



# Implementing Victoria Police's Code of Practice for the Investigation of Family Violence





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Victorian  
Auditor-General

# Implementing Victoria Police's Code of Practice for the Investigation of Family Violence

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The Hon. Robert Smith MLC  
President  
Legislative Council  
Parliament House  
Melbourne

The Hon. Jenny Lindell MP  
Speaker  
Legislative Assembly  
Parliament House  
Melbourne

Dear Presiding Officers

Under the provisions of section 16AB of the *Audit Act 1994*, I transmit my performance report on *Implementing Victoria Police's Code of Practice for the Investigation of Family Violence*.

Yours faithfully



DR PETER FROST  
*Acting Auditor-General*

10 June 2009



# Foreword

Family violence occurs in all sections of the community, and it is estimated that it affects one in three Australian women. It is the main cause of preventable death, disability and illness in Victorian women aged 15–44 years, and costs Victoria about \$2 billion annually.

Usually the first on the scene, our police play a crucial role in addressing family violence. In 2002 an internal review showed that by following established procedures Victoria Police weren't meeting community or victim expectations, that internal controls were poor and there were major gaps in family violence policing.

In August 2004 Victoria Police introduced the Code of Practice for the Investigation of Family Violence (the Code) to address these issues. The Code specifies a mandatory police response to reports of family violence and introduced new guidelines for managing these incidents. The Code focuses on safeguarding victims, appropriate service referrals, carrying out investigations and prosecutions; and breaking the cycle of family violence. The audit found that Victoria Police were complying with Code requirements.

Since the Code was introduced police attendance at family violence incidents have increased. Similarly, police have applied for more intervention orders, laid more criminal charges against perpetrators and the number of investigations and prosecutions relating to family violence matters has risen.

However, police data does not show how effective this increase in activity has been, particularly in terms of appropriate service referrals, successful prosecutions and improving outcomes for victims of family violence, or breaking the cycle of violence.

A common theme of recent audits, including this one, is the lack of outcome effectiveness measures. Public sector agencies, like Victoria Police, receive significant funding to implement services aimed at improving outcomes for the broader community. Agencies need to improve their performance measurement systems to generate data and measures that better inform the Parliament and the community on how effective they have been in achieving their stated objectives and outcomes.



DR PETER FROST  
*Acting Auditor-General*

10 June 2009





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# 1 Audit summary

## 1.1 Introduction

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Family violence has serious physical, emotional and financial consequences for individuals, families and the community. Men are the main instigators of violence against women, children and other vulnerable people. Family violence is common in all sections of the community, with estimates that it affects one in three Australian women. It is the main cause of preventable death, disability and illness in Victorian women aged 15–44 years, and costs Victoria about \$2 billion annually.

### 1.1.1 Background

In 2002 the government released the *Women's Safety Strategy* and set up the Statewide Steering Committee to Reduce Family Violence. In 2005 the committee recommended integrating services through a multi-agency system, rather than using shared information and processes to coordinate information across agencies.

The 'integrated response' to family violence incorporates Victoria Police, the Department of Justice, the Magistrates' Court of Victoria, the Department of Human Services and the Department of Planning and Community Development.

In 2004 Victoria Police introduced its Code of Practice for the Investigation of Family Violence (the Code), which is an important part of Victoria's family violence reform strategy—the *Integrated Family Violence Strategy*.

The Code enforces a mandatory police response to family violence reports and introduced new practices, including compulsory risk assessment and management procedures for all family violence incidents. The new practices required police to take greater action when responding to incidents, assessing immediate and future risks to the victim and responding appropriately using one or more of the three options prescribed in the Code.

Within police, the central Family Violence Unit is responsible for coordinating police participation in the integrated approach; while the operational discharge of the Code is undertaken by police at the regional level. Under the Code, police provide the first official response to a family violence incident, and act to secure the victim's immediate safety and refer them to support services and interventions as appropriate.

## 1.2 Audit scope and objectives

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The objective of the audit was to determine whether Victoria Police provides safety and support services to victims and perpetrators of family violence and reduces the impact of family violence in the community.

The audit reviewed police compliance with the operational, investigatory and administrative requirements of the Code. Detail about how police manage these responsibilities is given in Part 4 of this report. The audit also examined whether using the Code has safeguarded victims of family violence and resulted in better outcomes for them and perpetrators. The findings are detailed in Part 5. Governance arrangements for managing family violence are reviewed in Part 6.

Specifically, we examined whether:

- police family violence functions comply with the Code's requirements
- there is evidence of improved outcomes for victims and perpetrators as a result of the police's approach to family violence
- the Family Violence Unit develops and applies strategies that improve police responses to family violence incidents
- police work effectively with government and non-government agencies and the community in providing and referring people to family violence services.

The audit included:

- a review of police policy documents and operational guidelines
- interviews with senior police, command and operational police
- a review of data collection, evaluation and reporting of family violence statistics.

The audit was conducted at police headquarters, regional police offices and a number of metropolitan, regional and rural police stations.

## 1.3 Conclusions

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### Compliance with the Code

Introducing major change is challenging for any organisation, particularly a big one that is spread over a large area. Victoria Police has more than 11 000 sworn officers in 339 police stations across the state, so making changes to policy and procedure under the Code was a significant challenge.

Police are responding to all family violence reports as specified under the Code. However, police are not always complying with the Code's requirement of using a referral option, as it was used in only 78 per cent of incidents attended by police.

The introduction of the Code has been supported through suitable training. Within 18 months of its introduction, Victoria Police had trained 6 500 operational police and employed 10 regional family violence advisors and a designated family violence liaison officer for every 24 hour police station.

## Activity

Since its introduction there has been a marked increase in police response activity, including a 14.5 per cent increase in the number of family violence incidents attended between 2003–04 and 2007–08.

Police spent much more time attending family violence incidents in 2007–08, 107.3 minutes, compared with an average of 35.5 minutes in 2004–05, before the Code was introduced. This represents an increase of 202.3 per cent. On this basis the cost of police attendance for reported incidents in 2004–05 was \$2 504 878 and \$9 935 811 in 2007–08, an increase of 296.7 per cent.

The number of intervention orders that police applied for has almost trebled since the introduction of the Code, indicating a more proactive approach to securing the safety of victims.

## Outcomes achieved

Although activity data that Victoria Police collect indicates that it is complying with Code requirements, the information does not show how effective this has been, particularly in terms of improving outcomes for victims of family violence or breaking the cycle of violence.

The increasing incidence and use of the Code's civil and criminal options shows that police are looking after the safety of victims of family violence. They are applying for high numbers of intervention orders under the civil option; and under the criminal option they have laid record numbers of criminal charges against perpetrators.

It is difficult to determine how much high levels of police activity have improved victim safety. Police analysis of court data indicates the proportion of police-initiated intervention orders granted. However, this analysis does not show intervention order trends. Court data also reveals that breaches of intervention orders continue to increase.

The number of family violence-related charges for crimes against the person, including assaults, has increased during this period at a rate significantly higher than the annual growth rate in reported family violence incidents. This shows that police have been actively prosecuting offenders, and reflects the more thorough level of investigation applied under the Code resulting in the identification of crimes associated with family violence that were previously not reported.

Also the number of repeat attendances at family violence incidents has remained at around 32 per cent.

Police need to do more detailed research and analysis about how they respond to family violence incidents to find out whether the actions they take through the civil and criminal options of the Code improve the safety of the victims of family violence.

Police monitoring and analysis of referral data was insufficient. Given service agencies cooperation is variable and police's primary focus is on the crisis response to incidents, the analysis of referral data can determine whether appropriate referrals for the victims and perpetrators of family violence were made. Given that making referrals is the most common option under the Code, this is a serious gap in police information and analysis.

Without this information the Victoria Police cannot identify patterns in the type of referrals made, or assess the effectiveness of specific referrals to agencies; and, therefore, cannot evaluate whether the referrals improve outcomes for victims of family violence or break the cycle of violence.

Ongoing public investment in family violence strategies requires a rationalisation for every initiative and their effects that are supported by valid explanations and indications of the medium and long-term impacts. This data is not available.

## Governance and management

The central Family Violence Unit is responsible for developing and maintaining best practice and procedure for police responses to family violence. Although the audit found many examples of local initiatives and process improvements at the divisional and regional levels, there wasn't a system-wide approach to continuous improvement for targeting good practice across Victoria Police. The unit should be more proactive in monitoring the police response to family violence, including developing performance measures and evaluating the Code's achievements.

Family violence advisors and liaison officers play an important role in applying the Code and informing police of major developments and trends in family violence. Given the specialist knowledge that the full-time advisors develop, there is increasing demand for them to be actively involved in training police and liaison officers.

There is a growing expectation that liaison officers should be involved in analysing family violence data and planning local initiatives; in addition to their role as a source of information and knowledge for their operational colleagues. Accordingly, liaison officer positions should be strengthened by making their positions subject to competitive applications.

## 1.4 Recommendations

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Victoria Police should:

- introduce spot checks across all police regions to determine compliance with the Code's completion and quality assurance requirements for the Family Violence Risk Assessment and Management Report (the L17 form)
- establish benchmarks for timely and accurate completion of the L17 form to use for comparative purposes across and between regions
- set up and monitor benchmarks for the costs and time taken to manage the operational and administrative functions associated with the investigation of family violence incidents. **(Recommendation 4.1)**
- routinely measure and report the rate at which police-initiated applications for intervention orders are granted by the court
- include questions in the survey of family violence victims to judge whether police actions and intervention orders secured their safety
- work closely with the courts' administration and share data that illustrates the success rate of police applications for intervention orders. **(Recommendation 5.1)**
- in conjunction with courts' administration, develop a system that identifies and collects the findings of criminal prosecutions related to family violence. **(Recommendation 5.2)**
- establish protocols with service agencies to monitor formal referrals and track access to services, particularly among repeat offenders. **(Recommendation 5.3)**
- review family violence data collection and identify data gaps that stop effective performance measurement, including outcomes specified in the Code
- establish baseline measures and targets that align with family violence objectives and strategies aimed at breaking the cycle of family violence. **(Recommendation 5.4)**

The Family Violence Unit should:

- determine whether the Code is effective and is creating better outcomes for the victims and perpetrators of family violence. **(Recommendation 6.1)**
- develop a continuous improvement framework that identifies and encourages good practice for police responses to and management of family violence matters. **(Recommendation 6.2)**

Victoria Police should review its regional structure for family violence and the roles of family violence advisors and liaison officers to:

- enable advisors to play a bigger role in promoting good practice and training police
- make liaison officer positions subject to a competitive application process. **(Recommendation 6.3)**





# 2 Audit Act 1994 section 16 – submissions and comments

## 2.1 Introduction

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In accordance with section 16(3) of the *Audit Act 1994* a copy of this report, or relevant extracts from the report, was provided to Victoria Police with a request for comments or submissions.

The comments and submissions provided are not subject to audit nor the evidentiary standards required to reach an audit conclusion. Responsibility for the accuracy, fairness and balance of those comments rests solely with the agency head.

## 2.2 Submissions and comments received

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### ***RESPONSE provided by the Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police***

*Thankyou for providing Victoria Police with the proposed report on Implementing Victoria Police's Code of Practice for the Investigation of Family Violence, ahead of its tabling in Parliament in June 2009. Consistent with section 16(3)(b) of the Audit Act 1994, Victoria Police would like to take the opportunity to formally respond to the report.*

*While welcoming this independent assessment of our response to family violence, Victoria Police considers the complexities and interdependencies of the integrated systems response have been diminished by a single agency review. Family violence is a complex social policy area, and while Victoria Police plays an integral role in service delivery, it is one of over 80 government and non government agencies that together contribute to the safety of victims and their children. The report makes a number of recommendations that would require an integrated data set analysis, particularly of courts and the family violence support services, in order to appropriately inform any decisions to alter police practices.*

*Further, the integrated system commenced in 2006 as part of a continuum of reform, and it would be prudent to acknowledge we are yet to realise the full impact of our efforts to reduce the cycle of violence. Such an approach is already recognised in the development of the State Government's 10-year strategic plan for family violence which looks to increase system capacity, strengthen the justice and service system response, increase community awareness and focus on children over an extended period of time.*

**RESPONSE provided by the Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police  
– continued**

*Victoria Police continues to achieve significant results with its pro-action approach to family violence. Your report highlights some of our achievements in relation to increases in investigations, charges laid and applications for intervention orders. However Victoria Police considers the importance of this work is understated, and I respectfully suggest that as an organisation that carries the full responsibility of first response to family violence, such results are a crucial indicator that victim safety and perpetrator accountability is at the forefront of our actions, particularly at incidents of crisis.*

*The report undertakes preliminary analysis of the time and costs for police to attend family violence incidents, and recommends establishing benchmarks to manage the resultant operational and administrative functions. Victoria Police reiterates that our organisational priority is to deliver the right response to family violence and keep victims safe. In delivering this response we always attempt to provide policing services in an efficient and effective manner however the time and cost implications of this response will never be our main priority. Further, given the long term health costs of family violence to victims, current reforms may take many years to achieve a financial saving to the government and broader community.*

*In relation to the making of referrals by police to support services, the report highlights that only 78% of incidents attended have recorded the making of a formal or informal referral. It is important to note the DHS/Police referral protocol was developed and signed approximately two years after the introduction of the Code. Since that time Victoria Police has been working to improve the effectiveness of referrals in a number of ways, both in terms of numbers of referrals and referral pathways. This is a priority action task in our planning for the next five years.*

*Victoria Police is also cognisant of the issue of privacy and the need for information exchange, as it relates to referral. There is a prevailing view that client up take may be impacted if the flow of information regarding participation in programs and outcomes were shared across all agencies. This is particularly so for Indigenous communities which are traditionally reluctant to share information between government agencies through fear of repercussions. However, in recognition of the importance of information sharing, Victoria Police is currently participating in an inter-agency privacy/information sharing project with the Department of Planning and Community Development. We have also implemented improvements to forms to include more information for family violence agencies that receive these referrals.*

*The recommendation to review family violence data and identify gaps is being addressed through our themed Compstat process, scheduled for March 2010.*

**RESPONSE provided by the Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police  
– continued**

*The recommendation relating to establishing baseline measures and targets is being addressed through the Violence Against Women and Children Strategy.*

*Victoria Police welcomes the remaining recommendations that involve work already underway to review the Code of Practice, establish continuous improvement frameworks, knowledge manage good practice within the regions and working more closely with the courts to share data.*





# 3 Background

## 3.1 Family violence

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Family violence is the leading cause of preventable death, disability and illness in Victorian women aged 15–44 years, with an estimated cost of \$2 billion annually in Victoria. Some of the actions associated with family violence incidents are criminal offences, including physical violence, sexual abuse, stalking, property damage, threats and homicide.

Other forms, which are not classified as criminal offences but can be just as destructive for victims and their families, include bullying or controlling behaviours and those that may cause a person to live in fear, to suffer emotional and psychological torment, or financial hardship or social isolation.

Family violence affects the whole community. It happens in all areas of society, regardless of location, socioeconomic status, religion, age or sexuality. Although anyone can be a victim or perpetrator of family violence, men are the main instigators of family violence and the victims are usually women, children and other vulnerable persons.

## 3.2 The approach to family violence

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### 3.2.1 Family violence policy

In 2002 the government released the *Women's Safety Strategy* and set up the Statewide Steering Committee to Reduce Family Violence, which was jointly convened by the Office of Women's Policy and Victoria Police. The committee's final report *Reforming the Family Violence System in Victoria* was released in 2005 and recommended using an 'integrated approach' for family violence services.

This approach focused on using a single, multi-agency system, rather than simply coordinating the efforts of different agencies through shared information and processes. The 'integrated response' to family violence incorporates Victoria Police, the Department of Justice (DOJ), the Magistrates' Court of Victoria (MCV), the Department of Human Services (DHS) and the Department of Planning and Community Development.

### 3.2.2 Family violence legislation

Underpinning the government's family violence policy is the *Crimes (Family Violence) Act* introduced in December, 1987. In November 2005 the *Magistrates' Court Act 1989* was amended to include a Family Violence Division. A year later the *Crimes (Family Violence) (Holding Powers) Act 2006* was introduced, increasing the powers of police to remove perpetrators of family violence from the home.

In 2005 the government asked the Victorian Law Reform Commission to review all aspects of the family violence legislation. In December 2008 these recommendations became the basis of the new *Family Violence Protection Act 2008* and replaced the original 1987 Act. Its three main purposes of the 2008 Act were:

- to maximise safety for children and adults who have experienced family violence
- to prevent and reduce family violence as much as possible
- to promote perpetrator accountability.

The 2008 Act introduced family violence safety notices. These strengthen family violence intervention orders so police can issue a notice and remove perpetrators from the scene of an incident for up to 72 hours and provide immediate protection to victims outside of court hours.

### 3.2.3 Government funding for family violence initiatives

In 2005 the government committed \$35.1 million over four years to support the Statewide Steering Committee to Reduce Family Violence's reforms to family violence services. The purpose of these reforms was to speed up response times, provide 24-hour referral and support, improve case management and provide new emergency and longer-term accommodation options for women and children.

In 2007 the State Budget allocated a further \$14.5 million funding for a range of additional family violence projects. These included the new *Family Violence Act*, continuation of the Family Violence Court Division of the Magistrates' Court of Victoria and funding for a network of specialist family violence lawyers to support people applying for intervention orders.

The 2008–09 State Budget allocated a further \$24.7 million to address critical system gaps. These included focusing on prevention through men's behaviour change programs and victim crisis responses, such as a women's help line.

### 3.2.4 Victoria Police's role in addressing family violence

Victoria Police has been a key to family violence reforms across government and non-government agencies. Along with other government agencies, police have made a major contribution to the evolution of the state's integrated approach to family violence.

Victoria Police currently contributes to more than 15 whole-of-government activities related to family violence reform, and the benefit of these activities is expected to be realised in the future.

At the strategic level, examples of the leadership role provided by police include:

- governance and direction of numerous inter-departmental committees
- the development of whole-of-government funding bids that have resulted in over \$75 million of investment by the state government in family violence reforms
- guidance on the regional allocation of funding for the delivery of family violence services.

Police, through the work of its Family Violence Unit, have also introduced operational reforms in the delivery of family violence services through the development and application of:

- referral protocols for victims and perpetrators of family violence
- the common risk assessment framework for the family violence sector
- holding powers legislation and family violence safety notices
- the establishment, funding and training of family violence advisors across police regions
- all work related to the management of Indigenous family violence.

## Operational response

The police are the first to respond to family violence incidents, and they act to secure the victim's immediate safety and refer them to support services and interventions as appropriate.

In August 2004 police introduced the Code of Practice for the Investigation of Family Violence (the Code). The Code resulted from the police's *Review of Violence Against Women* in 2002, which found that:

- police responses to family violence didn't meet community or victim expectations
- internal procedural controls were ineffective
- there were major gaps in family violence policing.

The Code introduced measures that have strengthened the operational capacity of police to respond to incidents. The four outcomes of the Code are to safeguard victims, make appropriate service referrals, carry out investigations and prosecutions, and disrupt the cycle of family violence.

In 2007–08 police attended 31 676 reported family violence incidents. The increase in reported incidents that police have attended since the Code was introduced in 2003–04 to 2007–08 is 14.5 per cent.

Police did not get additional funding under the integrated services model or through budget measures for its family violence initiatives. Applications of the Code, procedural changes and associated training requirements have been resourced through reallocations within and between the central and regional divisions of Victoria Police.

## 3.3 This audit

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### In scope

The audit considered whether police safety and support services for victims and perpetrators of family violence helps reduce the impact of family violence in the community and break the cycle of violence. To measure this objective, the audit assessed whether:

- police comply with Code requirements when dealing with family violence incidents
- the police's approach to the issue improves victim and perpetrator situations
- the Family Violence Unit develops and applies strategies that improve police responses to family violence incidents
- police work effectively with government and non-government agencies and the community in providing and referring people to family violence services.

### Out of scope

Because this audit focused on the police's role in managing family violence incidents through their compliance with the Code, and whether the Code outcomes were achieved, it did not examine:

- the role of DOJ and its management of family violence matters through the Family Violence Court Division of MCV; or the role of specialist family violence lawyers in supporting people applying for intervention orders
- the role of DHS and its management of metropolitan and regional referral and support services for the victims and perpetrators of family violence.

Also, given the scope, the following issues were excluded from this audit:

- violence against children, which is reported to, and managed through, DHS
- specific programs for Indigenous and culturally and linguistically diverse groups
- the newly identified trend, teenage-led violence against parents and siblings.

## 3.4 Audit criteria and methodology

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The audit includes:

- a review of Victoria Police policy documents and operational guidelines
- interviews with senior police command and operational police
- a review of data collection, evaluation and reporting of family violence statistics
- a review of educational and training programs
- visits to metropolitan, regional and rural police stations in police districts.

## 3.5 Audit cost

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The total cost of the audit was \$390 000, including staff time, overheads and printing.

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# 4

## Procedural compliance

### At a glance

#### Background

The Code of Practice for the Investigation of Family Violence (the Code) was introduced in August 2004 and sets out the operational and administrative processes that police must follow when responding to and investigating family violence incidents.

#### Findings

Overall, police are complying with the Code's guidelines for managing family violence incidents. Specifically, police have been trained in the requirements of the Code, attend incidents as a matter of priority and implement the response options as mandated in the Code. Police carry out the Code's administrative functions with varying levels of diligence.

The introduction of the Code, and its investigatory and administrative requirements, has increased the time and cost of responding to family violence incidents. Monitoring and analysis of the time and cost of implementing the Code and its effect on the police workload is inadequate.

#### Recommendations

Victoria Police should:

- introduce spot checks across all police regions to determine compliance with the Code's completion and quality assurance requirements for the Family Violence Risk Assessment and Management Report (the L17 form)
- establish benchmarks for timely and accurate completion of the L17 form to use for comparative purposes across and between regions
- set up and monitor benchmarks for the costs and time taken to manage the operational and administrative functions associated with the investigation of family violence incidents.

## 4.1 Background

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Victoria Police developed its Code of Practice for the Investigation of Family Violence (the Code) as part of state government initiatives to reduce family violence. The Code was introduced in August 2004 and sets out step-by-step processes that police must follow when responding to a family violence incident.

When attending an incident police are required to do a risk and threat assessment for individuals and property before choosing the most appropriate response option or combination of options from the three mandated in the Code. Through these response options, police aim to secure the immediate safety and to provide further support to victims and perpetrators of family violence incidents.

Through interviews and fieldwork, the audit considered police knowledge and compliance with the Code, available support for monitoring and refining the effectiveness of the Code, and the impact of the implementation of the Code on local policing.

## 4.2 Police training in the Code

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When the Code was introduced, all operational police were required to attend a half-day training session about its principles and practices. Police have also received further training on the Code and the subsequent legislative changes introduced giving police extra powers to support victims of family violence and secure their safety.

Six and a half thousand police officers were trained within 18 months of the Code's introduction and all new recruits receive training during their induction at the Victoria Police Academy.

Although the majority of operational police have had training in the Code, there has been no evaluation of the value of the training, police compliance with the Code or the Code itself.

As amendments were made to the legislation governing the management of family violence in Victoria, major training has been developed for operational police, following:

- amendments to the *Crimes (Family Violence) Act 1987*, which introduced the use of 'holding powers', enabling police to remove an alleged perpetrator of family violence from the scene of an incident for up to 10 hours. To support the use of these new police powers an on-line training package and in-van/station reference materials were developed, as well as a general refresher course. Four and a half thousand members were trained in the three months before holding powers were introduced

- the proclamation of the *Family Violence Protection Act* in December 2008 and the introduction of Family Violence Safety Notices (safety notices). Issuing a safety notice allows police to remove a perpetrator from the scene of an incident for up to 72 hours. Police estimate that around 6 000 operational police will need to receive training about the new Act and the use of the safety notices. As at March 2009, 4 537 members, or 75 per cent of police had completed the training.

For the first time, funding for the development and implementation of the new Act has included a component that allows the Family Violence Unit to evaluate the overall impact of new training in the safety notices about 18 to 24 months after their introduction.

## 4.3 Responding to reports of family violence

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Victoria Police place a high priority on reports of family violence, from the first phone call, to assigning personnel to respond to incidents. Police responses comply with the Code's requirements. Locally, police have developed initiatives and practices that aim to address local issues.

Figure 4A illustrates the critical aspects in police response procedures for reports of family violence.

### Notification of a family violence incident

The Computer Aided Dispatch Centre (known as D24) gives all reports of family violence a priority rating of at least two for a verbal dispute, or a priority one rating if physical harm or property damage is suspected. The Computer Aided Dispatch Centre conducts the location check, which gives a history of incidents at the address, including the likely presence of firearms.

### Prioritising responses

At local stations, divisional patrol supervisors are responsible for prioritising attendance at incidents, which ranges from an immediate response for major priority one incidents; to a scheduled response for lower-level priority two incidents, which is a routine call out. Police may also refer to the Law Enforcement Assessment Program database (LEAP) to identify any reported issues associated with people who may be at the address. This assists local police in planning their response to the incident.

Police may supplement D24 information with checks on the victim's or the perpetrator's name and using local knowledge, especially in rural areas and outer Melbourne where communities are smaller and police have a more intimate knowledge of the area.

**Figure 4A**  
**Police response to a family violence incident**

Response procedure	Critical component for the effective management of the incident
Incident report	→ D24 establish priority and risk Contact nearest police station.
↓	
Prioritise and resource incident for response	→ Immediate or scheduled response. Initial risk assessment. Two police attend, one should have supervisory rank.
↓	
Attendance at the incident and securing the safety of the scene	→ Ensure police safety. Assess the level of risk and implement appropriate response option. Secure safety of victims and property. Make informal or formal referral.
↓	
Post-attendance management	→ Accurate completion of documentation. Preventative monitoring of repeat offenders and victims at greater risk.

Source: The Victorian Auditor-General's Office.

### Attending the incident

All operational police must be available to attend a family violence incident. In most incident responses two officers must attend, including a senior officer, usually a sergeant, who makes sure investigatory procedures and appropriate response options, as specified in the Code, are followed and properly recorded.

Police risk management planning for family violence incidents is a two phase process. Police must consider their own safety, as well as the victim's, when they develop an incident plan, anticipating the situation and how they will manage it when they arrive.

Police attending a family violence incident must investigate and:

- try to defuse the situation and assess if an intervention order should be sought
- assess whether there is any property damage
- take witness statements and collect evidence when a criminal offence may have been committed
- make appropriate referrals for immediate assistance for victims and perpetrators.

Under the Code, supervisors are responsible for making sure that police under their supervision choose the most appropriate response option when attending an incident. We sighted police records that showed that they were following and documenting the response options specified in the Code.

If the police believe that the dispute is purely verbal and there is no risk of violence they will attempt a verbal resolution, providing informal referral material that includes contact details of service agencies.

For more serious incidents, particularly if the victim seems very frightened and there is a possibility of escalating violence, police will follow the Code and act to secure immediate and ongoing safety of the victim by:

- providing formal referrals to services, such as emergency accommodation services for victims and their children
- removing perpetrators from the scene through police holding powers or the issue of a safety notice
- arresting and charging perpetrators if there is evidence of criminal behaviour, such as an assault.

## Post-attendance management

Police complete the Family Violence Risk Assessment and Management Report (the L17 form) after they have attended an incident. The L17 form includes the compulsory assessment and reporting requirements for all family violence incidents and forms part of a permanent record on the LEAP database. It is also the form used to send victim and perpetrator details to referral agencies.

Station supervisors are responsible for confirming the data is correct and complete before the form is faxed to a central data processing unit for entry into LEAP. During VAGO's regional fieldwork, auditors sighted records and documentation that supervisors had kept, which shows every effort is made to make sure the L17 forms are completed properly.

However, there was a lot of inconsistency in the way follow-up actions were completed and recorded and finalisation of the necessary paperwork was sometimes slow. Police indicated that they found the L17 form to be:

- too detailed, time consuming and repetitive
- difficult to complete at the scene of the incident because of the need to secure the safety of the victim and preserve the integrity of a potential crime scene
- sometimes reliant on subjective information
- geared towards central intelligence gathering rather than incident management.

## Data analysis

The completion of the L17 form and the input of data into LEAP are vital because police use this information to monitor and analyse family violence trends, identify repeat offenders and anyone at risk of future violence.

The corporate statistics units gather LEAP data into regular reports, which include information on the number of reported family violence incidents and applications for intervention orders for each division within a region, compared with the state-wide trends. These reports are sent to regional police management bi-annually for analysis. However, further use of this data analysis to develop family violence strategies for individuals and for high-risk groups, such as victims and perpetrators, largely depends on local intelligence initiatives.

Police hold regional fortnightly task and coordination meetings where they discuss strategies and look at the trend data that local Divisional Intelligence Units collect from the LEAP database. Divisional Intelligence Units were proactively analysing and distributing family violence data at the local station level to:

- identify policing resource priorities
- improve local responses to family violence incidents.

## 4.4 Impact on police resources

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The audit process focused on available measures and analysis to determine the resource implications for policing since the introduction of the Code.

### 4.4.1 Family violence incident reports

After the Code was introduced in August 2004 police expected reported incidents to rise because they believed the increased police response required under the Code would create more public confidence.

Figure 4B shows that there has been an increase in the number of family violence incident reports across all regions. Since the Code was introduced reported incidents that police attend have risen 14.5 per cent, from 27 664 in 2003–04 to 31 676 in 2007–08.

**Figure 4B**  
**Distribution of Victoria Police family violence incident reports**  
**2003–04 to 2007–08**

	2003–04	2004–05	2005–06	2006–07	2007–08
<b>Region 1</b> (Melbourne, Stonnington, Yarra, Glen Eira, Port Phillip, Bayside, Kingston)	3 164	3 449	3 215	3 166	3 151
<b>Region 2</b> (Brimbank, Hobsons Bay, Maribyrnong, Melton, Geelong, Surf Coast, Wyndham, Ballarat, Central Goldfields, Moorabool, Horsham, Northern Grampians, Corangamite, Southern Grampians, Warrnambool)	6 198	6 874	6 673	7 029	7 323
<b>Region 3</b> (Darebin, Whittlesea, Hume, Moonee Valley, Moreland, Bendigo, Macedon Ranges, Campaspe, Shepparton, Mildura, Swan Hill)	6 079	6 367	5 955	6 758	7 329
<b>Region 4</b> (Banyule, Manningham, Nillumbik, Boroondara, Monash, Whitehorse, Knox, Maroondah, Benalla Yarra Ranges, Mitchell, Wangaratta, Wodonga)	5 836	5 965	6 063	5 831	5 930
<b>Region 5</b> (Frankston, Mornington Peninsula, Cardina, Casey, Greater Dandenong, Bass Coast, Baw Baw, La Trobe, East Gippsland, Wellington)	6 387	6 502	6 388	6 868	7 941
<b>Incidents not specified by region</b> <sup>(a)</sup>					2
<b>Total</b>	<b>27 664</b>	<b>29 157</b>	<b>28 294</b>	<b>29 652</b>	<b>31 676</b>
<b>Annual percentage change</b>		+5.4	–3.0	+4.8	+6.8

*Note:* (a) In 2007–08 the occurrence of two family violence incidents could not be specified by region.

*Source:* Victorian Auditor-General's Office based on Victoria Police Crime Statistics 2006–07 and 2007–08. Data extracted from LEAP 18 July 2007 and LEAP 18 July 2008.

The trend variation during the four-year period was due to major events, such as the introduction of the Code in August 2004, which led to a reporting surge in the following year, and the introduction of police holding powers in July 2006, which included a refresher course in the Code and produced a similar surge. Police believe the drop in overall incidents in 2005–06 can be explained as an adjustment to the introduction of the Code.

There is no regional consistency in increased report trends. Police believe that the variations reflect local demographics, such as family structures, including recently separated partners and service availability. This is shown in Figure 4C.

**Figure 4C**  
**Regional distribution of Victoria Police family violence incident reports**  
**2003–04 to 2007–08 (per 100 000 residents)**

	2003–04	2004–05	2005–06	2006–07	2007–08
<b>Region 1</b> (Melbourne, Stonnington, Yarra, Glen Eira, Port Phillip, Bayside, Kingston)	479.0	512.8	469.8	454.1	444.0
<b>Annual percentage change</b>		<b>+7.1</b>	<b>-8.4</b>	<b>-3.3</b>	<b>-2.2</b>
<b>Region 2</b> (Brimbank, Hobsons Bay, Maribymong, Melton, Geelong, Surf Coast, Wyndham, Ballarat, Central Goldfields, Moorabool, Horsham, Northern Grampians, Corangamite, Southern Grampians, Warrnambool)	580.9	625.9	597.7	635.8	649.9
<b>Annual percentage change</b>		<b>+7.7</b>	<b>-4.5</b>	<b>+6.4</b>	<b>+2.2</b>
<b>Region 3</b> (Darebin, Whittlesea, Hume, Moonee Valley, Moreland, Bendigo, Macedon Ranges, Campaspe, Shepparton, Mildura, Swan Hill)	596.6	619.0	571.1	643.7	688.1
<b>Annual percentage change</b>		<b>+3.8</b>	<b>-7.7</b>	<b>+12.7</b>	<b>+6.9</b>
<b>Region 4</b> (Banyule, Manningham, Nillumbik, Boroondara, Monash, Whitehorse, Knox, Maroondah, Benalla Yarra Ranges, Mitchell, Wangaratta, Wodonga)	441.2	449.5	454.1	430.7	434.9
<b>Annual percentage change</b>		<b>+1.9</b>	<b>+1.0</b>	<b>-5.2</b>	<b>+1.0</b>
<b>Region 5</b> (Frankston, Mornington Peninsula, Cardina, Casey, Greater Dandenong, Bass Coast, Baw Baw, La Trobe, East Gippsland, Wellington)	730.5	725.3	710.0	744.3	845.1
<b>Annual percentage change</b>		<b>-0.7</b>	<b>-2.1</b>	<b>+4.8</b>	<b>+13.5</b>
<b>Total Victoria</b>	<b>556.4</b>	<b>576.4</b>	<b>553.3</b>	<b>574.2</b>	<b>603.8</b>
<b>Total annual percentage change</b>		<b>+3.6</b>	<b>-4.0</b>	<b>+3.8</b>	<b>+5.2</b>

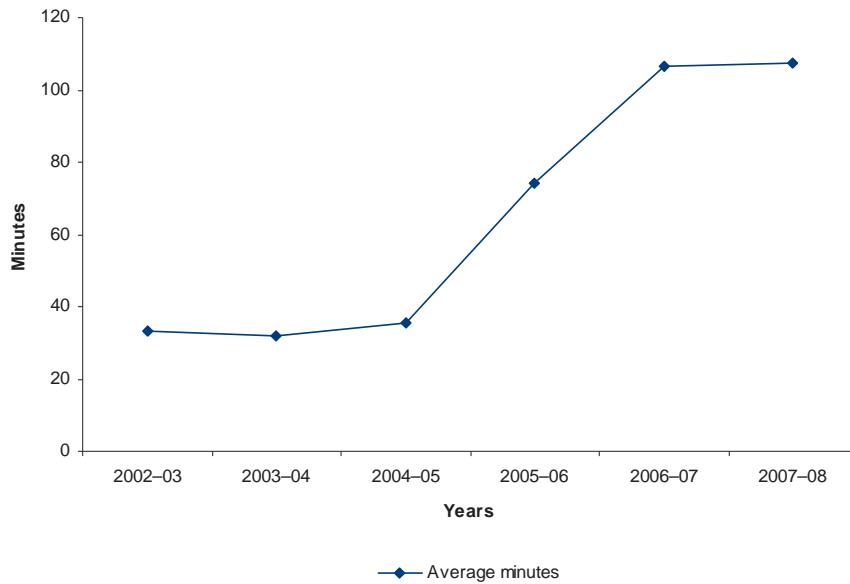
Source: Victorian Auditor-General's Office based on Victoria Police Crime Statistics 2006–07 and 2007–08. Data extracted from LEAP 18 July 2007 and LEAP 18 July 2008.

### Time taken to attend incidents

Police have spent much more time attending incidents since the Code was introduced in August 2004. Figure 4D shows the average time police spend attending family violence incidents.



**Figure 4D**  
**Average police time attending family violence incidents (minutes)**



Source: Victorian Auditor-General's Office, using data supplied by Victoria Police.

In 2004–05 police spent an average of 35.5 minutes attending incidents. This grew to an average of 107.3 minutes in 2007–08, an increase of 202.3 per cent. The increase clearly demonstrates a marked operational impact from the procedural requirements of the Code.

There is no information available on the average time taken to manage a family violence incident in total, including the time to complete administrative work, such as completion of the L17 form, and for more serious incidents, time spent applying for intervention orders, the investigation of criminal offences and court appearances. More serious incidents take a lot more time to manage and finalise than what is reflected in the average attendance times above.

Consequently, there is a need for police to expand how they measure attendance and overall management of incidents so they can understand the impact of the Code and the effect it has had on the overall workload of police.

### Cost of attending incidents

Police do not monitor the cost of responding to and managing family violence incidents. In Figure 4E, VAGO has estimated that the average cost of attending incidents increased 265.1 per cent between 2004–05 and 2007–08, or from \$85.91 to \$313.67 per call out. On this basis, police attendance of reported incidents for 2004–05 cost \$2 504 878 and \$9 935 811 in 2007–08, an increase of 296.7 per cent.

**Figure 4E**  
**Average cost of police attendees at family violence incidents**  
**2004–05 and 2007–08**

Attendance at incident <sup>(a)</sup>	Average time	Average wage per hour <sup>(b)</sup>	Cost of attending per incident	Cost of attending for all incidents <sup>(c)</sup>
<b>2004–05</b>				
1 sergeant	35.5 minutes	\$81.40	\$48.16	
1 constable	35.5 minutes	\$63.80	\$37.75	
<b>Total wage cost</b>			<b>\$85.91</b>	<b>\$2 504 878</b>
<b>2007–08</b>				
1 sergeant	107.3 minutes	\$97.50	\$174.36	
1 constable	107.3 minutes	\$77.90	\$139.31	
<b>Total wage cost</b>			<b>\$313.67</b>	<b>\$9 935 811</b>

Note: (a) Attendance based on one sergeant and one constable as required in the Code.

(b) Average wage per hour includes on-costs, such as superannuation and payroll tax.

(c) Number of reported incidents attended in 2004–05 was 29 157 and 31 676 for 2007–08.

Source: Victorian Auditor-General's Office, using data supplied by Victoria Police on average time for attendance, average wage cost and number of reported incidents attended.

While these significant cost increases linked to reported incident responses incorporate wage adjustments over the period, they also reflect the increased time and additional operational and administrative requirements associated with the introduction of the Code.

As stated above, these cost estimates reflect the time police spend attending incidents. Anecdotally, police said that after attendance, managing a family violence case could take between three and ten hours. Consequently, the total cost of managing incidents under the Code can be a lot higher, possibly two- to six-fold greater than the estimated average cost of attending an incident.

## Conclusions

Overall, police are complying with the investigatory and administrative processes and procedures specified in the Code. Police have been trained in the Code. They place high priority on reports of family violence, from the first phone call, to assigning personnel to respond to incidents at the scene and securing the victim's safety. When attending an incident police undertake a risk assessment, which guides their response and choice of options specified in the Code.

The Code requires police to record all reported incidents of family violence, although finalising all necessary administrative work can be slow. The ability of police to complete the L17 forms on time and accurately varies depending on the level of supervision and sometimes police interventions with family violence portfolio responsibilities.

It is important that police completion of the L17 form is timely and accurate. This information is used to identify repeat offenders and those at risk, to indicate trends, and it underpins the development of policing strategies. The audit identified examples of good practice at the local level, which involved analysing this data and using it to develop proactive family violence strategies for individuals and high-risk groups.

The time and the cost of investigating family violence incidents have increased since the Code was introduced. Given the additional operational and administrative requirements associated with the Code the time and cost have increased significantly. Monitoring of the time spent attending incidents is limited and the cost of managing family violence is not monitored at all.

Existing practices could be improved if benchmarks for time spent and associated Code costs are considered and monitored over time. These results should be compared between and across police regions to identify better performance and thereby facilitate a process of continuous improvement in the implementation of the Code.

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## Recommendation

### 4.1 Victoria Police should:

- introduce spot checks across all police regions to determine compliance with the Code's completion and quality assurance requirements for the Family Violence Risk Assessment and Management Report (the L17 form)
  - establish benchmarks for timely and accurate completion of the L17 form to use for comparative purposes across and between regions
  - set up and monitor benchmarks for the costs and time taken to manage the operational and administrative functions associated with the investigation of family violence incidents.
-



# 5

## Response effectiveness

### At a glance

#### Background

The four objectives of the Code of Practice for the Investigation of Family Violence (the Code) are to provide for the safety of victims, make appropriate service referrals, investigations and prosecutions, and disrupt the cycle of family violence.

#### Findings

Through the application of the Code, police are working towards securing the safety of family violence victims. This is reflected in the increasing levels of operational activity exercised through the criminal and civil options of the Code.

When police attend an incident they must refer victims and perpetrators of family violence to an appropriate service. However, monitoring and analysis of referral data to determine whether police have made appropriate referrals is insufficient.

Police have increased investigations and prosecutions in line with the Code's purpose; however, they do not measure the effectiveness of these activities.

Although police alone cannot reduce family violence, there is a lack of data that indicates whether the Code has disrupted the cycle of family violence.

#### Recommendations

Victoria Police should:

- review family violence data collection and identify data gaps that stop effective performance measurement, including outcomes specified in the Code
- establish baseline measures and targets that align with family violence objectives and strategies aimed at breaking the cycle of family violence.

## 5.1 Response options

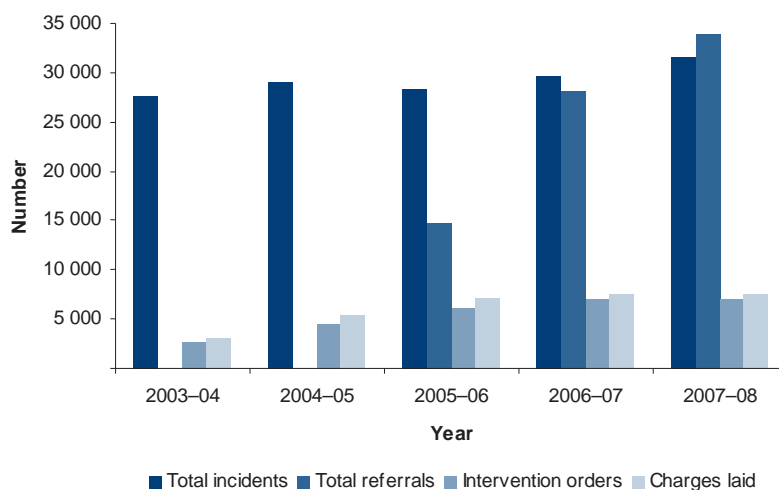
Under the Code of Practice for the Investigation of Family Violence (the Code) police attending incidents must do a risk and threat assessment before choosing the most appropriate response option, or combination of options, to safeguard and provide further support to victims and their children.

The options described in the Code are:

- **the referral option:** a mandatory requirement, which can be either:
  - **an informal referral:** where police give verbal advice and information brochures to those involved in less serious incidents
  - **a formal referral:** in serious incidents police will directly refer the victim and perpetrator to appropriate service agencies.
- **the civil option:** police assess whether there is a threat of further violence against the victim or property damage before making an application for an intervention order
- **the criminal option:** police arrest an offender and prepare criminal charges for committing a criminal offence, such as assault.

Figure 5A summarises the options available to police in managing family violence incidents through service referrals, intervention order applications and charges for criminal offences. These response options are not mutually exclusive, as police may use more than one option to deal with the issues arising from an incident.

**Figure 5A**  
Options used when attending family violence incidents



Source: Victorian Auditor General's Office, using data provided by Victoria Police.

Figure 5A shows that the use of the three response options has increased since the Code was introduced and that:

- police applications for intervention orders rose from 2 627 in 2003–04 to 7 061 in 2007–08, an increase of 169 per cent
- criminal charges laid by police rose 153 per cent between 2003–04 and 2007–08, from 3 003 to 7 612
- the number of police referrals has grown to 33 882 in 2007–08 from 14 797 in 2005–06. Information on referrals has only been available since 2005–06, because although police recorded this data on the L17 form, it was not entered into the Law Enforcement Assessment Program database (LEAP) before that date.

## 5.2 Expected outcomes

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The Code has four outcomes:

- to provide for the safety for victims
- investigation and prosecution of perpetrators where appropriate
- to make appropriate referrals
- disruption to the cycle of violence.

## 5.3 Securing the safety of victims

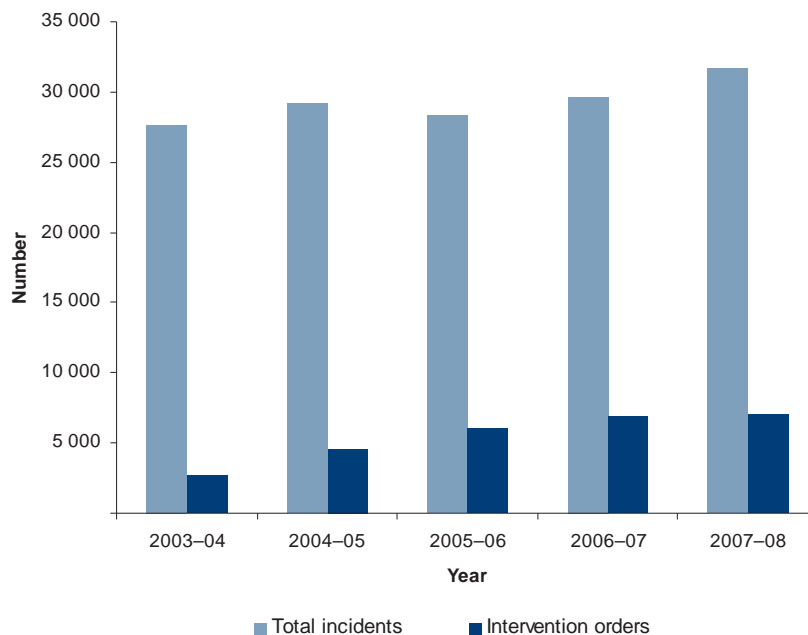
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This section analyses police use of the civil and criminal options to secure victim safety.

### 5.3.1 Using the civil option to secure victim safety

Under the civil option of the Code, police may apply for an intervention order against the perpetrator of the incident if they believe the victim or their property is at further risk of violence or damage.

**Figure 5B**  
**Total family violence incidents and police applications for intervention orders**



Source: Victorian Auditor-General's Office, using data supplied by Victoria Police.

Figure 5B shows that the number of intervention orders police applied for between 2003-04 and 2007-08, rose from 2 627 to 7 061, an increase of 169 per cent. Figure 5C shows that police-initiated intervention orders have grown to over 20 per cent of reported family violence incidents attended by police. However, this increase since the Code was introduced does not necessarily indicate that police have been more effective in improving victim safety.

**Figure 5C**  
**Police-initiated intervention orders**

	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08
Family violence incidents	27 664	29 157	28 294	29 652	31 676
Police-initiated intervention orders	2 627	4 521	6 050	6 943	7 061
Percentage change in intervention orders		+72	+33.8	+14.8	+1.7
Proportion of intervention orders to incidents	9.5	15.5	21.4	23.4	22.3

Source: Victorian Auditor-General's Office, using data supplied by Victoria Police.

The audit process tried to compare police information with court-supplied information recording police intervention order applications and their completion. However, differences in the way the two entities counted and reported their figures meant the two data sources could not be compared.



To be potentially effective, an intervention application must be granted. The data as shown in Figure 5C indicates an increase in intervention order applications made by police, but there is no routinely produced data on the success of these applications. Police and courts' administration share intervention order data quarterly. Audit analysis of this information shows that 6 182 or 63.1 per cent of the 9 791 police-initiated applications for intervention orders were granted over the period April 2007 to March 2008. To date, police have rarely used this analysis for management purposes.

This data should be routinely analysed across police districts and reported for comparative purposes. It also provides more qualitative information on police efforts to secure the safety of family violence victims compared with just the reporting of applications for intervention orders only.

Additionally, court information indicates that breach rates of intervention orders have increased. In line with the Code's intention police have responded to this trend by increasing the number of criminal charges against those breaching their intervention orders from 633 to 1 263 over the period 2003–04 to 2007–08.

Although it is clear that police are trying to safeguard victims through increased intervention order applications, it is difficult to determine whether they have achieved their goal.

Police said that despite their best efforts to inform victims about how intervention orders could preserve their personal safety, many victims often withdrew from this process, even in the most severe cases. In these circumstances applications are often dismissed. Under the new *Family Violence Protection Act 2008*, police can make applications without the victim's consent or cooperation as a witness, removing one of the common barriers police experience using the civil option of applying for intervention orders.

Police are also developing and trialling ways to reduce the administrative burden for those applying for intervention orders. Examples included:

- a 'minimum standard' package telling police what they must do when recording an incident and preparing paperwork and legal documents
- appointing a family violence investigation liaison officer who manages court appearances for police and assists victims when applications for intervention orders are heard in the Magistrates' Court
- a proposal for a common form for court registrars and magistrates, based on the L17 form, to record each case, including the assessment of the level of threat and risk to victims when applications for intervention orders are made.

### 5.3.2 Using the criminal option to secure victim safety

VAGO conducted an analysis of police criminal charges resulting from family violence incidents. A summary of this analysis is shown in Figure 5D and includes:

- crimes against the person, including assault, homicide, rape, sexual assault and abduction

- crimes against property, including property damage
- justice procedures, which are mainly breaches of intervention orders
- all other charges.

Figure 5D shows that there has been an increase in the number of police criminal charges, from 3 003 to 7 612, an increase of 153 per cent.

**Figure 5D**  
**Charges arising from Victoria Police reports of family violence incidents,**  
**2003–04 to 2007–08**

	2003–04	2004–05	2005–06	2006–07	2007–08
<b>Reported Family Violence Incidents</b>	<b>27 664</b>	<b>29 157</b>	<b>28 294</b>	<b>29 652</b>	<b>31 676</b>
<b>Charges laid</b>	<b>3 003</b>	<b>5 468</b>	<b>7 246</b>	<b>7 612</b>	<b>7 612</b>
<b>Crimes against the person</b>					
• Assaults	1 552	3 129	3 941	4 255	4 260
• Homicides	6	8	12	7	9
• Rape	12	25	31	42	54
• Sexual assault	21	46	50	61	92
• Abduction/kidnap	21	25	36	27	38
• Robbery	2	11	8	4	10
<b>Total crimes against the person</b>	<b>1 614</b>	<b>3 244</b>	<b>4 078</b>	<b>4 396</b>	<b>4 463</b>
<b>Crimes against property</b>					
• Property damage	408	646	752	850	841
• Other property	76	127	134	102	136
<b>Total crimes against property</b>	<b>484</b>	<b>773</b>	<b>886</b>	<b>952</b>	<b>977</b>
<b>Justice procedures (including breaches of intervention orders)</b>	<b>644</b>	<b>997</b>	<b>1 217</b>	<b>1 237</b>	<b>1 292</b>
<b>All Other <sup>(a)</sup></b>	<b>261</b>	<b>454</b>	<b>1 065</b>	<b>1 027</b>	<b>880</b>
<b>TOTAL CHARGES LAID</b>	<b>3 003</b>	<b>5 468</b>	<b>7 246</b>	<b>7 612</b>	<b>7 612</b>

Note: (a) All other represents a balancing item as police charges are aggregated by the main charges laid against each offender.

Source: Victorian Auditor-General's Office analysis of Victoria Police, Law Enforcement Assessment Program data 2003–04 to 2007–08.

## Crimes against the person and related incidents

In the context of family violence incidents, analysis of police criminal charges against the perpetrators of these crimes over the period 2003–04 to 2007–08 shows:

- crimes against the person increased 176 per cent during the period, from 1 614 to 4 463, of which 174 per cent is due to the increase in assaults, which rose from 1 552 to 4 260
- with the exception of 2007–08, the annual rate of growth in charges laid and crimes against the person and assaults, has exceeded the annual rate of growth in the number of reported family violence incidents
- other violent crimes against individuals including rape, sexual assault and abductions have all increased during the same period
- homicides are relatively small in number and a stable proportion of all incidents.

The rise in charges reflects increased police attention on pursuing investigations and prosecutions through the Code's criminal option.

The large increase in charges for crimes against individuals compared with total incidents is due to the rise in assault charges, and an associated increase in rape and sexual assault charges. This trend may indicate that:

- perpetrators of family violence are becoming more violent
- perpetrators of family violence do not have access to appropriate behavioural change services, or they may not be using these services
- counselling services are not effective in changing the behaviour of perpetrators
- victims are still reluctant to report a family violence incident to police until there is a serious assault or other crime associated with it.

While the number and proportion of homicides directly attributable to family violence remains small and stable, any homicide is tragic. The Victorian Health Promotion Foundation's research identified family violence as the main cause of preventable death in Victorian women aged 15–44.

Family violence-related serious injury and death highlight the importance of monitoring the incidence and severity of assaults especially for:

- repeat perpetrators, as research literature reveals these individuals are considered the most likely to escalate their violent behaviour
- repeat victims, as these individuals risk being subject to repeat offending behaviour.

Measuring charges for crimes against individuals can offer more information than just the level of activity. These measures can provide qualitative indicators of how safe the victims of family violence are, particularly if this group includes repeat perpetrators and repeat victims. They can also show whether police are effective in disrupting the cycle of violence. Another qualitative measure victim safety is the severity of assault, although police don't measure this at the moment and hospital emergency department data doesn't show the full extent of this.

## Legislative changes and enhanced police powers to secure victim safety

Since the Code was introduced, legislative changes have given police extra powers to secure the safety of victims. These include:

- introducing holding powers in mid-2006, which allow police to remove the alleged perpetrator from the home for up to 10 hours. These powers are used to manage incidents where there is a greater risk of further violence or danger to the victim or property. In the two years from July 2006 to June 2008, police attended 61 328 family violence incidents and used their holding powers in 2 531 of these incidents, or in just over 4 per cent of incidents
- new police powers, in the form of family violence safety notices, came into force in December 2008 with the introduction of the *Family Violence Protection Act 2008*. The safety notices have similar conditions to an interim intervention order and include the power to remove a perpetrator from the home for up to 72 hours. Safety notices have conditions attached to them and if the perpetrator breaks them they could face criminal charges. In the first month of their introduction, police had issued 128 safety notices.

Police said that they will monitor the use of holding powers and safety notices to determine whether they effectively safeguard victims and how they affect civil court proceedings.

## Conclusion

Police are using the Code requirements to safeguard victims of family violence. This is evident in the increasing use of the civil and criminal options of the Code. Police are working in line with the Code objective of securing the safety of victims through higher numbers of intervention order applications under the civil option. Police have laid a record number of criminal charges against perpetrators under the criminal option. Progressive legislative changes allow police to secure the immediate safety of victims through the use of holding powers and the issue of safety notices.

However, it is difficult to determine whether these higher levels of police activity have been entirely effective in improving the safety of victims because:

- there is no conclusive data that indicates a marked increase in the proportion of court-granted intervention orders, while breaches of intervention orders continue to increase
- the number of crimes against victims, particularly assaults, also continues to increase.

More detailed research and analysis of police responses to family violence incidents is needed to determine whether the use of the Code's civil and criminal options improve the safety family violence victims.

## Recommendation

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### 5.1 Victoria Police should:

- routinely measure and report the rate at which police-initiated applications for intervention orders are granted by the court
- include questions in the survey of family violence victims to judge whether police actions and intervention orders secured their safety
- work closely with the courts' administration and share data that illustrates the success rate of police applications for intervention orders.

## 5.4 Investigation and prosecution outcomes

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The Code requirement that police present offenders to the court is carried out through the Code's criminal option, which allows police to investigate and prosecute perpetrators of family violence for offences, including assault, rape or intervention order breaches (see Figure 5D).

The number of criminal charges laid is a useful indicator of operational activity and police commitment to pursue prosecutions consistent with the thrust of the Code. However, Victoria Police do not always know the results of criminal charges for family violence, and cannot measure their effectiveness as part of the criminal option.

To gauge the effectiveness of this activity there should be:

- a way of measuring the success of prosecutions, that is the proportion of police-laid charges that are proved
- ongoing monitoring of charges laid to determine:
  - trends in offence seriousness, which could indicate the Code's effectiveness in controlling family violence
  - whether these charges relate to repeat offenders and repeat victims, which would give police an indication of how successful their strategies are in reducing repeat offences by the same perpetrator and protecting high-risk victims.

Data on prosecution outcomes from police charges from court records is difficult to get. Family violence is not, in itself, an offence. There is a fundamental difficulty in identifying and extracting the results of police-instigated prosecutions related to family violence, and the courts' final decision, which may not mirror the original police charges.

To identify the success rate of these prosecutions, police need to work with the courts' administration to monitor and report the outcomes of family violence-related prosecutions. This could be done if the original police charges were given a Courtlink number (a court identifier), which would make it easy to track these outcomes.

Importantly, this illustrates a fundamental problem with data management, monitoring and reporting between the courts' administration and Victoria Police. Both parties are pivotal in delivering the state's integrated approach for family violence services. Both maintain family violence data but differ in their codes of practice, definitions, data collection methods, and standards for analysis and reporting data across agencies.

## Conclusion

Police have followed the Code objective of investigating and prosecuting in family violence-related matters. However, although the increase in this activity has been measured the success of these prosecutions has not.

Victoria Police reports on how many investigations and prosecutions arise from criminal offences, such as assaults and breaches of intervention orders. However, there is no direct link between court data showing the outcomes from criminal prosecutions and police prosecutions. This should be addressed as soon as possible given 25 per cent of family violence incidents lead to criminal charges.

## Recommendation

- 5.2 Victoria Police should, in conjunction with courts' administration, develop a system that identifies and collects the findings of criminal prosecutions related to family violence.

## 5.5 Appropriate referral outcomes

The Code states that family violence victims often have ongoing needs that require specialist referral services. Accordingly, the Code has a mandatory requirement that police make at least one informal referral to the appropriate service agencies for all victims, perpetrators and children involved in family violence, irrespective of any other police actions.

The Code offers two referral forms:

- Informal referrals are made in less serious incidents, such as verbal disagreements. Police provide the victim and the perpetrator with verbal advice and the contact details of appropriate service agencies.
- Formal referrals are made in more serious incidents involving the physical or mental health of the victim, injury or property damage. Police give separate information about the victim and the perpetrator directly to the appropriate service agencies, such as women's emergency refuges and men's counselling services.

### Informal and formal service referrals

Police record the referral type made on the L17 form. This data was only recorded in the LEAP database after the protocol between the Department of Human Services and Victoria Police—*Family Violence Referral Pathways: 2006–2008*, was signed in July 2006.

**Figure 5E**  
**Informal and formal referrals made by police 2005–06 to 2007–08**

Referral type	2005–06 <sup>(a)</sup>	2006–07	2007–08
Informal – victim	8 607	16 045	17 895
Formal – victim	2 974	5 885	7 176
Informal – perpetrator	2 703	5 051	6 398
Formal – perpetrator	513	1 288	2 413
<b>Total referrals</b>	<b>14 797</b>	<b>28 269</b>	<b>33 882</b>

Note: (a) Information in only for part of the 2005–06 year.

Source: Victorian Auditor-General's Office, using data supplied by Victoria Police.

There are ongoing recording and reporting issues related to referral data. Police-instigated referrals are mandatory under the Code, and may be made for more than one person at each incident. Therefore, the number of referrals made annually is expected to be higher than the number of reported incidents that police attend.

However, the number of referrals is less than reported incidents for 2006–07 and only just exceeds the number of reported incidents for 2007–08. This indicates under-reporting of police referrals. Police need to investigate and address this as a matter of urgency because referrals are the most widely used response option and are mandated in the Code.

There is also very limited information about the appropriateness of police referrals. Police data shows the number of formal and informal victim and perpetrator referrals made. This data is not correlated with other actions, and there is no indicator of the uptake or appropriateness of the referrals.

As victims and perpetrators are not compelled to take up referrals and there is limited follow-up of referrals, there is very limited information on:

- the type of referral services offered to victims and perpetrators
- whether referrals are accessed
- whether the most appropriate referrals are made, in terms of improving outcomes for the victim or the perpetrator, particularly:
  - whether victim safety is more secure
  - whether there are enough services for perpetrators, particularly high-risk individuals, such as repeat offenders, or whether they are benefiting from behavioural change.

Police are not formally required to follow up referrals; however, there would be benefits to police if they were. This could be done, for example, through the faxback process (these are formal referrals that police email to service agencies) to determine whether victims and perpetrators are accessing these referrals. It may also be possible, with the cooperation of the Department of Human Services and referral agencies, to collect information about victim and perpetrator referral outcomes. At a minimum, this exercise would inform police management about police were complying with all aspects of the Code starting with the initial formal referral.

## Local police initiatives to improve the effectiveness of referrals

The audit identified several examples of local initiatives where family violence advisors and family violence liaison officers have introduced improvements to the way police make and monitor formal referrals. Examples of these initiatives included:

- trial of an immediate phone call from the scene of an incident that puts the victim in direct contact with the referral agency, leading to higher uptake of the agency's services by victims and reduced paperwork
- the development of a comprehensive information package for both men and women to encourage the uptake of informal referrals.

To date, there has been no evidence of whether these initiatives have met their intended outcomes. Some programs have only been recently established. Police are not in a position to know the outcomes of service referrals as it is the responsibility of service providers to monitor their own effectiveness. Further, some agencies do not share client information given that the participation of victims and perpetrators in support service programs is voluntary, and there are issues about sharing client information between agencies. While some family violence advisors, with the cooperation of service providers, monitor service referrals more closely, this is not uniform practice.

Given the state's integrated service system, measures to facilitate uniform monitoring of access and outcomes of service referrals would be desirable particularly in informing police of the activities of high-risk individuals such as repeat or violent offenders; and planning for strategies to secure the safety of potential victims.

## Conclusion

Monitoring and analysis of police referral data is insufficient in determining whether police have made appropriate referrals for the victims and perpetrators of family violence. Given referrals are the most frequently used option under the Code, this represents a serious gap in police information and analysis.

Maintaining accurate data on how many police referrals are made, together with other measures could reflect the effectiveness of the Code. If police can improve their referral data it will also enable them to improve information about:

- the appropriateness of referrals made
- whether victims and perpetrators access these referrals
- the outcomes of victim and perpetrator referrals.

## Recommendation

- 5.3 Victoria Police should establish protocols with services agencies to monitor formal referrals and track access to services, particularly for repeat offenders.



## 5.6 Breaking the cycle of family violence

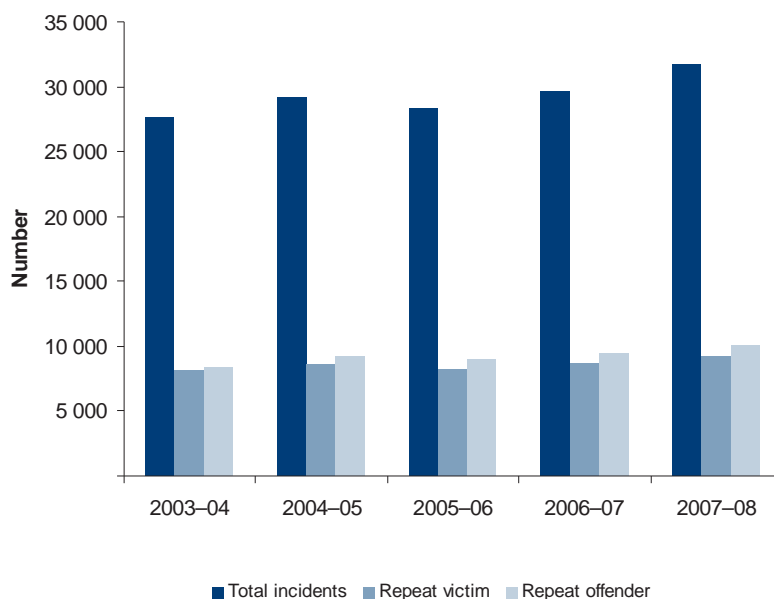
The number of reported incidents has increased since the Code was introduced and police anticipate that there will be a further increase with the introduction of the *Family Violence Protection Act 2008*, along with safety notices.

While the data shows there has been increased reporting of, and police attendance at, family violence incidents, there is a lack of meaningful data illustrating whether the Code has successfully disrupted the cycle of family violence.

VAGO looked at repeated incident data to assess how the Code affects the cycle of family violence. The results detailed in Figure 5F, show that repeat violent incidents committed by the same offender remain at 32 per cent of all reported incidents. The higher number of repeat offenders, compared to repeat victims, 32 per cent compared to 29 per cent, is due to a perpetrator having more than one victim in the relationship or moving on to a new relationship.

Police stated that this result was reflected the complexity of dealing with family violence and the 'cycle of violence'. They estimate that it takes several serious incidents before a victim will leave the relationship. The evidence supporting this view is limited. However, the constant rate of repeat offences indicates that the Code is not effective in breaking the cycle of family violence.

**Figure 5F**  
**Number of repeat family violence incidents in Victoria involving the same victim and the same perpetrator in one year**



Source: Victorian Auditor-General's Office, using data supplied by the Family Violence Unit, Victoria Police.

VAGO found that local initiatives were being applied across regions to address repeat offending, which included:

- analysing LEAP data on repeat incidents to identify victims who are at a greater risk of ongoing violence. This information is used to inform the ‘three strikes policy’, when a third call to a residential address leads to the assignment of a case officer both to monitor the situation to provide greater security to the victim, and to control the behaviour of the perpetrator
- a ‘high-risk client policy’, where a memorandum of understanding has been established with service agencies to undertake a comprehensive risk assessment of an incident to advise police as they provide for the ongoing safety and security of the victim
- Ballarat police have a 7 and 21 day follow-up with victims to ascertain whether services have been accessed and whether the perpetrator is living in the home. This informs police of the potential for a repeat incident and any increases in risk for the victim.

Although data on repeat incidents is important, police should focus on measures that, in combination, indicate the Code’s effectiveness on family violence, demonstrating:

- the incidence of repeat offences involving the same offender, same victim and same location, beyond the current year being reported
- the severity of violence, resulting in police-laid criminal charges
- changes in the offending behaviour of perpetrators of family violence, which is compared against long periods without offending.

### Improving performance measurement

Data collection, analysis and sharing are critical for identifying performance improvements and better outcomes. This work, whether it is undertaken centrally or at divisional or regional levels:

- is based on recording numerical data, such as the number of incidents
- is correlated against data entry fields, such as the location of incidents
- provides intelligence, such as the location of repeat offences.

When data is used to assess police performance, it mainly relates to activity levels rather than to outcomes. This is a common criticism of public sector data measurements, where organisational process and activity measures are considered before client or program outcomes.

For sustained and continued public investment in family violence strategies, valid explanations and indications of the medium and long-term affects of the initiatives are necessary. Although this data doesn’t exist, Victoria Police already has an idea about how this could be measured. Similarly, some local intelligence units are working on their own projects to improve policing in their area.

Police will be able to assess the effectiveness of their own procedures and policies if they establish comprehensive baseline measures and performance monitoring over time. This will allow them to identify gaps in the service system requiring support from other agencies to reach designated targets and outcomes. Police must demonstrate the impact of policing strategies, particularly whether they can reduce the incidence and severity of family violence and protect victims. Potential measures include reductions in repeat offending, reductions in the frequency and severity of incidents, and victim satisfaction with police responses.

Police work alone cannot combat and prevent family violence. Under the integrated approach, police need to work together with the rest of the criminal justice and the human services systems to meet the needs of victims of family violence and to change the offending behaviours of the perpetrators of family violence. Police need to improve performance measurement and provide this information to other agencies so they can assess the effectiveness of the integrated approach.

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## Recommendation

### 5.4 Victoria Police should:

- review family violence data collection and identify data gaps that stop effective performance measurement, including outcomes specified in the Code
  - establish baseline measures and targets that align with family violence objectives and strategies aimed at breaking the cycle of family violence.
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# 6

## Governance and management

### At a glance

#### Background

The Family Violence Unit (the Unit) develops and applies strategies to improve the police response to family violence. It also works with internal and external policy and advisory bodies and develops and delivers training along with regional family violence advisors. The five police regions are responsible for carrying out the Code and they operate in isolation from each other and the Unit.

#### Findings

The Unit is responsible for developing and applying the Code, which is a major achievement and underpins family violence policing in Victoria. The Unit, however, has not been proactive in the development or the evaluation of responses to manage family violence.

Despite monthly meetings between the Unit and the family violence advisors, there is no forum for sharing successful projects. Similarly, the Unit has not been involved in developing a framework to communicate regional examples of best practice and procedures.

Family violence advisors and liaison officers play an important role in applying the Code and informing police about major developments and trends in family violence.

#### Recommendation

Victoria Police should review its regional structure for family violence and the roles of family violence advisors and liaison officers to:

- enable advisors to play a bigger role in promoting good practice and training police
- make liaison officers positions subject to a competitive application process.

## 6.1 Police management of family violence

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The Family Violence Unit (the Unit) is part of the Sexual Offences and Child Abuse Coordination Office which is part of the Crime Department within Victoria Police. The Unit is responsible for developing and applying strategies that improve police responses to family violence. The Unit also works with internal and external policy and advisory bodies, and develops and carries out training together with regional family violence advisors.

The five police regions are responsible for applying the Code of Practice for the Investigation of Family Violence (the Code). They operate autonomously from each other and the Unit. At the regional level:

- family violence managers are responsible for family violence planning and management
- family violence advisors have an operational, policy and community liaison brief across regions for family violence matters
- family violence liaison officers provide day-to-day advice to police.

## 6.2 The Family Violence Unit

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Under the Code, the Unit is responsible for:

- developing and maintaining best practice and training procedures for police responses to family violence
- developing, implementing and evaluating regional and statewide responses to family violence
- monitoring and reporting on the overall police response to family violence
- coordinating police involvement with government and community agencies.

### 6.2.1 Best practice procedures in police training

The Unit has been responsible for major developments, including:

- developing the Code and associated training given to serving police from 2004 onwards
- developing comprehensive training and guidance materials for police on the use of holding powers, following legislative changes in 2006
- preparing for the introduction of the *Family Violence Protection Act* in December 2008. This included creating police training programs about the Act's implications on managing family violence and the issue of safety notices.

## 6.2.2 Development, application and assessment of regional and statewide responses to family violence

The Unit has spent a lot of time preparing for the application of the new Act and its associated training requirements during the past 15 months. Developing and applying the Code is a major achievement and underpins family violence policing in Victoria. The Unit, however, has not developed or evaluated responses to manage family violence.

In 2009 the Unit will be responsible for reviewing and updating the Code to meet requirements under the new Act. The Code, which has been operational for five years, has not been reviewed to assess whether it has met its intended outcomes and successfully addressed family violence in the community.

Accordingly, the Unit needs to develop a strategic approach to evaluating the Code, focusing on its main operational functions and intended outcomes. Such an evaluation could include:

- assessing whether victims and perpetrators are using the Code's mandatory referral option, whether there are any barriers to access, and whether referrals are meeting victims' needs and improving outcomes for perpetrators
- determining whether the Code safeguards and supports the victims of family violence. A victim satisfaction index could measure this across the five police regions, dividing information based on location, ethnicity and other relevant socioeconomic factors
- analysing the effectiveness of the Code's civil option, particularly the cost and time of applying for intervention orders and the benefits measured through the number of successful applications and securing the safety of family violence victims
- reviewing specific parts of the 'integrated service approach' to managing family violence and identifying service gaps between police and the courts, the Department of Human Services (DHS) and referral agencies, establishing whether potential system failures compromise victim safety and support
- reviewing case management for multiple and complex needs' clients and police partnering with other agencies under the integrated approach, including the use of common protocols and memoranda of understanding at a statewide and local level
- assessing whether the Code has reduced the incidence of family violence in the community, including an assessment of the barriers inhibiting the Code's effectiveness
- developing a partnership between police and the courts' administration and DHS to create performance measures that reflect the 'joined-up' approach to managing family violence. This group should also try to identify data availability and issues that could help or hinder this process.

The Unit could undertake these tasks by leveraging off the statistical and analytical capability that exists within Victoria Police or by contracting external evaluation specialists.

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## Recommendation

- 6.1 The Family Violence Unit should determine whether the Code is effective and is creating better outcomes for the victims and perpetrators of family violence.

### 6.2.3 Monitoring and reporting on the overall police response to family violence

The Unit's responsibilities include monitoring and reporting on the overall police response to family violence. The Unit does not have line control or managerial oversight of the advisors, who are managed and resourced through their regions, but it uses monthly meetings with the advisors to influence strategy and coordinate procedures.

There were many examples of good local practice for improving responses to family violence incidents at the regional level. These related to the administration, investigation and prosecution of family violence matters.

Despite monthly meetings between the Unit and the advisors, there is no forum for sharing successful projects. Similarly, the Unit has not been involved in developing a framework to communicate regional examples of best practice and procedures. This area could be developed further. The Unit needs to focus on ongoing improvements that identify and encourage good practices in regional responses to family violence.

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## Recommendation

- 6.2 The Family Violence Unit should develop a continuous improvement framework that identifies and encourages good practice for police responses to and management of family violence matters.

### 6.2.4 Police coordination with government and community agencies

Police are part of a wider, whole-of-government approach to the management of family violence known as the 'integrated approach' in Victoria. Police are represented on the committees and working groups that create the governance structure for the integrated approach to family violence. The Unit represents Victoria Police at every level in the structure and works closely with the other agencies involved in managing the integrated approach.



## Conclusion

The Unit developed and applied key strategic projects, such as the Code in 2004 and the *Family Violence Protection Act 2008*. It has developed related training and coordinated police involvement across government and with community agencies involved in the integrated approach.

The Unit's operations and focus can be improved, particularly its monitoring of regional responses to family violence and its communication of better practice examples.

The Unit will review the Code in 2009 and update it to include the operational impacts of the new Act. The Unit can show strategic leadership if it broadens the review scope to include ways to assess the Code's effectiveness. This evaluation would be timely because the Code has been in operation for five years and represents a major aspect of policing activity.

## 6.3 Managing family violence in the police regions

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The five police regions are responsible for applying the Code and they operate autonomously from each other and from the Unit. At the regional level:

- family violence managers are responsible for the strategic management of family violence, while family violence advisors oversee operational, policy and community issues across regions. Family violence liaison officers give day-to-day advice to police
- all operational police must respond to family violence incidents
- some regions have dedicated family violence units that specialise in the management of family violence incidents.

Family violence advisors and liaison officers play an important role in applying the Code at the regional level.

The audit process identified many examples of local family violence projects aimed at improving police responses and management of family violence incidents. However, it did not find a systematic approach to communicating examples of good practice, which could reduce doubling up of resources and ideas and inform operational improvements in other policing areas.

### 6.3.1 Family violence managers

Each of the five police regions has a regional family violence manager who is usually a senior inspector in the regional headquarters. Manager duties include:

- developing regional plans for the management of family violence
- monitoring and managing family violence matters within their region
- promoting the ongoing development of the integrated approach to family violence through internal and external communications
- taking part in police operational management, identifying family violence issues and planning responses to address family violence issues.

## 6.3.2 Family violence advisors

Family violence advisors are the only operational police who have a full-time family violence role. Along with the Unit, they are the main point of contact within police regions, and are the primary contact for the community and other agencies. They work with these entities in the management of family violence incidents and the development of improved strategies to deal with family violence.

Every geographical police region has from one to three full-time advisors, covering one or more divisions within each region. Under the Code, the advisor's role is to:

- provide a focal point for operational police and management, family violence liaison officers and service referral agencies
- set up and maintain formal consultative networks and represent Victoria Police at family violence forums
- coordinate, develop and conduct training and workshops for operational police in consultation with the Family Violence Unit and regional training officers
- research and identify issues, trends and incidents of family violence and develop projects and strategies for the management of family violence.

The extent to which the advisors can carry out any or all of these roles depends on resourcing and support they receive from management, ongoing operational pressures and policing priorities.

During our field work we observed that the advisors were involved in a number of activities, including:

- providing general information on family violence and specific guidance on procedural matters as specified in the Code to operational police
- providing training in the Code and regional response strategies to family violence liaison officers
- maintaining close relations with key service referral agencies, and in some cases setting up specific locally based agreements regarding services such as emergency accommodation and referral arrangement with hospitals
- informing the family violence manager of outcomes of meetings with the Unit and providing information on emerging trends or strategic issues
- setting up and maintaining community networks, including the development of community projects such as public engagements aimed at informing women about family violence; and representing police at family violence committees at the regional level
- an increasing involvement in training and educational activities including:
  - training for the application of the new *Family Violence Protection Act 2008*
  - the development of information on family violence for operational police
  - developing and conducting training workshops for operational police and liaison officers
- researching family violence data to identify:
  - local issues which, for example, resulted in the establishment of the dedicated family violence unit in Ballarat

- local trends in incidents of family violence that will inform local response projects and strategies for managing difficult and high-risk family violence cases. In some regions advisors work with divisional intelligence units to identify options for the strategic analysis of family violence data.

There were also good practice examples where advisors had developed Code application processes and procedures and police compliance and commitment improved. These included:

- establishing specialist family violence response units to manage incidents in areas with a higher rate of family violence. These units also manage more serious incidents, requiring more complex responses, such as issuing interim intervention orders, or procedures relating to a complaint and warrant
- keeping all Law Enforcement Assistance Program (LEAP) entries of family violence incidents open until advisors had reviewed and signed off on them as complete. This measure has been introduced to make sure that police make formal service referrals and that high-risk victims, subject to repeat offences can be identified
- developing a 'minimum requirements' package of all the paperwork needed to complete complex procedures relating to the complaint and warrant and complaint and summons stages of an investigation. These measures helped operational members by reducing the administrative complexity and burden associated with these process, while increasing the accuracy of completion
- some advisors assuming responsibility for cases that result in prosecutions, including preparing evidence briefs and communicating with victims and police prosecutors.

Advisors are usually employed full-time and report to their regional manager. However, some regions are moving away from this approach and assigning portfolio responsibility to other senior officers within the region, where family violence becomes just one of several portfolios they manage. This development will make it difficult to discharge the important and specialised role that advisors play in addition to their other general policing responsibilities.

### 6.3.3 Family violence liaison officers

Family violence liaison officers are the central contact point for most family violence-related matters at the station level. This includes establishing contacts and liaising within their local communities, particularly with service providers.

The appointment of family violence liaison officers does not depend on experience or interest in the area. Appointments are made without a competitive recruitment process. There is no mandatory training for the role, but in some regions advisors play a mentoring role.

There is a family violence liaison officer at every 24-hour police station in Victoria. The Code states they must be at sergeant rank, and take responsibility for the family violence portfolio at their station, or for a cluster of small stations within an area.

Family violence liaison officer responsibilities include:

- providing a consistent and coordinated approach to family violence
- monitoring and reporting on family violence
- providing a central contact point at the station for local referral agencies
- establishing relationships between police and other agencies
- coordinating responses and supporting victims who may experience repeat offences.

The family violence liaison officer role is an important part of local policing. Unlike advisors, liaison officers have general policing responsibilities and their ability to carry out their family violence duties depends on many variables, including local staffing levels and supervision, support and monitoring and access to ongoing training and information.

Liaison officers receive training in the Code and regional initiatives and are the point of contact on family violence for police. This approach means all police are equally responsible for managing family violence, as intended in the Code, and local knowledge is preserved. The weakness of this approach is that major portfolio positions may lack the necessary expertise and skill and this could directly affect local policing attitudes and behaviour towards family violence.

These officers are the central contact for training and news about changes in family violence practice. This is especially important when sending staff to non-compulsory courses and seminars is difficult. There is an expectation that liaison officers will communicate information and materials through informal contact with other officers.

Liaison officers are also responsible for monitoring and reporting family violence. This is monitored using family violence data on incidents, attendances, charges laid, intervention orders sought and reoffending activity analysis. This data is collated and analysed for regular regional and divisional task and coordination meetings; and informs resource decisions and the development of station projects, designed to address local issues.

However, the ability of liaison officers to strategically analyse family violence data varied. Time pressures and responsibilities in other areas meant that they had limited opportunities to search police databases for victim and perpetrator histories. There were also issues around their technical capability to interrogate existing police data sources. The need for specific intelligence training to enable liaison officers to better access and interrogate information sources is evident.

## Conclusion

The roles of the family violence advisors and liaison officers are important in administering the Code and keeping police informed about key developments and trends in family violence. Overall, they are meeting their responsibilities but there are opportunities for improvement.

As police regions operate autonomously without a systematic approach to continuous improvement, good practices in management of family violence incidents developed by advisors are not being effectively communicated to other regions.

Given the specialist knowledge that the full-time advisors develop, there is an increasing demand for them to be actively involved in training police in family violence-related matters. There is a similar demand for liaison officers to improve their contribution to local intelligence gathering and strategic planning. Specialised training in data analysis and periodic secondment opportunities to divisional intelligence units should also be offered to improve this ability in liaison officers.

Family violence responsibilities are only one of the portfolios that liaison officers manage. However, there is an increasing expectation that they are involved in the strategic analysis of family violence data and the planning of local initiatives. Additionally, the importance of their role as a central point of information and knowledge about family violence cannot be understated. Accordingly, the position of liaison officers should be strengthened through a competitive recruitment process.

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## Recommendation

6.3 Victoria Police should review its regional structure for family violence and the roles of family violence advisors and liaison officers to:

- enable advisors to play a bigger role in promoting good practice and training police
  - make liaison officer positions subject to a more competitive selection process.
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# Auditor-General's reports

## Reports tabled during 2008–09

Report title	Date tabled
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Biosecurity Incidents: Planning and Risk Management for Livestock Diseases (2008–09:9)	November 2008
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Management of the Multi-Purpose Taxi Program (2008–09:13)	December 2008
Results of Audits for Entities with 30 June 2008 Balance Dates (2008–09:14)	December 2008
Preparedness to Respond to Terrorism Incidents: Essential services and critical infrastructure (2008–09:15)	January 2009
Literacy and Numeracy Achievement (2008–09:16)	February 2009
Administration of the <i>Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988</i> (2008–09:17)	April 2009
Access to Public Hospitals: Measuring Performance (2008–09:18)	April 2009
Management of School Funds (2008–09:19)	May 2009
The New Royal Children's Hospital—a public private partnership (2008–09:20)	May 2009
The Channel Deepening Project (2008–09:21)	May 2009
Results of Audits for Entities with other than 30 June 2008 Balance Dates (2008–09:22)	May 2009

# Auditor-General's reports

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## Reports tabled during 2008–09

Report title	Date tabled
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Withdrawal of Infringement Notices (2008–09:24)	June 2009
Claims Management by the Victorian WorkCover Authority (2008–09:25)	June 2009
Connecting Courts – the Integrated Courts Management System (2008–09:26)	June 2009

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