

**MARAM FRAMEWORK:  
SUMMARY FOR  
ORGANISATIONAL  
LEADERS**



## **Acknowledgment of Aboriginal people and communities in Victoria**

The Victorian Government proudly acknowledges Aboriginal people as Australia's First Peoples and as the Traditional Owners and custodians of the land and waterways upon which we depend. We acknowledge Victoria's Aboriginal communities and culture and pay respect to their Elders past and present.

Aboriginal culture is founded on a strong social and cultural order that has sustained up to 60,000 years of existence. Victorian Aboriginal communities and peoples are culturally diverse, with rich and varied heritages and histories pre- and post- invasion. The impacts of colonisation — while having devastating effects on the traditional life of Aboriginal Nations — have not diminished Aboriginal people's connection to country, culture or community.

The Victorian Government recognises the long-standing leadership of Aboriginal communities in Victoria to prevent and respond to family violence, supported through self-determination and self-management, to improve outcomes for Aboriginal people and families, whilst also acknowledging the devastating impacts and accumulation of trauma across generations as a result of colonisation and the dispossession of land and children.

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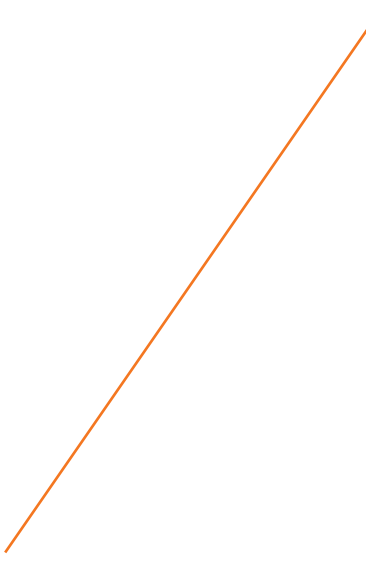
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### **Content Coordination**

Design by Najaaf Saleem

In this document, 'Aboriginal' refers to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.



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# 1. What is the MARAM Framework?

The MARAM Framework (or 'MARAM') is the policy framework describing best practice for family violence risk assessment and management, based on current evidence and research.

It is the approved family violence risk assessment and risk management framework, as described in Part 11 of the *Family Violence Protection Act 2008* (FVPA) and is therefore embedded in law and policy.

The MARAM Framework establishes the system architecture and accountability mechanisms required for a system-wide approach to, and shared responsibility for, responding to family violence risk.

Organisations may be prescribed as 'Framework organisations' by Regulations. Once prescribed, Framework organisations are required to progressively align their policies, procedures, practice guidance and tools with MARAM.

Organisations not prescribed can still voluntarily align with the MARAM Framework as the best practice framework in Victoria.

Framework organisations are prescribed because in their normal engagement with people using their services, there is an opportunity and responsibility to identify, screen, assess and manage family violence risk.

MARAM guides Framework organisations in their assessment of, and response to family violence risk, in order to increase the safety of victim survivors and keep perpetrators in view and accountable.

The MARAM Framework contains four key components:

- 1 Ten [MARAM principles](#) (refer to section 3)
- 2 The [four pillars](#), which support the structure of the MARAM Framework (refer to section 4)
- 3 The ten [MARAM responsibilities](#), found in Pillar 3 (refer to section 6)
- 4 Structured Professional Judgement, found in Pillar 2 (refer to section 7).

In addition to these key components, organisational leaders need to be aware that information sharing is essential to achieve consistent and collaborative practice, and to inform risk assessment and management.

Structured Professional Judgement is also discussed in greater detail in section 7.

## 2. Organisational requirements for MARAM alignment

The Framework defines alignment as:

‘Actions taken by Framework organisations to effectively incorporate the four pillars of the Framework into existing policies, procedures, practice guidance and tools, as appropriate to the roles and functions of the prescribed entity and its place in the service system’.

Alignment requires that embedding activities:

- are guided by the 10 principles
- incorporate the contents of the four pillars (and in particular the evidence-based risk factors and MARAM aligned tools)
- assign the MARAM responsibilities.

## 3. The principles

The principles establish the aims and objectives of the MARAM Framework and are reflected throughout the pillars. The principles are intended to guide the response to family violence.

The principles are:

- 1** family violence involves a spectrum of seriousness of risk and presentations, and is unacceptable in any form, across any community or culture
- 2** professionals should work collaboratively to provide coordinated and effective risk assessment and management responses, including early intervention when family violence first occurs to avoid escalation into crisis and additional harm
- 3** professionals should be aware, in their risk assessment and management practice, of the drivers of family violence, predominantly gender inequality, which also intersect with other forms of structural inequality and discrimination
- 4** the agency, dignity and intrinsic empowerment of victim survivors must be respected by partnering with them as active decision-making participants in risk assessment and management, including being supported to access and participate in justice processes that enable fair and just outcomes
- 5** family violence may have serious impacts on the current and future physical, spiritual, psychological, developmental and emotional safety and wellbeing of children, who are directly or indirectly exposed to its effects, and should be recognised as victim survivors in their own right
- 6** services provided to child victim survivors should acknowledge their unique experiences, vulnerabilities and needs, including the effects of trauma and cumulative harm arising from family violence
- 7** services and responses provided to people from Aboriginal communities should be culturally responsive and safe, recognising Aboriginal understanding of family violence and rights to self-determination and self-management, and take account of their

experiences of colonisation, systemic violence and discrimination and recognise the ongoing and present-day impacts of historical events, policies and practices

- 8 services and responses provided to diverse communities and older people should be accessible, culturally responsive and safe, client-centred, inclusive and non-discriminatory
- 9 perpetrators should be encouraged to acknowledge and take responsibility to end their violent, controlling and coercive behaviour, and service responses to perpetrators should be collaborative and coordinated through a system-wide approach that collectively and systematically creates opportunities for perpetrator accountability
- 10 family violence used by adolescents is a distinct form of family violence and requires a different response to family violence used by adults, because of their age and the possibility that they are also victim survivors of family violence.

## 4. The pillars

The MARAM Framework is structured around four conceptual pillars for leaders of organisations to align their policies, procedures, practice guidance and tools.

The pillars each set out a 'framework requirement' for organisations to work towards in the process of alignment.

### Pillar 1: Shared understanding of family violence

#### Framework requirement

Framework organisations demonstrate an evidence-based, shared understanding of family violence risk and impact. A shared understanding promotes an effective, integrated service response to family violence and comprises:

- spectrum of family violence types
- evidence-based risk factors used to support determination of seriousness of risk
- complexity of experiences across the community.

Pillar 1 contains foundational information about the prevalence and impact of family violence. When incorporated in policies, procedures, practice guidance and tools, it helps create a shared understanding of family violence.

A shared understanding across Framework organisations lays a strong foundation in the response to family violence.

The *MARAM practice guide: foundational knowledge* describes a shared understanding at practice level in more detail, including:

- **what constitutes family violence** — MARAM recognises the many different presentations of family violence, both in terms of behaviours and relationships, and across communities and identities
- **the underlying drivers of family violence, which include structural inequalities and community attitudes** — MARAM supports understanding the gendered nature of family violence, why women and children are disproportionately affected and the drivers of family violence (why a person chooses to use violence); MARAM also recognises the additional drivers of structural inequality and discrimination, and specifically the impact of colonisation on Aboriginal communities
- **evidence-based family violence risk factors** — knowing what the MARAM risk factors are and which particular risk factors increase the risk of lethality or serious harm. This is essential for screening, assessing and managing the level of family violence risk
- **recognising children as victim survivors in their own right** — acknowledging children and young people individually, and recognising their unique experiences, vulnerabilities and needs
- **an intersectional approach to family violence** — MARAM recognises the different experiences of family violence within and across communities, and examines how an individual's different identities (i.e. sexuality, age, disability) affect how violence is used against them, how they experience family violence and how it may influence their presentation, needs and ability to engage with services. It should be noted that the Aboriginal community has a different definition of family violence
- **a trauma- and violence-informed approach:** understanding how different experiences of trauma affect adult and child victim survivors' presentation, needs and ability to engage with services
- **shared responsibility to keep perpetrators in view and accountable** — this includes monitoring a perpetrator's behaviour, sharing information to reduce the risk to a victim survivor and avoiding collusion (even if inadvertent).

The *MARAM practice guide: foundational knowledge* provides comprehensive information on these topics.

## Pillar 2: Consistent and collaborative practice

Alignment with Pillar 2 aims to achieve a common approach to family violence risk identification, screening, assessment and management. This will enable a consistent response across Framework organisations.

### Framework requirement

Framework organisations use a shared approach to identification, screening, assessment and management of family violence risk.

Framework organisations use tools that are consistent with the evidence-based risk factors, and share information relevant to family violence risk assessment and management with other services in accordance with relevant laws.

Seriousness of risk is to be assessed through structured professional judgement, which comprises a victim's self-assessed level of risk, fear and safety, assessment against evidence-based risk factors, information sharing to inform assessment and professional judgement.

To assist alignment with Pillar 2, there are MARAM-aligned tools for use in the identification, screening, assessment and management of family violence attached to the MARAM practice guides.

These tools incorporate the evidence-based risk factors. They can be adopted in full or adapted into existing tools as best suits your organisation. Any adaption should retain the evidence-based factors as a minimum requirement.

The [MARAM practice guides and tools webpage](#) provides these resources.

### **Pillar 3: Responsibilities for risk assessment and management**

Pillar 3 lists 10 responsibilities. These responsibilities cover understanding and identifying family violence, assessment and management of family violence risk and collaborative practice including through information sharing.

#### **Framework requirement**

Framework organisations understand their responsibilities in risk assessment and management practice and those these relate to the operation of Part 5A of the *Family Violence Protection Act 2008*, as applicable.

Framework organisations assign responsibilities of services and service providers within them in accordance with the 10 MARAM responsibilities.

Part 5A relates to information sharing for the purpose of family violence assessment and family violence protection.

Framework organisations are required to understand which of the 10 MARAM responsibilities apply to their organisation, and to equip their workforces with the necessary tools, resources and training to meet those responsibilities.

The 10 [MARAM responsibilities](#) are explored in further detail in section 6.

### **Pillar 4: Systems, outcomes and continuous Improvement**

Pillar 4 outlines the requirements and benefits of aligning with MARAM, and participating in data collection and evaluation of family violence response.

It outlines how organisational leaders can contribute to the implementation of MARAM, to continuous improvement and an understanding of the evidence base over time.

#### **Framework requirement**

Framework organisations:

- establish or utilise existing relevant governance and advisory structures to implement the Framework
- collect consistent information about the evidence-based risk factors, through MARAM aligned tools, as well as service users' individual experience of the forms of family violence
- undertake activities to change organisational culture and practice to promote continuous improvement in risk assessment and management practice, information sharing and enhanced collaboration with other services.



Pillar 4 reiterates that alignment with MARAM requires significant cultural change and systemic reform, which will take time. The collection of data and evaluation is part of this ongoing process.

## 5. The evidence-based risk factors (under Pillar 1)

The evidence-based risk factors reflect the current and emerging evidence base relating to family violence risk.

International evidence-based reviews and consultation with academics and expert practitioners have informed the development of a range of evidence-based risk factors that signal that family violence may be occurring.

There are four categories of risk factors in Pillar 1:

- risk factors relevant to adult victim circumstances
- risk factors for adult or child victims caused by perpetrator behaviours
- risk factors specific to children caused by perpetrator behaviours
- risk factors specific to children’s circumstances.

Refer to p. 27 of the Framework for more information about these risk factors.

### ! Risk factors relevant to adult victim circumstances

- **Physical assault whilst pregnant/following new birth\***
- Self-assessed level of risk
- **Planning to leave or recent separation\***
- **Escalation - increase in severity and/or frequency of violence\***
- Financial abuse/difficulties
- Imminence.

### ! Risk factors specific to children caused by perpetrator behaviours

- Exposure to family violence
- Sexualised behaviours towards a child by the perpetrator
- Child intervention in violence
- Behaviour indicating non-return of child
- Undermining the child-parent relationship
- Professional and statutory intervention.

### ! Risk factors specific to children’s circumstances

- History of professional involvement and/or statutory intervention
- Change in behaviour not explained by other causes
- Child as victim in other forms of harm.

### ! Risk factors for adult or child victims caused by perpetrator behaviours

- **Controlling behaviours\***
- **Access to weapons\***
- **Use of weapon in most recent event\***
- Has ever harmed or threatened to harm victim or family members
- **Has ever tried to strangle or choke the victim\***
- **Has ever threatened to kill victim\***
- **Has ever harmed or threatened to harm or kill pets or other animals\***
- **Has ever threatened or tried to self harm or commit suicide\***
- **Stalking of victim\***
- **Sexual assault of victim\***
- Previous or current breach of court orders/Intervention Order
- History of family violence
- History of violent behaviour (not family violence)
- **Obsession/jealous behaviour towards victim\***
- **Unemployed/ Disengaged from education\***
- **Drug and/or alcohol misuse/abuse\***
- Mental illness/Depression
- Isolation
- Physical harm
- Emotional abuse
- Property damage.

**Note:** bold text denote increased risk of the victim being killed or almost killed. Risk assessment tools are designed from these evidence-based factors, using structured professional judgement to determine seriousness of presenting risk.

Figure 1: Evidence-based risk factors from MARAM Framework

## 6. The responsibilities (under Pillar 3)

Under MARAM, professionals across a broad range of services, organisations and sectors have a shared responsibility for identifying, assessing and managing family violence risk, even if it is not be a core part of their role.

This does not mean that all professionals in all Framework organisations are expected to become ‘experts’ in family violence — but it does mean that all professionals in all Framework organisations are expected to understand their role in responding to family violence risk.

Leaders of framework organisations are required to understand the responsibilities and assign responsibilities of services and service providers within them.

The MARAM responsibilities can be found on p. 46 of the MARAM Framework, and are recreated below.

Risk assessment and management responsibilities	Expectations of framework organisations and section 191 agencies
<b>Responsibility 1: Respectful, sensitive and safe engagement</b>	<p>Ensure staff understand the nature and dynamics of family violence, facilitate an appropriate, accessible, culturally responsive environment for safe disclosure of information by service users, and respond to disclosures sensitively.</p> <p>Ensure staff recognise that any engagement of service users who may be a perpetrator must occur safely and not collude or respond to coercive behaviours.</p>
<b>Responsibility 2: Identification of family violence</b>	<p>Ensure staff use information gained through engagement with service users and other providers (and in some cases, through use of screening tools to aid identification/or routine screening of all clients) to identify indicators of family violence risk and potentially affected family members.</p> <p>Ensure staff understand when it might be safe to ask questions of clients who may be a perpetrator, to assist with identification.</p>
<b>Responsibility 3: Intermediate risk assessment</b>	<p>Ensure staff can competently and confidently conduct intermediate risk assessment of adult and child victim survivors using structured professional judgement and appropriate tools, including the brief and intermediate assessment tools.</p> <p>Where appropriate to the role and mandate of the organisation or service, and when safe to do so, ensure staff can competently and confidently contribute to behaviour assessment through engagement with a perpetrator, including use of the perpetrator behaviour assessment, and contribute to keeping them in view and accountable for their actions and behaviours.</p>
<b>Responsibility 4: Intermediate risk management</b>	<p>Ensure staff actively address immediate risk and safety concerns relating to adult and child victim survivors, and undertake intermediate risk management when safe to do so, including safety planning.</p>

<p><b>Responsibility 5: Seek consultation for comprehensive risk assessment, risk management and referrals</b></p>	<p>Ensure staff seek internal supervision and further consult with family violence specialists to collaborate on risk assessment and risk management for adult and child victim survivors and perpetrators, and make active referrals for comprehensive specialist responses, if appropriate</p>
<p><b>Responsibility 6: Contribute to information sharing with other services (as authorised by legislation)</b></p>	<p>Ensure staff proactively share information relevant to the assessment and management of family violence risk and respond to requests to share information from other information sharing entities under the Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme, privacy law or other legislative authorisation.</p>
<p><b>Responsibility 7: Comprehensive assessment</b></p>	<p>Ensure staff in specialist family violence positions are trained to comprehensively assess the risks, needs and protective factors for adult and child victim survivors.</p> <p>Ensure staff who specialise in working with perpetrators are trained and equipped to undertake comprehensive risk and needs assessment to determine seriousness of risk of the perpetrator, tailored intervention and support options, and contribute to keeping them in view and accountable for their actions and behaviours. This includes an understanding of situating their own roles and responsibilities in the broader system to enable mutually reinforcing interventions over time.</p>
<p><b>Responsibility 8: Comprehensive risk management and safety planning</b></p>	<p>Ensure staff in specialist family violence positions are trained to undertake comprehensive risk management through development, monitoring and actioning of safety plans (including ongoing risk assessment), in partnership with the adult or child victim survivor and support agencies.</p> <p>Ensure staff who specialise in working with perpetrators are trained to undertake comprehensive risk management through development, monitoring and actioning of risk management plans (including information sharing); monitoring across the service system (including justice systems); and actions to hold perpetrators accountable for their actions. This can be through formal and informal system accountability mechanisms that support perpetrators' personal accountability, to accept responsibility for their actions, and work at the behaviour change process.</p>
<p><b>Responsibility 9: Contribute to coordinated risk management</b></p>	<p>Ensure staff contribute to coordinated risk management, as part of integrated, multidisciplinary and multi-agency approaches, including information sharing, referrals, action planning, coordination of responses and collaborative action.</p>
<p><b>Responsibility 10: Collaborate for ongoing risk assessment and risk management</b></p>	<p>Ensure staff are equipped to play an ongoing role in collaboratively monitoring, assessing and managing risk over time to identify changes in assessed level of risk and ensure risk management and safety plans are responsive to changed circumstances, including escalation. Ensure safety plans are enacted.</p>

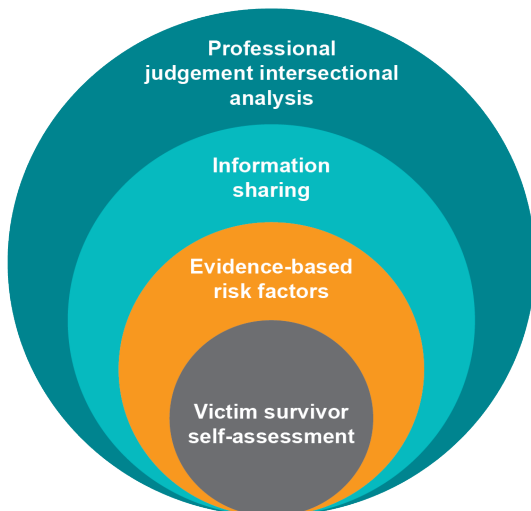
[MARAM victim survivor practice guides](#) with detailed guidance on each responsibility can be accessed on the [MARAM practice guides and resources webpage](#). Further guidance on working directly with perpetrators is intended for release.

A responsibility summary guidance is also on the MARAM practice guides and resources webpage under the organisational embedding guidance resources.

## 7. Structured professional judgement

Structured professional judgement is defined in the MARAM Framework as a professional determination of level of risk, taking into account:

- a victim's self-assessed level of risk, safety and fear
- assessment against evidence-based risk factors
- information sharing to inform assessment
- professional judgement, using an intersectional analysis lens.



**Figure 3: Model of structured professional judgement**

When aligning policies, procedures, practice guidance and tools with MARAM, consider and incorporate the Structured Professional Judgement model to enable practitioners to appropriately determine level of risk.

One way to do this is by using MARAM-aligned tools, and meeting the MARAM responsibilities (for example, through information sharing to inform risk assessment).

### Information sharing and structured professional judgement

Information sharing is a core component of the Structured Professional Judgement model.

The Royal Commission into Family Violence identified barriers that prevent information from being shared as effectively as it could be under existing legislation and practices. It also found that failing to share crucial information with frontline workers can have catastrophic consequences.

In response to these findings, the **Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme** was created by a new Part 5A of the *Family Violence Protection Act 2008*.

The scheme began on 26 February 2018, and it authorises a select group of prescribed information sharing entities to share information between themselves for family violence risk assessment and risk management.

The scheme does not interfere with existing legislation that allows information to be shared, such as privacy or child protection legislation.

Changes have also been made to Victorian privacy legislation that information can be shared in order to lessen or prevent a serious threat to the life, health, safety or welfare of a person.

The **Child Information Sharing Scheme** is also new. It responds to over a decade of reviews and enquiries recommending reform to the way information is shared about children including:

- McClellan Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse
- The Commission for Children and Young People's annual reports
- Royal Commission into family violence
- Victorian auditor general's office reports into vulnerable children and families
- Multiple coroners inquests and reports
- Cummins Inquiry on protecting Victoria's vulnerable children.

These inquiries have all recommended streamlining Victoria's information sharing arrangements to improve outcomes for children by promoting shared responsibility for their wellbeing and safety and increasing collaboration across the service systems.

They also identified the need to modify a risk-averse culture, which has resulted in some practitioners being hesitant to share information even when it would benefit children to do so.

Organisations prescribed to align to the MARAM Framework are likely prescribed under one or both new Information Sharing Schemes. Guidance on these schemes can be found on the [Information sharing resource page of the Victorian Government website](#).

