

Profile:

Meet Family Safety Victoria's new CEO, Sue Clifford

As the CEO of the state government's first agency dedicated solely to ending family violence, Family Safety Victoria, Sue Clifford will be driving many projects as part of the state's \$1.9 billion action plan. We caught up with Sue to find out more about the work of Family Safety Victoria and the challenges she sees facing Victoria's family violence sector.

Can you tell us about your professional background?

Most recently I was with Victoria Police as the Executive Director Corporate Strategy and Operational Improvement; I was also Commander of the Priority Communities Division to help engage with diverse communities more effectively. Prior to this I was the General Manager of People and Culture for the Australian Football League (AFL), leading core initiatives to effect change in the culture of those who work, play and support the AFL. I led programs to change how the AFL community perceive respect, responsibility, drugs, doping, gambling and alcohol and was Chair of the AFL's Vilification Committee.

What experience informs your leadership of Family Safety Victoria?

As the Inspector-in-Charge of the Sexual Assault and Child Abuse Coordination Office at Victoria Police, I led the development of a new approach to responding to adult and child victims of sexual assault. This resulted in establishing the first Multi-Disciplinary Centres (MDCs) which provide an integrated, holistic response to victims of sexual offences from a single location.

This new approach was an important shift in the way Victoria Police think and work. It placed the victim at the centre of the investigation while working to change attitudes in police responses to sexual assault.

We started with two trial sites in Mildura and Frankston and established the first Victoria Police family violence protocols with Aboriginal communities in Mildura, which formed the basis of protocol statewide. It was a small trial but now seven MDCs are being rolled out across the state.

I have witnessed significant social change over my career – I have seen family violence go from being a civil to a criminal issue, the major Victorian reforms of the 2000s, the introduction of multidisciplinary services, and a Royal Commission into Family Violence (RCFV). Although there is still so much to do, I can see how far we have come and it gives me great hope for the future.

Why were you interested in taking on the CEO role at this particular time in the reform journey?

I feel incredibly privileged to be leading a team that is part of redefining the way we respond to family violence. This work will be fundamental to improving the safety of people, particularly women and children. We will not know the names of all those we help, but we will know we have made a difference.

What are the guiding principles that inform how you work, partner and lead?

The culture we're building at Family Safety Victoria is defined by integrity, agility and respect. We're bringing organisations together in the shared belief that everyone has the right to be safe and children have a right to grow up enjoying gender equality and surrounded by respectful relationships. Family Safety Victoria is also helping the community develop a sophisticated understanding about family violence and the way it is linked to gender inequality.

How do you see Family Safety Victoria's role in the sector?

Family Safety Victoria is working alongside and guided by the expertise of the sector to change systems, policies, and practices. We want to bring organisations together in their support of victims of family violence, provide the skills

and tools needed to collaborate and build their capability as advocates for these changes.

The outcomes of this work go beyond just ending family violence; they connect and support other reforms addressing broader social issues such as homelessness, building more resilient families and children and changing deep-rooted cultural attitudes and behaviours.

Family Safety Victoria will carry out some of the most challenging reform in decades. What are the more complex aspects of these reforms?

The pace and the breadth of the work are incredibly challenging. Change is not easy. These reforms will ask a lot of people over a long period and you have to keep pushing to sustain momentum. We have to keep up the energy and work in a way that suits the essential stakeholders, who are already being stretched in terms of their time and expertise.

Family Safety Victoria's role is to work with our partners, victim survivors, the community and across government to ensure our work leads to better experiences for people seeking help and support.

The Royal Commission into Family Violence noted that primary prevention is a crucial aspect of the statewide changes, what do you see as the most important prevention activities in the coming year?

Family Safety Victoria has a close relationship with the Office of Prevention and Women's Equality, which is leading prevention initiatives and establishing a prevention agency. As recommended by the RCFV, the Prevention Agency will strengthen the focus on prevention of family violence and violence against women and will develop partnerships between the public and private sectors.

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Primary prevention is closely connected to the work of Family Safety Victoria. You cannot reduce family violence without considering how to prevent it, so our reforms must be joined up.

We need to tell the story of why change is so important and how gender inequality and family violence are linked. Deep rooted cultural change cannot be achieved with a PowerPoint presentation. One of the important factors is language – we need to use language that resonates with people and at the same time, provide language that will ensure everyone is family violence literate.

The Centre for Workforce Excellence will be of keen interest to our readers, how do you see it impacting on or informing their work?

The Centre for Workplace Excellence's priority is to deliver the 10 Year Industry Plan for prevention and response in Victoria, which will be the road map for continuing to build a capable, confident and agile workforce that recognises the specialist expertise of the sector.

The Centre for Workplace Excellence will also investigate how to further develop the best formal workforce training and family violence knowledge and practice across the community services, justice, education and health sectors.

How is the principle of Aboriginal self-determination embodied in Family Safety Victoria's work?

Family Safety Victoria is committed to embedding self-determination across the reforms; our role is to ensure Aboriginal communities are at the heart of decision-making. This process must be inclusive and guided by the Aboriginal communities who are shaping the design of policies, programs and reforms at statewide and



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local levels. This starts with the principle of understanding what works for Aboriginal people in the context of family violence and healing.

We have much to learn from Aboriginal communities and services – the 10 Year Indigenous Family Violence Plan is now in its ninth year and we need continued guidance to ensure the next phases meet specific needs and are culturally safe.

The Advocate is the family violence workforce magazine, what would you like to say to the workers on the ground?

At Victoria Police I saw how frontline family violence workers operate every day; I have great respect for both the visible and invisible work of the family violence workforce. It's important to say that the difficulty and complexity of this work hasn't always been acknowledged, and we can't achieve these reforms without you. We have a proud history of social services in this state and a wealth of specialist expertise and that fills me with confidence.