

*Integrating Harm Reduction in Family Violence Services: A Collaborative Initiative in Victoria*

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**Background:** The interrelation between substance use and family violence presents significant challenges, recognised by the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence<sup>1</sup> as both a contributing risk factor and a consequence. This project supports the implementation of harm reduction principles within family violence refuges, addressing the needs of people who have experienced family violence, who also use substances. Findings indicate that 50 to 90% of women accessing mental health and Alcohol and Other Drugs (AOD) services have experienced domestic and family violence. In response, our initiative, integrates harm minimisation and integrated practice support into these services<sup>2</sup>.

**Description of Model of Care/Intervention:** Initiated by specialist family violence advisors in alcohol and other drugs and supported by the sector's peak bodies, our project supports the refuge sector in removing previously utilised abstinence frameworks in family violence refuges. This approach has included training sessions, policy development, and the establishment of support systems that address the interrelated challenges of substance use and family violence. This approach has seen significant uptake across the state, modifying traditional abstinence policies to incorporate harm minimisation.

**Effectiveness/Acceptability/Implementation:** The adoption of harm reduction principles has significantly enhanced the refuge system's capacity to support individuals using substances, leading to more compassionate service delivery and improved understanding of the dual challenges community members face.

**Conclusion and Next Steps:** The project demonstrates the effectiveness of integrating harm reduction within family violence services, with plans to expand these interventions and continuously refine strategies based on feedback.

**Implications for Practice or Policy:** This model provides a replicable framework for addressing substance use within family violence services, advocating for integrated policy that supports harm reduction approaches. The substantial prevalence of substance-related incidents in family violence contexts<sup>2</sup> underscores the urgent need for these reforms.

**References:**

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2. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW). (2024). Factors associated with FDSV. AIHW. Retrieved from <https://www.aihw.gov.au/family-domestic-and-sexual-violence/understanding-fdsv/factors-associated-with-fdsv#:~:text=In%202022%E2%80%9393%2C%20of%20the,drug%20and%2For%20alcohol%20use>

**Disclosure of Interest Statement:** The authors declare no conflicts of interest related to this project.