

Call for an end to domestic homicides

Domestic violence homicides are largely preventable deaths. Those involved are usually known to government agencies (including police) or services. As well as being terrible individual deaths, these murders represent a failure of the service and criminal justice systems to respond appropriately to high risk cases. The deaths need to be examined in the context of other domestic violence deaths, to reveal patterns in why and how they occur, and to identify areas for improvement in service and agency information sharing, identification of offenders, risk assessment and response.

Domestic Violence Fatality Reviews (like the Child Death Reviews in place across the country) could offer insights and guidance to improve service and criminal justice responses. Their key role is to prevent future deaths. Australia does not employ domestic violence fatality reviews in any jurisdiction. The NSW Ombudsman, NSW Domestic Violence Coalition, Victorian Law Reform Commission, Domestic Violence Victoria, the Federation of Community Legal Services (Victoria) and Queensland the Domestic Violence Death Review Action Group have all called for the introduction of a review process.

The staff of the Australian Domestic & Family Violence Clearinghouse are deeply saddened and angered by the brutal murders of another woman and her two grandchildren in Cowra yesterday allegedly by her husband, and the attempted murder of her daughter. The Cowra murders follow the tragic murders of the three Bell children in NSW by their father, Gary Poxton, and his suicide last week. These seem to be just the latest in a string of domestic violence related deaths this year. We call for the introduction of a national domestic violence fatality review process, as a matter of urgency, and for support of this strategy through its inclusion in the Federal Government's National Plan of Action to Prevent Violence Against Women and Children.

Gaby Marcus

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