious trauma and burnout in our staff

- How can we support member organisations' contingency planning around:

  o other services ceasing or withdrawing

  o other services becoming overburdened (e.g., similar service providers, health services, emergency services)

- How would an organisation, sector or local area adapt if a particular emergency service or service system was suddenly overburdened? Are there contingencies in place?

- Can we allocate and formalise roles and responsibilities across departments and agencies around family violence during crises?

- How would we respond and adapt, allocate and deploy resources in the event of sudden service system breakdown or overburden? Are there contingencies in place?

- How can government responsively alleviate increasing acuity, severity, and complexity of service access needs?

- How can we monitor services in real-time to check for emerging service gaps and needs in order to maintain service continuity with an aim for earlier intervention?

- How can we increase resources, where needed, in a timely and coordinated way?

How can we create plans and responses with input from clients, local communities, partners, and government?

- What works best for us and our clients in terms of maintaining connection and delivering services?

- How might we keep in touch with our clients and ensure safety if there are outages (e.g., phone, internet, power, roads)?

- How do we centre client voice and ensure that there are avenues for clients and local communities to shape our responses?

- How can we ensure that services continue in ways that are accessible and tailored to clients' needs?

- How can we centre client and community voices and ensure that these feed into our organisational policies and responses to meet the needs of the most marginalised?

- How can we support staff, who are also from community and may be responding to the crisis in their own lives?

- How can we support coordination of crisis planning, resources and training for member organisations?

- How can we collaborate with other peaks support referrals between organisation and real-time data to support sector-level coordination and advocacy?

- How can we empower, build knowledge and support cross-sector and cross-region coordination and collaboration?

- How can we centre lived experience voices and consider inequalities and intersections in planning, funding and resource allocations, and responses?

- How can we support the most marginalised communities or people during crises? Have we fully identified and understood who these communities are and what their needs are likely to be?

Step 4: Communicate plans

This step builds on the importance of coordination and communication, whether that is internally, locally, with networks, or within the sector. Effective communication and coordination are critical to ensuring service continuity, identification, and appropriate responses to emerging and ongoing needs.

The following table summarises actions and considerations distinguished across the different levels of responsibility during Step 4:

	Frontline staff	Organisations	Sector peak bodies	Government
What channels of communication across the internal organisation, partner organisations, clients, and government exist? What needs to be created?	• What are the channels within teams and between staff and leadership? What needs to be created? • What are the channels to communicate with clients about their crisis or emergency plans and how we can support this or draw inspiration into our own planning? • Where are the communication gaps and where can we create new channels or protocols?	• What communication channels are in place across all levels both internally and externally? What needs to be created? • How do we communicate service continuity and crisis readiness/management plans early and across all levels? • How can we ensure client voice representation in communication across levels?	• What channels are available across all levels? What needs to be created? • How can we provide communication resources and guidance to member organisations? • How can we support member organisations to collaborate on and coordinate their plans?	• What communication channels are in place across all levels (including local communities, service organisations, and statutory authorities)? What needs to be created? • How can we create pathways and processes to respond to needs across contexts and communicate response across levels? • How can we centre lived experience voices to plan communication and coordination strategies with a focus on culturally-responsive, intersectional and accessible communication across a range of languages?
What media outlets or channels can be leveraged for communication across local and community contexts?	• What connections and networks with local community can we leverage to support clients during crisis? What new connections can we make? • What organisations and sectors do we already engage with in our everyday work? How can we strengthen communication	• How can we identify and leverage channels (e.g., media outlets) to communicate across all levels (internal, clients, external partners, and local/community)? • How can we leverage local knowledge, connections, and networks? • What are the areas of need? What are unique communication challenges that	• Where have our communication channels with member organisations and other peak bodies worked well previously? • What processes exist to identify needs and meet these among organisations and local communities?	• What is the state of information and communication technology access for service providers and communities across Victoria? How can we support improvements to access and reliability? • How can government identify both strong communication channels and

	channels and coordination with these services?	exist within the local context? How can these be addressed?		gaps in communication and leverage or deploy resources?
How will we collaborate with other organisations (whether they're local or elsewhere) in order to streamline communication and responses?	• How is our organisation communicating service responses and need during crises or disasters? How can we further communicate these responses to clients and other organisations?	• What mechanisms exist within the organisation to facilitate collaboration between teams and leverage off the existing networks of practitioners? • What collaborative networks or partnerships is the organisation already engaged in? • Are there new partnerships to explore to streamline and enhance communication across sectors and services? • How can we ensure that communication plans are responsive to emerging needs?	• How can we strengthen communication channels across member organisations to respond to emerging needs? • How can we take a leadership role and support collaboration with other sectors to support family violence service collaboration and coordination?	• How can the Victorian Government improve and strengthen communication channels with emergency services, peak bodies, organisations and communities? • What allocation of funding will be allocated to organisations to establish collaborative partnerships to improve service provision for vulnerable clients, particularly during crises?

Step 5: Reflect and review

Ongoing crises and overlapping or co-occurring crises provide opportunities to test, reflect, iterate and refine to improve future responses and respond to emerging needs. Similarly, plans and ideas should be constantly appraised by all levels from staff to government. Following the implementation of any aspect of a crisis readiness plan, entities across these levels should reflect purposefully and consciously to understand what worked well, what could be improved, and what to try next.

The table below summarises actions and considerations distinguished across the different levels of responsibility during Step 5:

	Frontline staff	Organisations	Sector peak bodies	Government
What can we learn from previous crises that can inform how we prepare for future crises?	• What processes are in place to review crisis readiness and response with clients and apply feedback to future plans? • What processes are in place to review within and across teams to continue centring client voice? • What processes are in place to review crisis readiness plans with practitioners across different sectors?	• What processes are in place to review and reflect on our whole-of-organisation response, including client voice? What are the lessons which can be incorporated into future plans? • What processes are in place to review and reflect across levels (including with other organisations and government) to learn from past responses and improve future ones?	• What processes are in place to review and reflect across the organisation? • How can we facilitate learning from across member organisations? • How can we learn from our experiences during COVID-19 to support communication and collaboration in future crises?	• What processes and channels are in place to support the integration of lessons from COVID-19 at all levels (including client, community, organisation, peak body and emergency services)? • What processes are in place to integrate feedback and lessons to future plans and resourcing? • What funding and time have been allocated for service providers be able to reflect, learn and better collaborate?
What processes, plans, and processes worked? What did not? What can we put in place before the next crisis?	• What were the common things that worked for clients? What were the common things that did not? • What needs to be put in place for the next crisis? • What were common things that worked for you or your colleagues? How do we support our own wellbeing during crises so that we can better support our clients?	• What were successful temporary adaptations and successful permanent adaptations (whether for staff or clients)? • What would have helped us respond to the changes we encountered in previous crises? (Think about resources, networks or partnerships, particularly in your area.) • What do we need to put in place before the next crisis?	• What worked during the last crisis? What did not? How can we learn from this? • How can we ensure that lessons reflect feedback from across levels including client voice? • What do we need to put in place before the next crisis?	• What worked during the last crisis? What did not? How can we learn from this? • How can we ensure that lessons reflect feedback from across levels including client voice? • What do we need to put in place before the next crisis? • What resources do we need to make available?

How can we better respond during crises? What do we need to consider further?	• What gaps and strengths did we identify? • What can we do, what processes can we adopt, what plans do we need to put in place, and what advocacy and communication needs to take place to respond better to the next crisis? • Did anything emerge that cannot be resolved at this level? What needs to be escalated? Who needs to be involved?	• What gaps and strengths did we identify? • What can we do better and what processes, partnerships, plans and actions do we need to put in place to respond better to the next crisis? • What unexpected issues, risks or strengths emerged? How can we learn from these? • Were there unexpected increases or decreases in demand? • What needs to be escalated? What advocacy needs to take place? What do we need to communicate to peak bodies and government?	• What gaps and strengths did we identify? • What can we do better and what processes, plans and actions do we need to put in place to respond more effectively to the next crisis? • What unexpected issues, risks, or strengths emerged? How can we learn from these?	• What gaps and strengths did we identify? • What can we do better and what strategies do we need to put in place to respond better to the next crisis? • How can we better allocate and deploy resources to enhance responses?
How can we build in iterative processes and ensure that reflection and review is always taking place?	• How can we ensure that these crisis readiness steps become normalised within practice?	• How can we ensure that crisis readiness is normalised and built into our organisational culture and operations?	• How can we ensure that crisis readiness is normalised and built into sector best practice?	• How can we ensure that crisis readiness is normalised and built into government plans and resource allocation?
How can this step help us to respond better to complex and diverse needs and specific challenges and barriers before, during, and after a crisis?	• How can we ensure that we are identifying unique barriers and challenges and identifying unique needs of intersectional and marginalised clients?	• How can we use an intersectional lens to ensure that we adopt best practice into our organisational policies, processes and practice to better meet the needs of diverse clients?	• How can we ensure that we are engaging and incorporating diverse, lived experience, and marginalised voices and feedback from across levels into sector best practice?	• How can we ensure that we are engaging and incorporating diverse, lived experience, and marginalised voices and feedback from across levels into government crisis readiness responses, plans, and resource allocation?

Final thoughts

Future-proofing Safety highlighted gaps and shortfalls within the family violence and sexual assault service system caused both by increased need and complexity amongst people seeking support; but also, by a system which came under immense strain and was unable to respond in a timely and coordinated way, leaving many of the most vulnerable members of our community at risk.

This Crisis Readiness Framework aims to mitigate some of the service gaps and issues which emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic to improve the family violence and sexual assault service system's response during crises, so that services and sectors within this system are able to provide better support to those experiencing and using violence, during future crises.

The intent for this framework is to guide questions, considerations, and actions across frontline staff, organisations, sector peak bodies, and government to collaborate and centre client voices and needs. It aims to learn from past mistakes and strengthen future responses to crises.

We hope that this contribution to the space is timely, given the increased occurrence of climate change related disasters. We also want to honour the work that already exists in the disaster and crisis readiness response space. The next section provides some additional resources which may be useful in guiding all levels in crisis readiness responses.

Additional resources

This section provides some additional resources for all levels to refer to that may be helpful for frontline staff, organisations, sector peak bodies, and government to refer to and use in their crisis readiness plans.

Collaboration 4 Inclusion: A Person-Centred Disaster Preparedness (PCEP)

This project provides a good model for inclusive disaster-preparedness. The model has been developed over time, across many projects and through participatory and co-design research methodologies. The website provides some excellent templates that can be adapted. The project also takes a *strengths-based* approach to preparation work for and with people with disability.

https://collaborating4inclusion.org/home/pcep/

The full handbook with templates:

https://collaborating4inclusion.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/2020-08-19-Person-Centred-Emergency-Preparedness-P-CEP-WORKBOOK_FINAL.pdf

Climate Adaptation and Social Justice

This project also takes a person-centred and social justice approach to disaster preparedness. The website is a hub for resources and guides. Organisations and advocates and submit their templates and guides, for other people's use and adaptation to local contexts.

https://climatechangeexchange.org.au/

Resources and guides:

https://climatechangeexchange.org.au/resources-training

Place-based guides and resources

https://climatechangeexchange.org.au/resources-training/place-based-adaptation-planning-guidance/

The website also has a playbook designed for working with children.

Guide action planning:

https://www.climatechange.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0042/489687/RAS-GN6_Identifying-and-prioritising-actions-.pdf

Federal Government funded Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience:

https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/

Significant and growing, government hub of resources and a giant knowledge library. This provides a thorough collection of resources and links.

Emergency Planning Resources, for key principles and guides.

https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/collections/emergency-planning/

The Handbook is designed for a range of organisations, including community services: https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/resources/emergency-planning-handbook/

Although really it is mainly focussed on emergency response organisations.

42 Degrees Library (Edge Effect)

https://www.42d.org/contenthub/beginners-guide/

A combination of reports and resources for including diverse genders and sexuality in any humanitarian or crises responses.

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