

Question on Notice

No. 1166

Asked on 26 October 2022

DR A MACMAHON ASKED THE ATTORNEY-GENERAL AND MINISTER FOR JUSTICE, MINISTER FOR WOMEN AND MINISTER FOR THE PREVENTION OF DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE (HON S FENTIMAN) –

QUESTION:

With reference to the government's Victim Assist program— Will the Attorney-General advise (a) for each of the four years from 2018-19 to 2021-22 how many applications for financial assistance (i) were made , (ii) were made by survivors of family or domestic violence, (iii) were refused, both generally and for applications by survivors of family or domestic violence, (b) has there been any work performed in order to ensure that Victim Assist is a trauma-informed service and (e) what engagement strategies are in place to ensure that community members are aware they are able to access this service?

ANSWER:

I thank the Member for South Brisbane for her question.

The Queensland Government, through Victim Assist Queensland (VAQ), provides financial assistance to help victims to recover from the physical and psychological impacts of violent crime.

On 1 July 2017, the scheme was extended to all victims of domestic and family violence (DFV), including non-physical DFV. This has led to a 78% increase in applications since 2016-17.

I am advised that in 2018-19, VAQ received 4,190 applications for financial assistance, including 1,727 applications from primary victim survivors of DFV (41%). VAQ refused 310 applications in 2018-19, 64 of which were made by DFV primary victims.

In 2019-20, VAQ received 4,177 applications for financial assistance, including 1,561 applications from primary victim survivors of DFV (37%). VAQ refused 252 applications in 2019-20, 34 of which were from DFV primary victims.

In 2020-21, VAQ received 4,603 applications for financial assistance, including 1,715 applications from survivors of DFV (37%). VAQ refused 172 applications in 2020-21, 16 of which were made by DFV primary victims.

Recognising the sustained increase in demand for financial assistance, in the 2021-22 budget, the Queensland Government provided additional funding of \$1 million per annum for an additional 10 full-time equivalent positions to VAQ to help manage the increasing demand. VAQ is also implementing changes to its processes to reduce waiting times.

In 2021-22, VAQ received 4,929 applications for financial assistance, including 2,263 applications from survivors of DFV (46%). VAQ refused 51 applications in 2021-22, 5 of which were made by primary victim survivors of DFV.

Actions taken to ensure Victim Assist is a trauma-informed service

From January to July 2022, VAQ completed a project to develop a framework to implement and embed trauma-informed practice into the organisation. This framework covers four domains including governance, management and leadership, policies and procedures, direct services to victims and healthy and effective workforce.

Implementing and embedding a trauma-informed approach is a priority in VAQ's 2022-23 Business Plan and the trauma-informed principles of safety, trust, choice, collaboration, empowerment, and diversity have been adopted as the organisation's values.

The completion of training in trauma-informed practice is mandatory for all VAQ staff. In 2022, all leaders completed specific trauma-informed leadership training. A number of VAQ policies have also been amended, resulting in a more beneficial approach being taken to the assessment of financial assistance applications under the *Victims of Crime Assistance Act 2009*. VAQ also amended many of its forms and other communication resources to ensure they are trauma-informed and easier to understand.

Through the Victim Services Funding Program (VSFP) administered by VAQ, the Queensland Government funds five non-government agencies to provide trauma-informed support to victims of violent crime. This support includes 24/7 telephone support, case management, emotional support, free therapeutic counselling, court support for adults and children and assistance to complete VAQ applications.

Engagement strategies to enhance awareness of and access to Victim Assist

Financial assistance for victims is promoted on the whole-of-government website, where any member of the community is able to find information about victim's rights, victim support services, and financial assistance for victims. This information is also promoted on most victim services' websites and the Department of Justice and Attorney-General, Queensland Police Service (QPS), Child Safety and Queensland Health intranet sites.

Between the 2018-19 and 2021-22 financial years, VAQ has distributed more than 10,000 brochures about financial assistance to the Queensland community.

When the QPS attends a personal crime occurrence, officers provide information about VAQ directly to the victims via the QPS referrals system.

Training is delivered by VAQ to criminal justice and victim services stakeholders across the state by webinar several times per year to reinforce and enhance knowledge to assist victims to apply for assistance. Training opportunities are promoted on the whole-of-government website and invitations are sent to more than 2000 victim services workers. Customised, cohort-specific training is also available on request.

VAQ designs and facilitates the delivery of tailored training several times a year, most recently for the disability services sector and Queensland Health Child Protection and Forensic Services. Customised training has also been designed for QPS and is a mandatory component of the QPS ISACURE course and phase 2 of detective training.

VAQ provides support to regional communities through their Regional Coordinators situated in Townsville and Cairns and Regional Victim Coordination Officers in Ipswich, Rockhampton and Cairns. Three newly appointed High-Risk Team Senior Assessors will be situated in regional centres in Cairns, Cherbourg and Mackay to better support remote and regional victims of crime and the existing High-Risk Teams in those locations.

VAQ staff travelled to Bamaga in June 2022 and Doomadgee in October 2022 as part of multi-agency visits to promote government services, providing face-to-face assistance and education to Queenslanders from First Nations communities applying for financial assistance.