

MEDIA RELEASE

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Expert help now available for GPs supporting family violence victim-survivors

Video [available here](#).



GPs and other primary health care providers in Melbourne's centre, north and west now have access to expert help when caring for a patient impacted by family violence.

Risk assessment review and advice on obtaining psychological and social supports for victim-survivors of family violence is available through a new secondary consult service, funded by North Western Melbourne Primary Health Network (NWMPHN).

The service, which operates on weekdays between 9am and 5pm, is delivered by two family violence specialist services – Berry Street and GenWest.

Research shows that people affected by family violence often first disclose this information in a general practice setting, because trust and confidentiality are important protections.

Professor Kesley Hegarty is the joint Chair in Family Violence Prevention at the University of Melbourne and the Royal Women's Hospital, and leads the [Safer Families Centre](#). She says that GPs

comprise the profession most commonly told when family, sexual and domestic violence is occurring.

“GPs are really key, because they are a very accessible resource that anybody can go to – often survivors are *allowed* to go to their doctor, when they may not be allowed to go other places that might be labelled as family and domestic violence services,” she says.

However, many patients do not receive an appropriate response because some GPs, practice nurses and other staff either do not feel confident in discussing family violence or are not aware of the support options available.

Through the Safer Families Centre, NWMPHN offers funded, specialist [training](#) to general practices to develop in-depth responses to family violence. Professor Hegarty says that whole practice teams are “really stepping up” and becoming safe spaces for patients to discuss family violence.



Professor Kelsey Hegarty. Image courtesy of [Safer Families Centre](#).

However, this training program is a phased process, and there is a need to ensure every practice across the region has immediate access to informed support for family violence victim-survivors.

Hence the new secondary consult service. Within operating hours, GPs, practice nurses and other staff seeking information and insight on providing appropriate care to patients disclosing family violence can call Berry Street or GenWest and receive immediate attention. Alternatively, they can seek information through email.

Advice can be sought about matters such as referral options, risk assessments and risk managements, as well as culturally safe engagement with First Nations people or people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

“This is an important expansion of the family violence support services available in the north and west,” says Christopher Carter, NWMPHN’s chief executive.

“GenWest and Berry Street have an extraordinary depth of skill, experience and knowledge in this field, and will be able to provide the case-by-case support advice needed so that general practice can deliver the best care possible to impacted patients.”

Berry Street provides secondary consult services to practices located primarily in the north, while GenWest caters to the west. [This page](#) contains more information.

The GenWest service can be reached on 1800 436 937 or via email gpfvconsults@genwest.org.au

The Berry Street service can be reached on 03 9450 4700 or via email gpconsults@berrystreet.org.au

[See the video here.](#)

For further information or to arrange interviews, contact:

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ABOUT PHNs

Funded by the Commonwealth Department of Health, PHNs began operation on 1 July 2015 and are responsible for coordinating primary health care and facilitating improved health outcomes in their local community. Melbourne Primary Care Network operates the North Western Melbourne Primary Health Network.

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We acknowledge the peoples of the Kulin nation as the Traditional Custodians of the land on which our work in the community takes place. We pay our respects to their Elders past and present.

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