



Interagency Risk

Guidance for managing risks that involve multiple agencies



Family Violence Reform: Case Studies in Interagency Risk

Finding common ground

How do you get a shared view on what has to be done when governance is complex, stakeholders have differing—sometimes competing—priorities, and you need to constantly reassess what has to be done?

In 2017, the Victorian Government committed to implementing all 227 recommendations of the Royal Commission into Family Violence. The ten-year plan of reform to end family violence requires close partnerships to succeed, with some agencies jointly responsible for reform

Agencies implementing recommendations

- » Department of Health and Human Services
- » Family Safety Victoria
- » Department of Justice and Regulation
- » Department of Education and Training
- » Court Services Victoria
- » Victoria Police
- » Judicial College of Victoria
- » Department of Premier and Cabinet

and highly co-dependent, and others working with less dependency but still a shared purpose. Different partnerships present different challenges for managing interagency risk.

Walk in their shoes

Department of Justice and Regulation has several business units involved in implementing reform with other departments and agencies. Kirsten Lacey, Assistant Director, Risk and Resilience, Department of Justice and Regulation, assists those teams to identify risks. In 2017, she ran workshops with staff from the department and agency partners to identify risks and treatments.

The idea that 'a risk is a risk, no matter which way you look at it' doesn't always apply when considering interagency risks, according to Kirsten. If you work in justice the risk may be different from the risk in health. Agencies also have different priorities.

Kirsten's view is that we need to take a systems approach to managing interagency risk and walk through an interaction that someone from the community would have. How would they come into the system? Who would they talk to first? What does the system look like as a whole? Where are the interagency intersections and what are the risks?

Top tip

Look at the system from the perspective of a member of the community.

Interagency workshops also showed up the difficulty of trying to assign an owner to every risk, particularly if there is no joint responsibility for delivering a particular reform. "We found a way through this by focusing on the treatments and who would own those. We tried to understand what needs to go right—where are the difficulties now, and what is the risk down the track if we don't get on top of things."

“When you've got multiple agencies and projects, each with their own governance, then who makes the decision about what Agency X should do?”

– Kirsten Lacey

Steering committees that involve multiple agencies don't necessarily have the authority to dictate what a partner agency should do.



“We saw that there were limits to what we could do to address the issue about decision making. Instead, we focused on communicating and briefing people, and staying alert for emerging problems. It really comes down to good reporting, and keeping the communication and the dialogue going.”

It can be the best way to break new ground. “At the last workshop where we had co-dependencies, we were able to respectfully identify some of the difficulties people were having and we walked away with seven or eight new ways that we would approach managing risks that were really practical and solution-focused.”

Top tip

Where people are likely to converge is on the risks to collaboration—so communication, governance, and collaborative structures are really important.

Keep the wheel turning

Another initiative in family violence reform is the Family Violence Reforms Interagency Network, established by the Department of Premier and Cabinet to drive collaboration, accountability and a principles-based approach to managing the interagency risks associated with reform.

In 2017, VMIA helped run three workshops with representatives from each of the agencies, including the Department of Justice and Regulation, to assess risks from a holistic perspective.

“Agencies like the Department of Justice and Regulation were collaborating brilliantly on implementation, but we needed to get to grips with the risks to overall reform. In such a complex, highly-interdependent space, the challenge was to get consensus without losing rigor in the risk assessment.”

– Vicki Conroy, Risk Adviser, VMIA

The first workshop focused on identifying and analysing risks to family violence reform. VMIA's Risk Identification and Management Program facilitated this work.

In the second workshop the group mapped out existing controls and identified what new treatments were required. Through this process, the group realised that, in the first workshop, it had identified risks to the sustained delivery of services after implementation, as well as the implementation of the reforms—this led to a large number of risks and lack of clarity on priorities.

In the third workshop, the group tightened its focus back to implementation, giving priority to risks such as the timing of reform activities, where one agency's work needed to occur before those of another. The group used an approach to evaluating control effectiveness that looks at what must go right, rather than what could go wrong.

The methods used in the workshops were simple but designed to give agencies the opportunity to raise questions, discuss issues, resolve differences and float ideas. It drove considerable change in thinking as representatives assessed risks and took them back to their home agencies for review.

Top tip

Don't get bogged down with risk labels and ratings—focus on managing the risk.

As Vicki says, “it's a process but a flexible one. In the future, we want to look at how we can share what we are learning as we manage these risks, agency to agency, with the oversight of the FVRIN.”

The workshops assessed risks to:

- » Resourcing
- » Governance
- » Coordination
- » Information management
- » Stakeholder engagement

You can find out more about Family Violence Reform at <https://www.vic.gov.au/familyviolence.html>

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