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Health centre seeks greater family violence role

Posted By [Matt Crossman](#) On July 20, 2015 @ 4:25 pm In [Uncategorized](#) | [No Comments](#)

Community health centres are ideally placed to play an increased role in responding to family violence, according to Sunbury Community Health's submission to a royal commission.

But the 40-page document warns that the whole response system must be adequately funded if the devastating consequences of the problem are to be curbed.

The submission was one of almost 1000 made to the royal commission launched in response to rising family violence rates.

Public hearings began last week, with the commission to report and make recommendations to the state government by February.

SCH's submission said references to family violence as an emergency becoming widespread meant little without adequate resources.

"A national emergency requires a strategic plan which recognises the need to ... adequately fund all stages of the response system until prevention, early intervention, accountability and healing measures start taking effect," the submission says.

"Community health centres work directly with thousands of local families and have strong relationships with schools, businesses and other community agencies. They are best placed to lead prevention activities."

The submission calls for funding to allow SCH to recruit a small team of family violence workers to implement locally relevant education and intervention programs.

"The system must be localised and strengthened to ensure early intervention responses are timely and effective.

"SCH and other community health centres can respond to low-risk incidents that may not be actioned by regionally provided services.

"They also have personal relationships with local police, capacity to contact victims and perpetrators in the 24 to 48 hours after an incident and can immediately provide wrap-around supports for the whole family."

The submission also calls for behavioural change programs to be expanded, with demand greatly exceeding availability.

With almost 60 incidents reported in Hume every week, SCH child, youth and family services general manager Marcus Bosch told

Star Weekly it was crucial that the community supported women and children experiencing family violence.

"It's also important for clear messages to be given to men who behave violently," he said.

"Information can be given to them about services to help them address these issues, also through Sunbury Community Health.

"We seek to engage the community in working towards building a culture where men are respectful of women and where there is strong value placed on gender equality from an early age."