‘Safe at home’ programs in the context of the Victorian Integrated Family Violence Service System Reforms: A review of the literature

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SAFER Research Program
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Abbreviations

ABS
Australian Bureau of Statistics

AIHW
Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

DPCD
Department of Planning and Community Development, Victoria.

SAAP
Supported Accommodation Assistance Program jointly funded by Commonwealth, State and Territory governments. Women’s refuges are funded through SAAP.

WHO
World Health Organisation
**Introduction**

Family violence is a leading cause of homelessness, poverty (FaCHSIA 2009, COAG 2010), preventable death, disability and illness for Victorian women aged 15–45 years (VicHealth 2004). Exposure to family violence is now widely recognised as a form of child abuse (Statewide Steering Committee 2005, FaCHSIA 2009). Family violence costs the Australian economy an estimated $13.6 billion per year (FaCHSIA 2009:34), if not effectively and appropriately addressed, the total cost in 2021–22 is estimated to be $15.6 billion (FaCHSIA 2009:36).

Although domestic and family violence began to be taken seriously by Australian governments in the latter half of the twentieth century, a growing body of evidence revealed that prevalence was not decreasing. At the same time, there was recognition that the best interests of women and children experiencing this form of violence were not necessarily being well served (Rorke 2008). In response to calls from the family violence sector, the Victorian government embarked on a program of major legislative and service system reform by adopting a ‘whole of government’ approach to redressing family violence incidence and responding to the needs of affected women and children. The new approach to family violence involves integration of the Victorian family violence service system, and is guided by the goals of ensuring the safety of women and children and holding men who use violence accountable (see Green, ADFVC, record#170). This wide-ranging initiative represents a profound shift in the way government, police, judiciary and service providers respond to, and seek to prevent family violence.

Enabling women to have the choice to remain safely within their own homes, rather than believing they must leave and seek refuge, is a key component in this reform program. Referred to here as ‘safe at home’,
the strategy signifies a new direction in the way the family violence service system supports women and their children to escape family violence. This literature review was undertaken to develop a more complete understanding of ‘safe at home’ as a service system response, with a particular focus on its capacity to contribute to the Victorian reform goals of ensuring the safety of women and children and holding men who use violence against women accountable.

The methodology for compiling this literature review, outlined below, identifies and describes the aims, questions and methods. This is followed by the definition of ‘safe at home’ as an intervention approach.

**Methodology**

**Context of the literature review**
This study is imbedded in the Australian Research Council Linkage project, known as SAFER (Safety and Accountability in Families: Evidence and Research), which is researching Victoria’s integrated family violence service system reforms. This five-year research program constitutes a partnership between the University of Melbourne and Monash University, the Department of Planning and Community Development, the Department of Justice, Victoria Police and the Department of Human Services. The broad goal of the SAFER project is to ‘gain an understanding of how the Victorian family violence reforms are impacting on the safety and wellbeing of women and children and the accountability and responsibility of men who use violence’ (SAFER 2011). In researching the safety of women and children, the SAFER objective is ‘to examine the strategies which allow women and children to remain safely at home’ (SAFER 2009).
**Aims**

The aims of this literature review are to:

- further understand ‘safe at home’ as an intervention strategy within the Victorian integrated family violence service system;
- explore how the ‘safe at home’ strategy might contribute to enhancing the safety of women and children;
- consider whether ‘safe at home’ interventions are able to hold men who use violence against women accountable;
- to identify elements necessary for successful implementation of ‘safe at home’ programs.

To this end, ‘safe at home’ is examined in the context of National and state family violence policy and practice initiatives. Specific focus is given to determining elements required for successful and effective implementation.

**Questions**

Key questions informing the review are:

- How is ‘safe at home’ defined in policy and practice?
- Is there evidence to indicate that ‘safe at home’ programs have enhanced the safety of women and children?
- Is there evidence to suggest that ‘safe at home’ as a response is able to hold men who use violence against women accountable?
- What is required for successful implementation of ‘safe at home’ programs?
- What supports are necessary to enable women and children to stay in their home, if they prefer this option?
Methods
Sourcing relevant literature
Published and grey literature on the topic of ‘safe at home’ programs was drawn from a range of Australian and international sources. These included state and national policy; consultancy documents; evaluation and survey reports; government and peak body publications; conference presentations, web sites and academic research. The journals accessed included: Violence Against Women; The Journal of Interpersonal Violence; Women Against Violence; Journal of Family Issues; Global Society and the Australian Journal of Public Administration.

A snowballing approach was employed to identify and access appropriate literature. This strategy was two-fold; firstly bibliographies and reference lists of literature in use were screened for relevant publications. Secondly, key informants were identified via organisational websites and contacted by email requesting advice on relevant literature and permission for access to evaluation reports and other published literature. These included the Queensland Centre for Domestic and Family Violence Research (QCDFVR), Purple Kangaroo Consultants Pty Ltd, the Social Policy Research Centre, the University of New South Wales and The Violence Prevention Team; Department of Communities, Queensland. In addition, published consultancy reports were recommended and provided by key informants who had authored those documents.

Search terms
In conducting a broad on-line, and targeted, site-specific searches, of Australian and international sites, the following terms were used: ‘apprehended violence orders’, ‘domestic violence programs’, ‘exclusion orders’, ‘family violence safety notices’, ‘family violence reform’, ‘home safe’, ‘integrated family violence service systems’,

Data bases
Relevant library, clearinghouse and organisational databases were identified. Databases accessed included the Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse, APAI, Informit, and the Melbourne and Monash University library catalogues. The SAFER library, compiled by members of the SAFER research team was also accessed.

Selection of literature
Literature was screened for relevance to ‘safe at home’ as both a policy strategy and practice approach within the criminal justice, policing or family violence service systems, specifically intended for addressing violence against women and children occurring in the home.

The selected literature was firstly organised into a chronological timeline, with the purpose of identifying the emergence of ‘safe at home’ approaches. This was then categorised according to whether it was international or Australian. Australian literature was further sorted according to state and territory. These geographic data sets were then divided into document type, ie. evaluation report, literature review, academic journal article, policy document, program description, conference presentation, in order to determine the level of authority of the information.

The exclusion of documents was determined by lack of relevance to the topic, and poor quality of information. A total of 95 documents were selected to inform the review; these are provided in the reference list.
As a relatively new approach, there is a limited body of literature on ‘safe at home’ initiatives, although has recently begun to expand. The report: *Women, Domestic and Family Violence and Homelessness* (Flinders University 2008) notes ‘the literature revealed a dearth of evaluations of these and other programs to assist women affected by domestic and family violence’ (Flinders University 2008: 42–43). This report further observes that resources have been directed at practice, with no surplus time or money for evaluation or documentation of these initiatives. While a number of emergent themes regarding the success of such programs can be identified, much published material, either in print or electronic form, is descriptive and promotional, rather than offering evidence-based evaluative or critical analysis of ‘safe at home’ initiatives (PADV 2002). Given the promotion of ‘safe at home’ in both state and national family violence and homelessness policy, and also the *Victoria Police Code of Practice for the Investigation of Family Violence* (2004; 2010), there is an urgent need for evidence gathering regarding women’s decisions to remain at home, evaluations of existing programs and critical inquiry into the broader issues which surround ‘safe at home’ models\(^1\). To this end, the Victorian government has made significant investments in developing knowledge and gathering evidence about the reforms, such as establishing the Victorian Family Violence database, and participating in the ARC linkage, SAFER research program (Green n.d).

**Background**

**Definitions of ‘safe at home’**

‘Safe at home’ programs have been variously referred to as: ‘sanctuary schemes’; ‘staying safely at home’; ‘staying home, leaving

\(^1\) The SAFER program is currently engaged in conducting a supported questionnaire which aims to determine ‘the circumstances of women who try to remain safe by excluding the abusive man from their home compared to the circumstances of women who do not (or cannot) stay in their home and need to re-locate’ (SAFER Update Dec 2010).
violence’; ‘home safe’ (Flinders Institute 2008: 35). Some of these are location specific programmatic strategies, while others involve strategic policy approaches at state and national levels. The Australian government defines ‘safe at home’ as:

A ‘jurisdictional response’ to domestic and family violence which seeks to have the perpetrator removed from the home in circumstances where it is safe, appropriate and desirable for the woman and her children.

(Flinders Institute 2008 in FaHCSIA 2009b: 192)

Features of ‘safe at home’ models that have been implemented in Victoria include enhanced family violence crisis and outreach support, the development of partnerships and protocols between services, intensive coordination of police and specialist service responses, installation of security and alarm systems and provision of dedicated emergency mobile phones. Programs may involve one or a number of these services, in combination with an intervention order that has exclusion conditions in place. The literature shows that there is no single approach to ‘safe at home’ interventions. Rather, services, to this point, have developed programs to meet the specific needs of their client group, their agency context and available resources.

**Rationale**

Philosophically, the concept of ‘safe at home’ is informed and supported by gender equity, human rights and social justice frameworks. A woman’s right to choose to remain in her home, together with the belief that ‘perpetrators should be held accountable for their actions and women and children should not be penalised for violence against them’ (Flinders Institute 2008: 35) sits at the heart of ‘safe at home’ initiatives (Edwards 2004; 2009; 2011, PKC 2009).

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2 This list is representative of some terms used in Australia, it is not intended to be exhaustive.
Gender equity
The need to challenge the patriarchal culture and ideology that has supported and promoted women and children leaving the family home to escape violence, rather than exclusion of the abusive party, is offered as a key justification for introducing ‘safe at home’ programs (Chung et al 2000, Edwards 2004; 2009, 2011; Logar 2004, McFerran 2007, Murray 2008; FaHCSIA 2009a, Schindler 2009, Martin & Levine 2010, PKC 2009, Taylor & Mackay 2011). ‘Safe at home’ is also underpinned by the conviction that women and children are entitled to live free of violence in all forms, and that it is the due diligence of governments to protect and uphold this right, as per the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Violence Against Women (CEDAW 1979) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Logar 2004, FaHCSIA 2009a: 22, OSCE 2009).

Human Rights
Article 7 of The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that:

All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law. All are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination in violation of this Declaration and against any incitement to such discrimination. (United Nations, The Human Rights of Women 1998: 2)

Additionally, ‘Any form of violence against women, which can be construed as a threat to their life, liberty or security … or which constitutes torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment’ constitutes a violation of Articles 1, 3 and 5 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (Humphreys & Carter 2005:5). Furthermore, Article 25 of the UDHR states that everyone has a right to adequate housing and security, and that ‘Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance’ (UDHR 1998: 3); authorising women and children’s entitlement to security of tenure and safety in their own home.
Australian governments are bound by an international legal agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) to take:

All appropriate measures [to] modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of women and men, with a view to achieving the elimination of prejudices and customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for women and men. (OWP 2009: 22)

At the state level, the Victorian integrated family violence service system reform is fortified by the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (OWP 2009: 7–8), which is informed by the values of freedom, respect, equality and dignity. Section 10 of the charter states that all people have the right to:

Protection from torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. People must not be tortured, treated or punished in a cruel, inhuman or degrading way. People must treat each other with respect.

**Social justice**

The concept of ‘safe at home’ is promoted as a more just response than women and children being forced to seek refuge. In this regard it is seen as an effective strategy for avoiding the social consequences of escaping family violence, such as homelessness, disconnection from community and local support networks, and disruption to children’s schooling (Chung et al 2000; PADV 2002; Logar 2004; Edwards 2004, 2009, 2011; McFerran 2007; Shelter 2007; Murray 2008; Rorke 2008; FaHCSIA 2009a; Schindler 2009, PKC 2009, Martin & Levine 2010). ‘Safe at home’ is also considered to offer a more appropriate choice for many Aboriginal women, women with disabilities and women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (PADV 2002; Edwards
2004; 2011; Murray 2008, PKC 2009). It can also be argued that ‘safe at home’ is a more suitable response for supporting elderly women who are seeking help to escape violent family relationships (PADV 2002).

**Economic drivers**
A safe at home response can make the financial burden for women seeking escape from violence more manageable by reducing the costs associated with finding alternative accommodation, establishing and furnishing a household and relocating children to new schools. Being able to remain in the same area can also mean that employment security is not threatened. A compelling rationale for Government support of safe at home approaches is also linked with cost efficiency. Safe at home programs have been found to be less costly than accommodating and supporting women and children in the refuge system (Taylor & McKay 2011).

Serious commitment from the government level to providing the necessary sanctions and support to allow women to confidently make the choice to stay at home, while having the violent party excluded has a short duration of less than two decades. The next section considers this brief history, internationally and within Australia.

**Historical Context**
During the 1970s, as a result of the Women’s Liberation Movement, public perceptions and tolerance of domestic violence started to change. Women began to receive active support and encouragement to leave their homes in order to escape assault and other forms of violence perpetrated by their partners. The notion that violence in the domestic setting between intimate partners was somehow less criminal than between strangers in public was becoming unacceptable (Coates & Wade 2004). In response, women’s refuges
were established across Australia, Britain, Europe and the United States (Gondolf and Fisher 1988, Logar 2006, McFerran 2007). Whilst this was an enormous step in terms of women resisting violence, the practice of leaving home to secure safety unwittingly contributed to poverty and homelessness for women and children and also to a lack of accountability for the male perpetrators of violence (Chung et al 2000; PADV 2002; McFerran 2003; Murray 2008; Edwards 2009; Schindler 2009, PKC 2009). This approach also failed to prevent or diminish the prevalence of family, or domestic violence, and was not always able to adequately protect the women and children affected.

Calls for legislative reform by feminist groups in northern Europe to support women’s right to remain in their own home, and to have the violent party removed, were supported in 1993 at the United Nations Conference on Human Rights held in Vienna, where acts of violence against women, in public and private, were declared to be human rights violations. Subsequently, the Convention on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (CEDAW) was passed and a special rapporteur on violence against women was appointed (Logar 2004).

**International initiatives**

The first iteration of a ‘safe at home’ response supported by government and driven by legislative reform took place in the mid 1990s in northern Europe. The women’s movement in Austria played a key role in lobbying for a shift from a refuge model response towards barring the perpetrator. This was largely because the injustice of ‘victims having to flee their homes, while perpetrators went unpunished’ became increasingly evident and was consequently considered intolerable (Logar 2004:2).

The *Protection Against Domestic Violence Act* was passed by the Austrian national assembly in November 1996 (Humphreys & Carter
2005) and implemented in May 1997 (Logar 2004; Haller 2005; Bringing Security Home 2009). This law recognises the rights of the victim to protection from assault and threats of violence within their own home. Police are required to assess the level of danger and if the assessment determines that ‘dangerous assault on the life, health and liberty of a person is imminent’ (Logar 2004:3) they must evict the perpetrator (even if they own the property) and bar them from returning for a period of 10 days3 (Logar 2004, Haller 2005). Keys are handed over to police, and breach of the order, ie. returning to the property without police escort, results in a fine, and possibly arrest. If the victim allows the perpetrator to return, they can also be fined. The Protection Against Domestic Violence Act incorporates three complimentary elements:

1. Eviction and barring orders by police for a period of 10 or 20 days; 2. Longer-term protection by means of a protective temporary injunction under civil law; 3. Support for the victims, violence prevention measures and coordination of the interventions by establishing Intervention centers. (Logar 2004: 2-3)

A number of other European countries subsequently introduced legislation that allows police to remove and exclude the perpetrator, as well as providing intervention, or victim support centres. These include Switzerland, Germany, Poland and Sweden (Humphreys & Carter 2005).

In 1996, the Canadian province of Prince Edward Island introduced the Victims of Family Violence Act, in order to provide for victims of domestic/family violence who did not want to leave their homes (McFerran 2007). Police and Victim Services workers are able to apply for emergency protection orders on the victim’s behalf which can exclude the perpetrator from the home, give the victim exclusive

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3 The original period provided for in the 1996 Bill was 7 days, an amendment in 2000 increased the period to 10 days.
occupation for a defined period of time, and require the perpetrator to continue to make rent or mortgage payments (Sherman & Reddin 2003 cited in McFerran 2007). Family violence legislation targeted at removing the perpetrator to enable women and children to stay safely at home has been subsequently introduced across other Canadian jurisdictions (Laycock 2005).

Assertion of women’s rights offers one rationale for the promotion of ‘safe at home’ approaches. However, in the United Kingdom, the prevention of women and children’s homelessness took prominence. In 2006 the British Government introduced sanctuary schemes, recognising that ‘domestic violence is a major cause of statutory homelessness’ (Housing Research Summary 2010: 3). By 2007 it was estimated that approximately one in two British councils had introduced sanctuary schemes (CLG 2007 cited in Housing Research Summary 2010). Sanctuary schemes are described as:

A victim-centred initiative and innovative approach to homelessness prevention designed to enable victims of domestic violence to remain in their own accommodation, where it is safe for them to do so, where it is their choice, and where the perpetrator does not live in the accommodation.

(Department for Communities and Local Government 2006:6)

Although approaches to delivery vary between council areas, and according to the needs of the client group, the bottom-line of a sanctuary scheme is to provide a safe room in the home of a victim of domestic violence, where they can retreat and remain safely until police arrive. This might involve installing new locks, security cameras at household entrances, reinforced doors and alarm systems (Department for communities and local government 2006, Housing Research Summary 2010).
While the British Government sought to address the issue of women’s homelessness in tandem with domestic/family violence, the Australian Government also began to pay attention to this dual solution strategy. Prior to the introduction in 2004 of the Victorian integrated family violence services system reforms, however, a small number of ‘safe at home’ programs were implemented in Australia. The following looks at a number of these and the background to their introduction. As previously mentioned, to this point the evidence-base about these programs has been limited, and therefore the review is dependant on grey literature for much of the information. A seminal paper by Ludo McFerran (2007), titled Taking back the castle: How Australia is making the home safer for women and children, draws together and describes many of these initiatives.

‘Safe at home’ in Australia
By the early 1980s there was growing pressure in Australia for legislative change to support victims of family violence to remain safely in their own homes. This resulted in the introduction of legislation in NSW and Victoria that could exclude offenders from the home, and for police to take responsibility for applications for protection orders. Nevertheless, the property rights of male perpetrators continued to be privileged over the rights and accommodation needs of women and children (PADV 2002). Police and judiciary were reluctant to enforce the law, because of the condition that ‘consideration had to be given to the accommodation needs of all parties’ (McFerran 2003: 41). Ironically, women and children who were victims of violence found they were forced to seek refuge outside the home, in order to prevent their assailant’s homelessness.

The social policy, justice and family violence service systems continued to be designed around assisting women and children escape violent
relationships by exiting their homes (Murray 2008). In the mid 1990s The Women’s Safety, Australia Survey (ABS 1996) found that less than 5% of women experiencing violence at home sought crisis service assistance. The family violence service system, based on the provision of refuge or shelter seemed to be working against the best interests of women and children (Logar 2006, McFerran 2007). A small number of initiatives began to emerge within the family violence sector, which sought to respond and deliver services in different ways to women seeking assistance to leave violent relationships.

The first of these was introduced on the Eyre Peninsula in Port Lincoln, South Australia in 1998. The Yarredi Services program conducted basic risk assessments, provided phone alarm systems, replaced locks, and upgraded window security. Police and on-call family violence workers would respond within 10 minutes. This pilot was not specifically designed to remove the perpetrator, but rather to enhance women and children’s safety. This program and other similar pilots introduced in South Australia at the time seem to have disappeared when further funding was not forthcoming (McFerran 2007).

In May 1998 the Australian Capital Territory introduced The Family Violence Intervention Program (FVIP), this was the first integrated community and justice responses in Australia. The program aim was to support women and children to remain safely at home through pro-arrest, intensified evidence gathering and service co-ordination (SHLV 2007).

Tasmania’s ‘Safe at home’ program, introduced in 2003, is a whole of government response to domestic and family violence that combines Department of Justice, Tasmania Police and Department of Health and Human Services (Tasmanian Govt 2003). The program is ‘strongly
interventionist ... pro-arrest and pro-prosecution’ (Wilcox 2006: 5). New protection orders, known as Police Family Violence Orders (PFVOs), can be issued immediately by senior police who are at the level of sergeant or above. These can last for up to 12 months (Wilcox 2006).

Although there is no literature available describing ‘safe at home’ initiatives in the Northern Territory, it is interesting to note that the law requires ‘an express presumption that the protection of the protected person and any children living with that person is best achieved by them remaining in their home’ (FaHCSIA 2009c, n.p).

In Western Australia, the Restraining Orders Act 1997 includes provisions for police to issue a ‘Police Order’ that can last for between 24 and 72 hours. Following the introduction of the National Plan to Reduce Family violence in 2009, the Western Australian Government commenced reforms in family violence service provision. These are governed by the WA Strategic Plan for Family and Domestic Violence 2009–2013. Under the banner of these reforms, ‘safe at home’ programs are now offered in six areas: four metropolitan and two regional (Women’s Council 2011).

South Australia is also currently engaged in introducing legislation and practice initiatives focused on supporting women and children to make the choice to remain safely at home within an integrated service system (ADVFV Clearinghouse 2010: 10).

In New South Wales, the Bega Staying Home Leaving Violence (SHLV) program commenced as a pilot in 2004. This incorporates comprehensive risk assessment and safety planning, security upgrades in the home, court support, liaison and collaboration with police, and outreach support (Bega Women’s Refuge Inc. 2007: 9, Edwards 2009).
The SHLV program has gained wide recognition. Further programs, referred to as ‘staying home leaving violence’, were piloted in East Sydney and Mt Druitt and the success of these led to the funding of a further 16 programs across the state (PKC 2010).

‘Choosing Safety’ pilot projects commenced during 2010 across three domestic violence services throughout Queensland in Townsville, the Gold Coast and the Sunshine Coast. These twelve month programs aimed to help women and children stay safely at home, and were directed at victims of Domestic and Family Violence who had applied for a Protection Order with an Ouster Condition, although the service was not restricted to this group (NQDVRS 2009). The pilots involved a dedicated Safety at Home worker, who works with clients to identify the necessary measures required for remaining safely at home, such as changing locks, fitting security doors and sensor lights, as well as other services, such as accessing brockerage for temporary accommodation while the house is secured (NQDVRS 2009).

‘Safe at home’ in Victoria
The first official ‘safe at home’ initiative in Australia commenced in Victoria during 2001 when the Eastern Region Domestic Violence Outreach Service (EDVOS), received funding to provide specialist outreach support to women who were living in their own homes with intervention orders that included exclusion conditions (McFerran 2007). The program takes a whole of community approach and works with police, courts, other service providers and the wider community to raise awareness and dispel myths about refuge being the only safe option. During one three-year period EDVOS successfully supported over 150 women to remain safely at home (Kearney n.d.).

The Bsafe Pilot Project has been providing a ‘safe at home’ service in Victoria’s predominantly rural region of Hume since 2007. This project
supports women and children who have an intervention order with exclusion conditions in place, who are in fear of the order being breached, and reside in the pilot region of Hume. A local Victoria Police Officer observed a Swedish program that was using safety kits while on a Rotary study exchange trip. Following his proposal that a similar approach might be applicable in the Hume region, Bsafe was trialled by the Benalla Family Violence Prevention Network (Taylor and Mackay 2011:5). As well as enhanced outreach and service coordination, Bsafe provides a personal alarm system that operates via the home telephone line. This can be activated by a water-proof pendant within the bounds of the client’s home and garden. A mobile companion (similar to a mobile telephone) is also part of the system that works wherever there is mobile telephone coverage. When activated, both of these devices send an alarm to a 24 hour personal emergency response service, which in turn automatically alerts the police via the emergency 000 telephone number while continuing to monitor and record the call (Taylor 2010).

Since early 2012, newly developed mobile units with GPS tracking (similar in size to an electronic car key) have been trialled. These provide a discreet way for women to alert the call centre (and thus the police) that they are in danger at the press of one button (personal communication, BSafe Coordinator, WHGNE, 27th May 2012). Bsafe is ideally suited to women residing in socially and geographically isolated circumstances, such as in rural areas, where there are additional barriers to women accessing support services (including family violence, disability, CALD and Aboriginal services) discreetly without risking exposure.

In Melbourne’s Northern region, the North Crisis Advocacy Response Service (NCARS) has operated since February 2008. This integrated
service model involves a tight partnership, regular forums and review meetings of specialist family violence agencies, mainstream agencies, police and the state’s family violence telephone crisis service. It challenges the dominant perception that women and children seeking support from the family violence service system must leave their homes and access crisis accommodation and provides tight engagement with, and flexibility of responses to, women and children at a time of crisis. While recognising that some women must leave home to escape violence, the NCARS ‘safe at home’ approach seeks to promote ‘women's right to remain in, or return safely to their home' (Rorke 2008:8). The program provides 24/7 face-to-face crisis response, access to the CARS unit, a safe secure accommodation facility, where women have time to consider their options, access accurate legal information, referral services and appropriate health and counselling services whilst children have ‘time out’ from the precipitation situation (Rorke 2008; Frere et al 2008). This model, with variations, is being replicated in other metropolitan regions of Melbourne.

Due to the increased policy focus on ‘safe at home’ initiatives at both state and National levels, further programs have begun to emerge over the past few years. Some programs have been evaluated to date (May 2012), and further published evaluations of newly funded programs will provide a valuable and much needed evidence-base for future program and policy development.

Clearly, the legislative and policy context in which ‘safe at home’ programs are located is integral to their effectiveness and sustainability. This is discussed next, before turning to an exploration of the factors arising from the literature regarding the dimensions and implementation of successful practice approaches.
Policy Context

National Policy
For nearly three decades women and children escaping family violence have constituted a main sub-set of both the homeless population and homelessness service delivery. The Road Home: A National Approach to Reducing Homelessness (2008) identifies family violence as a ‘major driver of homelessness’ and the ‘principle cause of homelessness among women’ (AIHW 2008 cited in FaHCSIA 2008:7). The white paper calls for strategies to prevent women and children from becoming homeless due to family violence, suggesting that: ‘Violence will continue to be a major cause of homelessness unless rates of domestic violence fall significantly or new strategies are found to keep victims, mainly women, safer in their own homes’ (FaHCSIA, 2008:11). Making it safer for women and children who are victims of domestic and family violence to return to, or remain within their own home (FaHCSIA 2008:33) is asserted as a key homelessness prevention strategy.

In 2008 the Australian Federal Government set up the National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children. The resulting document, Time for Action: The National Council’s Plan for Australia to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children, 2009-2021 argued for ‘a sustained new level of investment in primary prevention and the justice system that will create respectful relationships, fair outcomes for all, and safer communities’ (A Snapshot 2009: 3). Time for Action recommends the development of integrated service systems, and encourages jurisdictional responses, where feasible, to focus on removing the perpetrator and providing the necessary supports to secure women’s and children’s safety if they choose to return to, or remain at home. With an emphasis on human rights, the national plan of action is informed by the 2008 Amnesty International Australia
document, Setting the Standard: International Good Practice to inform an Australian National Plan of Action to Eliminate Violence Against Women. Guided by ‘Setting the Standard’, the national council produced an ‘As is’ assessment of Australian jurisdictional profiles and trends (FaHCSIA 2009a: 53). The national plan has adopted the 3 ‘S’s and 3 ‘P’s of Setting the Standard, outlined below.

The plan acknowledges that it needs to work at a structural level, ie. ‘laws, institutions, attitudes and perceptions’; that it must be strategic, ie. ‘goals have timeframes, agencies are accountable, evaluation occurs’; and sustainable, ie. ‘ongoing funding and leadership from a continuing body’ (FaHCSIA 2009a: 53-54). The plan also seeks to prevent violence via long-term strategies, such as education and media campaigns; provide appropriate services for victims; and prosecution of all forms of violence against women and their children needs to occur4.

The ecological model adopted by the World Heath Organisation is identified by the national council as useful for highlighting multiple approaches to understanding the main contexts of violence against women and their children (FaHCSIA 2009a: 48). This model (revisited below in the discussion of state policy) underpins the strategy adopted by the Time for Action framework.

The subsequent National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010 – 2022 produced by COAG in response to the Time for Action recommendations, establishes a national framework for action by Commonwealth, state and territory governments. This National Plan identifies, ‘Improv[ing] and expand[ing] cross-agency

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4 Table 1 (Appendix 1) provides an overview of the legislation and policy in each Australian state and territory that supports the implementation of integrated responses to family violence, necessary for successful implementation of safe at home programs.
support for women and children to remain safely in their homes and communities while the perpetrator is removed’ as a key first phase action for implementation during 2010 – 2013, (National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children 2010 – 2022: 25).

**The Victorian Policy Context**

**Women’s Safety Strategy 2002–2007**

Throughout the past decade, the state of Victoria has been engaged in a program of widespread reform. This began in 2002 with the launch of the Women’s Safety Strategy 2002–2007 and the establishment of the Statewide Steering Committee to Reduce Family Violence; which in 2005 released the report: Reforming the Family Violence System in Victoria. This whole of government strategy was designed to address Victoria’s specific needs through an integrated, multi-agency response model incorporating a range of legislative, criminal and service system level reforms in the areas of family violence and sexual assault (Background Paper, n.d: 165; Green n.d; Report of the Statewide Steering Committee to Reduce Family Violence, 2005: 6).

The policy model aims to be inclusive of all Victorians, with particular attention to women, children, those with a CALD background, Aboriginal people and communities, those affected by disability, offending histories, alcohol and drug use, and mental health issues (Report of the Statewide Steering Committee to Reduce Family Violence, 2005: 6).

The five year duration of The Women’s Safety Strategy oversaw the introduction of a police Code of Practice for the Investigation of Family Violence 2004 (outlined below); establishment of the Family Violence Court Division in the Magistrates Court, and specialist family violence

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courts; increased accountability of perpetrators through strengthening men's behaviour change programs; the establishment of the Indigenous Family Violence Taskforce; the introduction of a common risk assessment framework (CRAF) for services responding to victims and perpetrators of family violence; training for health, human services, justice, education and non-government workers to implement CRAF and respond to victims of family violence; additional funding and services for women and children experiencing family violence; and review of family violence legislation which lead to the introduction of the new Family Violence Protection Act, 2008 (Background Paper, n.d: 165; Green n.d.).

**Code of Practice for the Investigation of Family Violence**
The Women's Safety Strategy sought to strengthen the role of police and the courts to enable them to act as a strong deterrent to family violence. In August 2004 Victoria Police introduced a new Code of Practice for the Investigation of Family Violence (COP) that targeted safety and support for victims and accountability of perpetrators (DPCD, 2008). A revised version of this code was launched in December 2010 (Victoria Police 2010).

This code of practice forms a central component of the integrated response to family violence in Victoria, and promotes the ‘safe at home’ approach, stating that the aim is to ‘[s]upport aggrieved family members to stay safely in their own homes’ (Victoria Police, 2004: 1). This aim was further embedded with the introduction of the Family Violence Protection Act in 2008, giving police the power to remove a perpetrator from the home for up to 72 hours. The Family Violence Safety Notice (FVSN) issued by police acts as an application for a family violence intervention order and enables police to support the
Affected Family Member (AFM) and any children to remain in the home, if safe to do so.

The Code supports police working in partnerships with other agencies and recognises the need to interagency collaboration in breaking the cycle of violence (Victoria Police, 2004: 2). The options model outlined in the Code of Practice requires that police consider criminal, civil and referral options in responding to family violence. The referral process is a vital step in breaking the cycle of family violence, and the Code outlines how police rely on their partnerships with specialist service providers to give the appropriate assistance to all involved (Victoria Police, 2004: 23). The Code also embeds a risk assessment and management approach to family violence, requiring police members to make an assessment of the likelihood of future violence, and to consider the characteristics of both current and previous incidents.

**Legislative reform**
New legislation, introduced in 2006 and 2008, included an expanded definition of family, and recognised violence which includes emotional and economic abuse, controlling and intimidating behaviour, threats to friends and pets, racist taunts and social isolation. For the first time, legislation also recognises ‘carer abuse’ signalling the recognition that the relationship between a person with a disability and the person’s carer can approximate a family-like arrangement and thus the recognition that family violence can occur in such circumstances. The new laws aimed to make ‘it easier for victims of family violence to remain in the family home if they wish, while perpetrators of violence may be required to leave’ (Green n.d: 4). This involved changes to tenancy laws to allow immediate transfer of lease into the victim’s name when premises were rented; enabling police to have enhanced holding powers while investigating allegations of family violence and

Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities


Developed by the Indigenous Family Violence Partnership Forum, this document outlines nine guiding principles for developing responses to family violence in Aboriginal5 communities, with particular focus on: the need to recognise the complexity of family violence for Aboriginal

5 Although many of the current policy documents use the term Indigenous, recently there has been a renewed preference for use of the term Aboriginal. For this reason the terms are used interchangeably.
people; the context of dispossession and disadvantage caused by the effects of white settlement; the importance of Indigenous leadership and local solutions; strengthening relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal services; emphasis on holistic healing to overcome and address family violence, and respectful and transparent partnerships between government and community (AAV 2009: 8–9, 12).

**A Right to Respect (2009)**

This framework adopted a prevention focus and was aimed at promoting ‘respectful, gender-equitable relationships in our communities and homes’ (OWP 2009:6). In order to influence attitudinal and behavioural change, it aspired for ‘systematic, sustained and cross-sectoral policy to build skills, attitudes and cultural values that reject violence’ (OWP 2009: 6). To this end, the plan was informed by three factors, which are internationally recognised as key drivers of violence against women – unequal power relationships between women and men, adherence to rigid gender stereotypes and broader cultures of violence (OWP 2009: 6). In keeping with the National Plan, this policy also drew on the ecological model applied by the World Health Organisation6 for understanding violence as complex and multi-level, and targeting interventions across three levels: societal, community/organisational and individual/relationship (see figure 1).

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6 The WHO model includes four levels, rather than the three articulated in A Right to Respect: 1) Societal, 2) Community, 3) Relationship and 4) Individual and does not include ‘organisational’ (see FaHCSIA 2009:48).
This document, building on A Fairer Victoria, structured the family violence service system response and provided the framework for continuing family violence reform in Victoria. A significant and defining feature is its foundation in human rights legislation, asserting that: ‘Whatever form it takes, family violence is a fundamental violation of human rights and is unacceptable in any form, in any community and in any culture. It is everyone’s responsibility to reject and prevent violence’ (OWP 2010a: 4).

**Figure 1:** Adapted from Figure 3, A Right to Respect – Victoria’s Plan to Prevent Violence against Women 2010–2020: 12

**A Right to Safety and Justice (2010)**

This document, building on A Fairer Victoria, structured the family violence service system response and provided the framework for continuing family violence reform in Victoria. A significant and defining feature is its foundation in human rights legislation, asserting that: ‘Whatever form it takes, family violence is a fundamental violation of human rights and is unacceptable in any form, in any community and in any culture. It is everyone’s responsibility to reject and prevent violence’ (OWP 2010a: 4).

In October 2012, the Victorian Government released a three-year plan of action to address violence against women and children. This plan builds on the above policy reform agenda and continues the commitment to developing and strengthening the integrated family violence service system. Three streams of action structure the plan; the prevention of violence, early intervention and provision of an integrated response. The plan acknowledges the importance of service responses throughout the state supporting women to be able to choose safe at home as an option.

Multi-level Approach

Overall, these policy frameworks group violence prevention strategies into three categories: primary prevention, secondary prevention and tertiary intervention (FaHCSIA 2009a: 49, OWP 2009:12). Primary prevention strategies work to reduce individuals’ and families’ violence risk factors whilst also increasing their protective factors; secondary prevention (also known as early intervention) targets those already at risk of being violent by intervening to change ‘attitudes, behaviours and skills’; and tertiary intervention is a response to violence after it has occurred by providing support for victims, including utilising the criminal justice system, and providing programs to offenders to break the cycle of violence (FaHCSIA 2009a: 49). The majority of ‘safe at home’ initiatives are located within the tertiary level of intervention: responses after violence has occurred and help has been sought. However, it needs to be acknowledged that ‘safe at home’ programs also operate at primary and secondary prevention levels by reducing individual risk factors. For example, by establishing the entitlement to remain at home as residing with non–offending parties, and including community education to re–orient attitudes regarding victim rights,
such as posing the question “Why should she be the one who has to leave?”

Implicit in these policy frameworks, is the understanding that in order for women and children to successfully live free from violence in their own homes, intervention needs to be directed across all levels: Individual/relationship, community/organizational, and cultural/societal within an integrated service system (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2:** Intersection of three levels of intervention required to successfully support women and children to remain safely at home within an integrated family violence service system.

*Victoria’s Action Plan to Address Violence Against Women and Children 2012-2015* (OWP 2012) asserts that in order to stop violence against women and children a whole of community approach is necessary. The plan states: ‘Realising the long term vision of all women and children living free from violence in Victoria involves everybody including governments, business, media, community organisations, communities, families and individuals’ (OWP 2012: 3).
The Victorian Practice Context

The Integrated Family Violence Service System
Service integration is widely recognised as intrinsic to implementing an effective, coordinated and consistent response to victims of family violence (National Plan to reduce violence against women and their children 2010 - 2022). Victoria’s whole of government strategy involves five key government departments: Department of Justice (DoJ); Department of Human Services (DHS); Department of Planning and Community Development (DPCD); Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD); and Victoria Police (VicPol), as well as peak bodies, specialist services and related service providers (Thomson Goodall 2010: 3; Ross et al 2011; Green n.d.). The cooperation of services between and across these jurisdictions at the practice level is understood as essential to achieving the reform goals of ensuring the safety of women and children, and holding men who use violence accountable. Further, the success of ‘safe at home’ approaches is dependent on an effectively integrated service system (Crinall & Hurley 2009). To this end, funding for the development of twenty service partnership networks across the state were established to support integration at the practice level (Green n.d.). With emphasis on local change, these are designed to offer an integrated range of services, including outreach, services to families and children, after hours services, intensive case management, counselling, private rental brokerage support and men’s behaviour change programs, and training for service providers (Green n.d.: 4).

The Integrated Service System provides a range of response options for women and children experiencing family violence throughout the state of Victoria. These include access to crisis accommodation in a women’s refuge, telephone and referral assistance through the
domestic violence crisis services, and outreach support to women who choose to remain at home, where it is safe to do so.

**Regional Committees**
Regional and sub-regional committees to coordinate these practice partnerships and implement the reform programs at the local level have been established across the Department of Human Service regions. Regional Action Groups, based within each DHS region, have also been established to coordinate responses and address family violence in Indigenous communities (Green n.d.).

While committee membership varies between regions, state-wide representation is drawn from across the five government sectors involved in the whole of government reforms, and includes, specialist family violence services, police, children’s services, legal services, courts, men’s behaviour change programs, disability services, victim support, sexual assault centres, etc. These regional committees oversee local initiatives and report on a quarterly basis to the statewide steering committee (see Statewide Steering Committee 2005: 46).

Nested within this governance network, some services at the local level have introduced ‘safe at home’ programs. Although challenged by severely limited resourcing, some of these programs have managed to conduct evaluations. Drawing on international and national data, the findings of this limited evidence base are discussed next.

**‘Safe at home’ models: The evidence arising from evaluation and research findings**
**Staying Home Leaving Violence, NSW**

The aim of the research study, *Staying Home Leaving Violence* (SHLV) conducted in New South Wales, was to explore ‘how women leaving a domestic violence relationship could stay safely in their own homes with their children, with the violent partner removed’ (Edwards 2004: 4). As the first study of its kind in NSW, the research findings are significant.

A mix of 29 urban and regionally based women from a variety of backgrounds – Anglo-Australian, CALD, Aboriginal, and Maori – participated in the 15 month long study during 2002 and 2003 (Edwards, 2004: 4). Women were given the choice of staying or leaving their homes, and nine elected to stay. Six out of this nine had experienced extreme physical violence. There were three factors which made the difference in these women being able to remain ‘safe at home’:

1. The women had a strong attachment to their homes and felt they had a right to remain in the home.
2. The violent partner was removed by the authorities, or went voluntarily because he had other housing options.
3. While the women had concerns for their safety, they were not overwhelmed by fear, and had developed a range of safety measures to help them feel safer at home. (Edwards 2004: 25).

Not one of the nine women who chose to stay at home experienced further violence from their ex-partner, despite some perpetrators making unwelcome returns to the house. The report recognises the importance of safety protocols being in place, and recommends a whole-of-government systemic response as a preventative measure in ensuring that women and children do not become homeless as a consequence of leaving family violence (Edwards, 2004: 56).
A subsequent study; *Staying Home Leaving Violence: Listening to women’s experiences* (Edwards 2011) was conducted in a partnership between the Social Policy Research Centre (SPRC) and the NSW Staying Home Leaving Violence Program (SHLV). Seventeen women were interviewed, fourteen of these women considered themselves to be living free from violence at least 12 months after separation. Of significance in this study, was the finding that:

> Post-separation violence and abuse occurred regardless of where the woman was living and regardless of whether she had remained in her own home. Indeed the only woman who had not experienced any form of violence or abuse from her ex-partner since separating had remained in her own home, while the woman who had reported feeling least safe had left her home and re-located. (Edwards 2011:6)

The study concludes that supporting women in their choice to remain at home when leaving a violent relationship represents a new ‘narrative, which has justice at its core; is empowering for women and children, and places accountability with the violent offender’ (Edwards 2011:31). The findings also recognise that SHLV is successful in supporting women and children to live free from violence, and also in preventing homelessness (Edwards 2011:31). Effective interagency partnerships and collaboration across government and non-government services at local and state levels are also emphasised as essential for success in systemically addressing violence against women and children.

The success of pilot SHLV programs in Bega, Eastern Sydney and Mt Druitt led to funding for further programs, bringing the total number of SHLV projects in NSW to eighteen (ADFV Clearinghouse, Newsletter 40, Autumn 2010: 2; PKC 2009).

The Mt Druitt SHLV pilot project employed ‘a community and casework model to assist women and children … who were experiencing
family/domestic violence to remain safely in their homes whilst ending a violent relationship’ (PKC 2009:25). The service involved case management, including intensive support; risk and safety assessments; court support; counselling and advocacy; home safety audits and brokerage for home security upgrades, including provision of personal security alarms, video surveillance and mobile phones if necessary; referral to, and joint case management with other services; protocols with Police; and community education and advocacy. Intake criteria included the woman wanting to remain at home and have the violent partner excluded. The project policy was to support all women who chose to remain at home, despite the level of risk, although women assessed as being at high risk were counselled on the dangers of their choice. The Mt Druitt SHLV pilot supported 61 women and 160 accompanying children from September 2007 until November 2009.

The evaluation of the Mt Druitt SHLV pilot (PKC 2009) found that for the women, the support of the SHLV workers was the most important factor in deciding to stay, as well as a belief in the right to stay (PKC 2009:49). The advocacy and community development work that was invested in the implementation phase was also cited as crucial (PKC 2009: 53). The evaluation concluded that the Mt Druitt SHLV approach was a highly successful service model that held men accountable, while challenging the traditional paradigm of service provision to women escaping violence. Success depended on effective service system integration, partnerships between key agencies and police, a flexible, client-centred approach and effective security measures (PKC 2009:79).

**Safe@home, Auckland New Zealand**

The Safe@home service, provided by Shine (Safer homes in New Zealand Everyday) was based on the UK sanctuary scheme model,
and the first of its kind in New Zealand. The program was delivered to women and children assessed as at high risk of further violence, to enable them to remain in their own homes. A formative evaluation conducted during the first 12 months of the program drew on self-reported information about safety and well being collected by workers from 50 women at point of entry to the program and following security upgrades (Martin & Levine 2010:3). The program involved a safety audit; a security upgrade if necessary; and provision of monitored personal alarms and mobile phones.

During the first 11 months, safe@home provided services to 50 women and 86 accompanying children under the age of 18 years. All except for one woman was assessed as being at high, or extreme danger by the Shine risk assessment. At point of entry to the program, prior to receiving the safe@home service, women were asked to identify their level of fear of harm on a seven point scale, with zero (0) being unconcerned, and seven (7) being extreme fear. The average fear of harm score before the upgrade was 6.23, and following the safe@home service it was 2.70. (Twenty-two women rated their fear of harm at 6/7 before the intervention, post-intervention one woman rated her fear of harm as 6 (Martin & Levine 2010). This project did not focus on service integration, increased case management or wider system change, apart from a closer working relationship with police.

**BSafe, Victoria**

An evaluation conducted of the Bsafe pilot project (2070-2010) found that a majority of the women involved in the Bsafe program were able to not only remain safely in their own homes, but to also regain their participation in community and ‘lead normal lives’. Importantly they expressed being able to live without the debilitating dread of constant fear (Taylor & Mackay 2011:3).
During the three year pilot project phase, 72 women, and 143 accompanying children (including 2 Aboriginal women and 10 Aboriginal children), accessed Bsafe; 50% of these women (36) participated in the evaluation, which found that Bsafe:

[I] mproved the physical and psychological health of women and their children and had a profound impact on homelessness. It was effective for a diversity of women with varying needs; Aboriginal women, rural women, women with disabilities and women with limited English language skills. (Taylor & Mackay 2011:3)

The evaluation also found that perpetrators were held more accountable through the enhanced police response. Furthermore, women reported that following the installation of Bsafe, breaches of IVOs shifted away from physical assault to threats, intimidation and stalking (Taylor & Mackay 2011:38). Of the 36 women who participated in the evaluation, only 2 women reported increases in perpetrator violence, and these breaches involved stalking and calling/texting (Taylor & Mackay 2011:39). For the majority of women (32), breaches ceased after 6 months in the Bsafe program. The Bsafe program enabled ‘sixty-two percent of women involved in the project to remain in, or return to their own home, despite their high risk status’ (Taylor & Mackay 2001:44). While the Bsafe model was found to reduce the overall costs associated with supporting women and children to leave violent relationships (Taylor & Mackay 2011:18), the evaluation noted that:

[P]erhaps Bsafe’s greatest achievement is its potential to reduce the high rates of women and children experiencing homelessness as a consequence of fleeing family violence and sexualised assault. (Taylor & Mackay 2011:70)

The pilot region has a predominantly Anglo-Australian demographic, which is reflected in the background of women participating in the evaluation. The first evaluation found that Bsafe units were ideally suited to women from immigrant and refugee, backgrounds and to
women with disabilities (particularly sensory and physical impairments), as women were not required to state their address and the details of the emergency in order to elicit a police response and were best supported by being able to remain safely in their familiar homes, particularly where modifications had been made to accommodate women’s impairments. A second evaluation is underway and will explore ways of improving access to the program by women with disabilities and women from Aboriginal and CALD backgrounds (personal communication, BSafe coordinator, 2012).

The evaluation and research findings discussed above challenge the commonly held belief that women must exit their own homes in order to leave a violent relationship and achieve safety for themselves and their children. ‘Safe at home’ approaches have also been found to assist the process of recovery from family violence by avoiding the emotional, economic, and social upheaval of relocation. However, the literature invariably stresses that a ‘safe at home’ approach must only be one of a range of options for women seeking to leave violent relationships (Edwards 2004; 2011; Shelter 2007, Flinders Institute 2008, FaHCSIA 2008; 2009a; 2009b; PKC 2009; Taylor & Mackay 2011).

Although the evidence suggests that a swift and effective police response, combined with well integrated, multi-agency support has a diminishing effect on levels and frequency of perpetrator violence (Taylor & Mackay 2011), ‘safe at home’ approaches are identified as most effective with women who are not overwhelmed by fear (Edwards 2004; 2011). Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that ‘safe at home’ is not usually implemented as a crisis intervention, due to the need to conduct home safety audits, and upgrades, and to establish alarm systems (PKC 2009; Martin 2010; Taylor & Mackay 2011).
Summary: Elements for successful ‘safe at home’ program implementation

Key elements identified as necessary for success in addressing violence against women and children span the four levels of the ecological model as described above. Broadly, these encompass the need for alignment in beliefs and attitudes about social justice, gender equity and human rights; legislation and policy reform; and service system resourcing, and integration. The literature also makes it clear that programs must be informed by Aboriginal/Indigenous understandings of family violence, as well as recognising and embracing difference and diversity amongst women and children who are escaping violence. The evidence suggests that community education and support to change attitudes are essential prior to the implementation of programs, as women escaping violence must be able to make informed choices. It is important that perpetrators exercise cooperation, whether this is through being held accountable by justice responses or through their own volition. Support service responses; such as Men’s Behaviour Change Programs for perpetrators play a key role in accountability. A number of these factors are briefly expanded below.

Overwhelmingly, the literature impresses the dependence of ‘safe at home’ approaches on an effectively integrated family violence service system. Collaboration, cooperation, consistency, information sharing and formal agreements are all required between a range of agencies and sectors. At a minimum this should involve specialist family violence and statutory children’s services, the police and courts (Chung et al 2000, Edwards 2004, Statewide Steering Committee 2005, Wilcox 2006, Bega Women’s Refuge Incorporated 2007, Gregg 2007, Little 2007, McFerran 2007, Flinders Institute 2008, FaHCSIA 2008; 2009a & 2009b, Taylor & Mackay 2011).
Common risk assessment and safety planning are also fundamental to the success of any ‘safe at home’ program. Although a number of sources state that ‘safe at home’ must only be an option for women assessed as at low risk (Haller 2005, McFerran 2007, Flinders Institute 2008, Bega Women’s Refuge Incorporated 2007, Little 2007), more recent evaluations of programs have found that this is not necessarily the case. The Bega Staying Home Leaving Violence project (Edwards 2004; 2011), the Bsafe pilot project (Taylor & Mackay 2011) and the Shine ‘safe@home’ project in New Zealand (Martin 2010) all identified successful outcomes for women who were assessed as at high risk, but who made informed choices to stay at home with appropriate services and supports in place.

Choice is clearly a key factor. ‘Safe at home’ should only be an option for women who choose it. Women and children escaping violence must continue to be offered a range of exit and support services; staying at home must be seen as only one of an array of choices (Edwards 2004, 2011; Shelter 2007, Flinders Institute 2008, FaHCSIA 2008; 2009a; 2009b). The importance of community education is highlighted as a fundamental first stage in the implementation of safe at home models. This is considered essential to raising awareness about women’s right to choose to remain at home when seeking escape from a violent relationship, and to gain community support in making that choice (Edwards 2004, Gregg 2007, FaHCSIA 2009a; 2009b; PKC 2009).

Financial support for women to maintain security of tenure is also a critical factor (Flinders Institute 2008, FaHCSIA 2008). Additionally, adequate resourcing and workforce training across all agencies involved in delivery and supporting ‘safe at home’ initiatives within an
integrated system is also, unsurprisingly, consistently identified as essential to success (Edwards 2004, Gregg 2007, Shelter 2007). It is worth noting, however, that the evaluation of Bsafe found that overall it was a more cost efficient model (Taylor & Mackay 2011).

The literature strongly stresses the need for appropriate, supportive and consistent police and court responses. This fosters the confidence of women in the system and delivers an effective message to men about formal accountability. A supportive justice system response also validates the right for women and children to be protected from violence. ‘Police and courts must be sympathetic to the staying safe at home model and have positive and continuing roles with those involve’ (Flinders Institute 2008:40). While legislative and policy reform is an essential first step, alone it has proven to be insubstantial in altering understanding about the nature and effect of family violence (Logar 2004, Gregg 2007). Furthermore, it is recognized that the system must hold perpetrators accountable through the justice system. At the same time, support services, such as men’s behaviour change programs and accommodation must be provided to prevent men’s homelessness and maximize the opportunity for change (Edwards 2004, McFerran 2007). As the Bsafe pilot project evaluation found, an immediate and appropriate police response to breaches, reduces the incidence, level and type of perpetrator violence (Taylor & Mackay 2011).

Finally, the literature indicates a clear imperative for the introduction of ‘safe at home’ programs to be thoroughly planned and afforded an adequate timeframe. They must be supported by an appropriate, properly resourced change management process (Edwards 2004, Shelter 2007, Flinders Institute 2008, FaHCSIA 2008; 2009a; 2009b; PKC 2009).
The above offers an overview of some key themes strongly arising in the literature and research that is now building about ‘safe at home’ initiatives. As identified in *The Road Home* and *Time for Action*, ensuring the safety of women and children and holding men accountable for their violence requires the implementation of prevention and response strategies across multiple service systems, all social levels, and supported by a coordinated whole of government legislative and policy framework. The issue of violence against women and children must be addressed broadly, holistically and creatively. Success depends on challenging entrenched beliefs and attitudes about gender, violence, power, and privilege (FaHCSIA 2009a) and undoing the structures that support violence (Burk 2008).

It is apparent from the literature reviewed here that, ‘safe at home’ approaches represent a paradigm shift in the way family violence is addressed. In meeting the objectives of ensuring women and children’s safety, in holding men accountable and in preventing further violence, the approach, when appropriately implemented and adequately resourced appears, on current evidence, to offer much promise in the goal of reducing family violence. The veracity of this hope will become more apparent as the programs that are currently being rolled out throughout Victoria and in other states across Australia are evaluated and researched.
Glossary

Family/Domestic Violence

Although these terms, ‘family violence' and ‘domestic violence' are the most commonly used to describe the abuse of women and children by men in the home, they are contested. Domestic and family violence can be terms that hide the gendered nature of violence at home, ie. that men most often are the perpetrators of violence. The terms perpetrator and victim are also challenged as these terms can be disempowering for women and discursively place men in a position of power over women and children. The term family violence is also regarded as more appropriate by many (though not all) in Indigenous communities as violence affects not only the immediate family but also the extended family, as well as the community (Laing, 2000: 2). The desire to acknowledge partner abuse in gay, lesbian and transgender relationships challenges assumptions about women as perpetrators and men as victims.

The Victorian Family Violence Protection Act 2008, defines it thus:

Family violence is any behaviour that in any way controls or dominates a family member that causes them to fear for their own, or other family member’s safety or wellbeing. It can include physical, sexual, psychological, emotional or economic abuse and any behaviour that causes a child to hear, witness, or otherwise be exposed to the effects of that behaviour.

In Aboriginal communities, family violence is defined as:

An issue focused around a wide range of emotional, sexual, social, spiritual, cultural, psychological and economic abuses that occur within families, intimate relationships, extended families, kinship networks and communities. It extends to one- on one fighting, abuse of Indigenous community workers, as well as self-harm, injury and suicide.

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Appendix 1
Table showing an overview of the legislation and policy in each Australian state and territory that supports the implementation of integrated responses to family violence, necessary for successful implementation of ‘safe at home’ programs.
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| **New South Wales (NSW)**<br>Crimes (Domestic & Personal Violence) Act 2007; Crimes Amendment (Sexual Procurement or Grooming of Children) Act 2007 | NSW State Plan: Recognises FV is a crime & priority for gov’t - commits gov’t to statewide strategy. NSW Strategy to Reduce Violence Against Women (1997): Evaluation of this Strategy is being used to develop a new strategic framework involving 5 lead agencies: Community Services, Attorney-General’s Dep’t; Dept of Health; Police; & Dep’t of Premier & Cabinet. | 5 main projects including Staying Home Leaving Violence initiative: removal of violent offender to ensure safety of women & children, & to promote the notion that it is possible to remain ‘safe at home’. An Exclusion Order is usually given as part of an Apprehended Violence Order.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Legislation</th>
<th>Policy</th>
<th>Examples of Implementation</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Queensland</strong></td>
<td>A whole-of-govt strategy to respond to FV is currently being developed by the Department of Communities.</td>
<td>A range of services and programs including telephone support services, accommodation support, court support services and the Indigenous FV Program.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Domestic and Family Violence Protection Act 1989;</td>
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<td>Women’s Safety Strategy 2005: reference group includes representatives from Office for Women, 7 govt departments</td>
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<tr>
<td>Domestic and Family Violence Protection Regulation 2003</td>
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<td>Women’s Information Service Family Court Support Program; Rekindling Indigenous Family Partnerships project; Indigenous-specific domestic violence services in metropolitan Adelaide.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>South Australia</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>‘safe at home’ initiative is monitored by steering committee with representatives from 5 Government Departments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic Violence Act 1994; Sex Offender Register Bill 2006; Children, Young Persons and their Families Act 1997</td>
<td></td>
<td>The ‘safe at home’ initiative services include Family Violence Offender Intervention Program, court Support &amp; Liaison Service for adults &amp; children, and Victim Safety Response Team.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Tasmania</strong></td>
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<td>Family Violence Act 2004;</td>
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<td>Children, Young Persons and their Families Act 1997;</td>
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<td>Sentencing Act 1997;</td>
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<td>Criminal Code Amendment (Stalking) Act 1999</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Victoria</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Family Violence Protection Act 2008; Crimes (Sexual Offences) Act 2006;</td>
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<td>Crimes (Sexual Offences) Further Amendment Act 2006;</td>
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<td>Crimes Amendment (Rape) Act 2007;</td>
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<td>Justice Legislation Amendment (Sex Offences Procedure) Act 2008;</td>
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<td>Victorian Charter of Human Rights &amp; Responsibilities Act 2006</td>
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<td><strong>Western Australia (WA)</strong></td>
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<td>Restraining Orders Act 1997; Family Court Act 1997;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Acts Amendment (Family &amp; Domestic Violence) Act 2004;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Statutes Amendment (Evidence &amp; Procedure) Bill 2007;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Criminal Law Consolidation (Rape &amp; Sexual Offences) Amendment Bill 2008;</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Background Paper to Time for Action; A Right to Safety and Justice
‘Safe at home’ programs in the context of the Victorian Integrated Family Violence Service System Reforms: A review of the literature

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Jenny Hurley
Lucy Healy

SAFER Research Program