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## **Victorian Government Royal Commission into Family Violence Report**

Brimbank Melton Community Legal Centre (BMCLC), a program of Comm Unity Plus Services Ltd, supports the recommendations from the Royal Commission into Family Violence. We congratulate Premier Andrews and the Victorian Government for establishing the Royal Commission, thereby acknowledging the adverse impact of family violence on our community. We strongly urge the Government to make a significant investment to ensure the implementation of the recommendations from this review.

We are pleased at a number of the recommendations put forward in the Report, including the establishment of support and safety hubs throughout Victoria. BMCLC believes that this will provide a broader reach of support to victims of family violence who will have better access to appropriate services in their area. Talei Richards, Senior Lawyer and Family Violence Project Coordinator, states "These specialised service hubs are especially vital for people who live in the outer suburbs of Melbourne where they are isolated and have limited access to support in their community."

BMCLC also agrees that the sharing of information between agencies that work with victims of family violence is vital to our ability to provide a holistic support service. The recommendation to create a Central Information Point will facilitate this process and provide a conduit for agencies to share important data, which will enhance efficiency but most importantly, reduce the need for the victim to retell their story.

Another recommendation that has been welcomed by BMCLC is the 'Safe Home' initiative. James McCarthy, Chairperson of Comm Unity Plus Services, agrees that any proposal that serves to address immediate to long term risks of homelessness for female victims of family violence and their children is a priority. The Report recommendation that prioritises the removal of blockages for women needing access to crisis, refuge and transitional accommodation will substantially improve the housing situation for our clients experiencing family violence. Mr McCarthy also

encourages the need for agencies to work with men who are affected by family violence as part of our holistic approach through the ongoing development and expansion of behavioural change programs.

As a legal advocate at Court, Talei Richards works closely with Sunshine Magistrates Court, a specialist court, and Bacchus Marsh Magistrates Court to improve court based services for family violence victims. She observes that "there are extensive benefits of a specialist family violence court, like the Sunshine Magistrates Court, and we endorse any plans to expand these courts to outer Melbourne areas."

BMCLC has recently expanded its outreach legal services to include health justice partnerships with Sunshine Hospital and Djerriwarrh Health Service within their ante-natal clinics. These are both central health services that support large and growing populations of racially diverse communities. Rachna Muddagouni, CEO of Comm Unity Plus Services, firmly believes that our work with these two major health services allows us to develop a holistic response for people, and their children, experiencing family violence. Ms Muddagouni says "We believe that providing a legal service in a health justice setting brings important benefits to our family violence clients by reducing risk and combining resources and expertise."

*For further information or for any queries and referrals, please contact Talei Richards, Senior Lawyer & Family Violence Project Coordinator on 8312 2020 or 9747 5240.*