



MARAM alignment and COVID-19

Background

The Family Violence Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework (MARAM) aims to create a consistent response to family violence risk across all services that may come into contact with people experiencing violence. The creation of MARAM was a key recommendation of the Royal Commission into Family Violence.

In September 2018, a new legislative requirement was established for designated organisations and services to align their policies, procedures, practice guidance and tools to MARAM. Many of these organisations and services were also prescribed to two new information sharing schemes (Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme and Child Information Sharing Scheme – the FVIS and CIS Scheme respectively). Proactive information sharing is a core component of managing risk under MARAM.

A list of prescribed organisations and services can be accessed [here](#). ***It is essential that alignment activities intended to increase staff capability to respond to and manage family violence risk continue.*** This factsheet identifies the importance of ensuring MARAM alignment forms a part of business continuity planning in response to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

Business continuity planning and MARAM alignment

Family Safety Victoria (FSV) is aware that prescribed organisations and services have been progressing with MARAM alignment. In the current climate of COVID-19, FSV is conscious of the potential strain organisations and services will encounter at this time, requiring significant business continuity planning.

MARAM alignment remains a critical piece of work that all organisations and services are encouraged to include in their business continuity plans.

Why should establishing a consistent family violence risk assessment and management approach be part of business continuity planning for non-specialist services?

We know from international evidence that family violence risk increases during disasters due to the way society constructs gender roles and norms. These circumstances must be taken into account and proactively planned for. MARAM provides the basis for services to respond effectively to increased family violence risk.

In this dynamic and fast-moving environment, there are rapidly changing public health messages from government to the community. As a result of self-isolation requirements, many victim survivors may be forced to remain in close proximity with perpetrators, or become entirely reliant upon them for care and support in isolated circumstances.

Travel restrictions, increased employment adversity and/or reduction in income may place increased strain on families, potentially increasing family violence risk and placing new limitations on safety plans.

Community services which usually offer some respite for adult and child victim survivors may be temporarily closed or operating at reduced capacity.

Isolation is an evidence-based risk factor for family violence under MARAM - a victim survivor is more vulnerable if isolated from family, friends, their community (including cultural communities) and other social networks. Isolation is not only geographic.

Critical services for victim survivors are likely to experience an increase in demand at a time when their own staffing resources are reduced due to illness or caring responsibilities.

What MARAM alignment activities should be prioritised?

Significant work has already been undertaken by many organisations and services to prepare staff members to fulfil MARAM responsibilities. A collaborative and consistent response to family violence helps keep victim survivors safe and perpetrators in view and accountable; and supports our colleagues across the whole service system.

It is for organisations to determine which MARAM alignment activities will remain a priority under business continuity activities. Examples of alignment activities that can be prioritised include:

- Ensuring staff are prepared to engage with clients in a respectful, safe and sensitive way (MARAM Responsibility 1) and can identify evidence-based risk factors of family violence (MARAM Responsibility 2).
- Establishing clear processes for staff members to seek secondary consultations (internally and externally), make warm referrals and proactively share information, including by using the FVIS and CIS Schemes (MARAM Responsibilities 5 and 6).
- Those organisations holding risk assessment and risk management responsibilities (MARAM Responsibilities 3 and 4, or MARAM Responsibilities 7 and 8 for family violence specialists) must ensure ongoing risk assessment and proactive risk management for victim survivors, including by updating safety plans to reflect increased risk related to isolation as a result of COVID-19.

Next steps

Additional resources and support will be made available in the coming weeks. FSV is working with departments and training providers to finalise training contingency planning to reduce the interruption to MARAM training as much as possible. Should you have any queries please contact infosharing@familysafety.vic.gov.au

MARAM practice guides and other resources can be accessed at: <https://www.vic.gov.au/maram-practice-guides-and-resources>