

MEDIA RELEASE

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General practices helping patients affected by family violence




Primary Care Pathways to Safety empowers general practice staff to provide immediate and practical support to patients experiencing family violence. Image: Shutterstock

Helping general practice staff to protect and support patients experiencing family violence is a central mission of North Western Melbourne Primary Health Network (NWMPHN).

Through its successful and innovative program, Primary Care Pathways to Safety, the organisation fosters a strong, practical and trauma-informed response to victim-survivors. It aligns directly with the measures flagged recently by Victorian Premier Jacinta Allan, and provides evidence-based support for Australian Government priorities in tackling family violence.

With funding from the Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care, Primary Care Pathways to Safety provides tailored training to GPs, practice nurses, practice managers and reception staff to help them assist patients who disclose that they are experiencing intimate partner or other forms of domestic violence.

Support offered ranges from information on local services right through to alerting emergency and crisis organisations to provide immediate refuge and protection.



Developed in collaboration with the University of Melbourne's Safer Families Centre of Research Excellence, which developed targeted training protocols, the program began in 2019, with funding provided to 30 practices across Melbourne's north and west for training and resources.

The program went through 2 rigorous evaluations – by the university's Department of General Practice and the Sax Institute – and was found to be valuable and effective.

As a result, it was renewed and expanded. NWMPHN is in the process of recruiting another 30 practices to undertake the training.

In a further expansion, Primary Care Pathways to Safety is set to launch a secondary consult service, with 2 family violence specialist services – Berry Street and GenWest – funded to provide expert tailored advice to practices.

"As the Australian and Victorian governments have acknowledged, gendered violence has reached crisis proportions in this country, with family violence accounting for a large proportion of incidents," said Bianca Bell, NWMPHN's Executive Director, Health Systems Integration.

"Often it is people in primary care – doctors, nurses, reception staff – to whom victim-survivors first disclose what they are going through. General practices are safe spaces run by compassionate people, and Primary Care Pathways to Safety is a valuable pipeline through which to help ensure immediate care is appropriate, proportionate and effective.

"We congratulate the Victorian and Australian governments on their very positive responses to gendered violence, and pledge to do all we can to provide our health care sector with the tools and knowledge it needs."

The Primary Care Pathways to Safety program operates in concert with other resources, including specialised guidance on HealthPathways Melbourne, and webinars and workshops organised by the Safer Families Centre.

For more information about the Pathways to Safety program, [please visit this webpage.](#)

For more information about NWMPHN, [please visit this website.](#)

For more information about the Safer Families Centre of Research Excellence, [please visit this webpage.](#)

To see a short video on Pathways to Safety in action, please [watch this short NWMPHN video on YouTube.](#)

For further information or to arrange interviews, contact:

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ABOUT PHNs

Funded by the Commonwealth Department of Health, PHNs began operation on 1 July 2015 and are responsible for coordinating primary health care and facilitating improved health outcomes in their local community. Melbourne Primary Care Network operates the North Western Melbourne Primary Health Network.

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We acknowledge the peoples of the Kulin nation as the Traditional Custodians of the land on which our work in the community takes place. We pay our respects to their Elders past and present.

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