

# Information Sheet

## Multidisciplinary Centres (MDCs)



VICTORIA POLICE

### What are MDCs?

MDCs co-locate a range of agencies in the one building to provide a victim-centred, integrated and holistic response to victims of sexual crime and child abuse.

MDCs are an innovative way of responding to sexual crime by providing better coordination of specialist services which improves responses and outcomes for victims.

The agencies in each MDC share common goals and work collaboratively under the direction of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and local area agreements to ensure clients are provided with every opportunity to seek the level of help they require and ensure this information is well protected.

MDCs operate so that each agency can work under their own prescribed protocols, funding arrangements and legislative requirements whilst contributing to the collaborative model.

### History

For some time, victims had been reporting difficulties in having to repeat their story to different agencies, who often did not talk to each other.

*“I started talking to my counsellor about the sexual assault. She basically just said, ‘Oh would you like me to organise one of the police officers to come in if you’re willing..?’ I found it was good because... I didn’t have to try and build up the urge to go to the police station. While I was still in that frame of mind I just went straight into a next room.”*

– MDC Pilot site client

In response, the MDC concept was developed and in 2007 the first two sites opened in **Mildura** and **Frankston**<sup>1</sup>.

These first MDCs co-located teams of Victoria Police specialist investigators (SOCITs) alongside counsellor/advocates from the Centre Against Sexual Assault (CASA). Due to the success of this model, Victoria Police has led the development of additional MDCs located at:

- **Geelong** - commenced 2012
- **Dandenong** - commenced 2014
- **Morwell** - commenced 2015
- **Bendigo** - commenced 2015
- **Werribee** - to commence in 2018

The model has also expanded to now co-locate Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) child protection staff, community health nurses and Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine (VIFM) Forensic Medical Officers<sup>2</sup>.

### MDC Principles

The following principles underpin the operation of MDCs and apply to all partner agencies:

- Provide victims with empathic, professional and comprehensive responses
- Work according to the best interests of the victim and uphold their rights, including their human rights
- Work collaboratively to ensure that the victim receives an integrated response
- Recognise each other’s distinct roles and professional approach
- Engage and support families to provide a safe and stable environment for victims
- Support victims throughout all parts of the investigation process
- Provide victims with timely responses and information
- Ensure that services are accessible to all victims from marginalised and disadvantaged groups
- Evidence-based decision making guides the functions, operations and design of MDCs
- Agencies are committed to continuous strengthening of MDC partnerships



*“...one of the biggest barriers to people reporting these types of offences –[is] the fact that they need to go to a police station with other people around and talk about something that’s very personal and sensitive to them... I never really thought that having to go to a police station was a barrier for victims, but I can really see that now...”*

– Police member MDC Pilot site

<sup>1</sup> Frankston MDC relocated to Seaford in 2013.

<sup>2</sup> In Dandenong MDC only

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### MDC Facilities

MDC buildings are located away from police stations and are designed to provide a welcoming, confidential, and safe environment for victims and their support people.

Extensive consideration is given to ensure that the buildings are culturally respectful, support the victim's well-being, are accessible and facilitate confidentiality.

MDCs are discreetly located with minimal external signage to enhance the privacy and security of clients. Police members working from the MDC are not in uniform.

Forensic services are made available in most locations, so that victims do not have to go anywhere else.

***“Although there are areas within Victoria where there's already strong relationships between partner agencies, the understanding of the roles, responsibilities and capabilities of different agencies is much greater when you co-locate – the shared understanding becomes explicit.”***

*- Police member MDC Pilot site*

### What services are available at MDCs?

MDCs are a one stop shop providing access to:

- Specially trained police investigators
- Counselling and advocacy support
- Video Audio Recorded Evidence rooms where child victims and adults with cognitive impairments can provide their statement
- Nurse clinic rooms where victims can have their general health needs assessed
- Treatment programs for children and young people up to 18 years of age who are displaying or engaging in sexually abusive behaviours
- Forensic medical suites (at some locations) to enable forensic examinations on site
- Remote Witness Facilities (at some locations) so victims can provide their evidence remotely to Court

### Achievements of the MDC model

Independent evaluations of MDCs have identified that the approach:

- Streamlines responses so victims access help more efficiently
- Improves the range and quality of support for victims, their families and support people
- Improves the investigation of sexual crime and child abuse through service integration

- Improves the capability of agencies to understand and respect each other's work, share information and work collaboratively
- Provides a welcoming environment for victims and families which is focused on their safety and wellbeing
- Contributes to increased reporting of sexual crime to police and reduces the number of withdrawals from justice system processes
- Leads to more just outcomes, often through the provision of higher quality investigation briefs
- Commitment to continuous strengthening and improvement practices of partnerships.



### Integration of family violence responses

Victoria Police is currently in the process of integrating family violence responses in MDCs by co-locating police family violence investigative teams alongside family violence service providers at Dandenong, Geelong and Werribee MDCs.

An independent evaluation into the effectiveness of this approach is scheduled for report in 2018.

***“compelling evidence that the twin elements of colocation and collaboration, combined with the specialist skills of the MDC staff, work together to improve outcomes for victims of sexual offences and child abuse.”***

*- 2015 Evaluation of MDCs in Victoria*

### Additional Information & Reporting Sexual Offences

Further information on sexual offences and family violence can be found by:

- Exploring the Victoria Police website;  
<http://www.police.vic.gov.au/sexualoffences>
- Phoning your local police station
- Victim/survivors and support people can contact the **Sexual Assault Crisis Line (Victoria) on 1800 806 292**