

A Review of Family and Domestic Violence in Western Australia

Key insights from the in-depth investigation into the Family and Domestic Violence Response Team model

What is the Family and Domestic Violence Response Team (FDVRT)?

The FDVRT is Western Australia's key coordinated response to Family and Domestic Violence (FDV). It brings together representatives from the Department of Communities, the Western Australia Police Force and the Coordinated Response Service, with the Department of Justice being progressively included into each FDVRT over four years.

After police officers attend a FDV incident, the FDVRT works together to share information, identify risks, and plan responses that aim to keep victim survivors safe and hold people who use violence to account. There are currently 18 FDVRTs operating across Western Australia.

FDV remains a serious and growing issue in Western Australia, with FDV call outs resulting in a Family Violence Incident Report rising from 47,818 in 2020–21 to 63,137 in 2024–25. This increase means that FDVRTs are handling more cases every year, making it vital that their work is effective and consistent.

This investigation began after FDV fatality reviews revealed ongoing issues in how the FDVRTs operate. These included inconsistent risk assessments, poor data collection, limited support for vulnerable groups, and gaps in follow-up actions. Despite our earlier recommendations, an external independent review commissioned by the Department of Communities in 2020 – which made 40 recommendations – and significant reforms, many of these issues persisted. This prompted a deeper look at whether FDVRTs are meeting their operational requirements and if the model is functioning as intended.

What we found

Key issues identified through this investigation included:

Gaps in information collected by attending police officers: The FDVRT relies heavily on information collected by attending police officers at FDV incidents. However, almost a quarter of Risk and Behaviour questions were left marked 'unstated' or 'unknown' in police reports. This incomplete data makes it difficult for FDVRTs to understand risk and make informed decisions to protect families.

Further examination revealed that there is no formal ratification process in place to prevent any single agency from unilaterally changing established practices, which is essential to uphold the integrity and accountability of the system.

Inconsistent compliance with operational requirements: FDVRTs must use a structured risk assessment tool and escalate high-risk cases to Multi-Agency Case Management (MACM). We found that these steps were often not followed, leaving some families without the coordinated support they need.

Insufficient support for vulnerable groups: The FDVRT model has not been adapted to meet the unique needs of vulnerable groups, such as Aboriginal people, children, people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CaLD) communities, LGBTIQ+ people, and people with disability. Without tailored approaches, those most at risk do not always receive appropriate support.

Limited responses for children beyond Child Protection: While children are frequently present at FDV incidents, the FDVRT response is typically limited to Child Protection involvement. There are no child-focused adaptations to procedures or risk assessment tools, and many children exposed to FDV receive no further support or recognition as victim survivors in their own right.

Challenges with the current risk assessment

tool: The mandated tool is lengthy, not embedded in the application used by the FDVRT, and based on a westernised model of FDV that does not reflect all cultural or family contexts. These factors make it difficult for FDVRTs to use the tool consistently.

Limited accountability for people who use violence

beyond a justice response: The FDVRT made few referrals for people who use violence, and limited programs are available, particularly in regional areas. Most interventions focus on supporting victim survivors, with little engagement or accountability for repeat offenders. This means many people who use violence, cycle through the system without meaningful intervention to change their behaviour.

No clear process when the victim survivor cannot be reached:

If agencies cannot make contact with a victim survivor, there is no standard process for follow-up. This leaves some families without any support or monitoring.

Weak data foundations: The FDVRT operates without a fit-for-purpose, multi-agency database. Information is scattered across systems, records are often incomplete, and it is difficult to track actions, outcomes, or safety impacts.

No statewide monitoring and evaluation: There is no statewide monitoring and evaluation framework for the FDVRT model. This means agencies cannot see whether the FDVRT model is working as intended or where improvements are needed.

Recommendations

We made nine recommendations, which can be summarised as follows:

- Establish a formal, jointly governed ratification process for any changes to settled FDVRT practice, including partner consultation and approval before implementation.
- Identify and address barriers to compliance with operational requirements related to record keeping, risk assessment and escalation of high risk cases to MACM.
- Introduce a process to identify vulnerable groups engaging with the FDVRT and apply tailored

guidance, clear response steps and dedicated referral pathways.

- Develop clear service pathways for all children identified at FDV incidents, beyond existing Child Protection responses.
- Strengthen FDVRT focus on people who use violence beyond justice responses, including maintaining a register of engagement and a live directory of behaviour change programs.
- Implement a standardised process for unsuccessful contact with victim survivors.
- Develop a purpose built, multi-agency FDVRT database to embed risk assessment, record all partner activity, support monitoring, audit, quality assurance and system oversight.
- Implement a statewide monitoring and evaluation framework.
- Re-establish FDVRT Central as a dedicated oversight and coordination function to ensure consistent practice.

Why it matters

FDVRTs are operating in a high-demand environment, routinely working with families experiencing serious, repeated, and complex FDV, often involving children. While triage meetings occur daily, key processes designed to identify, escalate and respond to risk are not being applied consistently.

Real-world pressures, including rising demand, resource constraints, and differing professional perspectives, mean that some divergence in practice is inevitable over time, even among agencies that currently agree.

The absence of a formal ratification process for any proposed change to settled FDVRT practice, combined with the lack of a strong monitoring and evaluation frameworks, and a comprehensive data system, limits the effectiveness of the FDVRT model. Without these foundations, the Department of Communities, as the lead agency for FDV in Western Australia, cannot reliably oversee the FDVRT model, measure its impact, or drive genuine system-wide improvement. To ensure every family receives the protection and support they need, a coordinated, accountable, and data-driven approach is essential.