

Chief Executive Office



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Inquiry Secretariat
Inquiry into a better family law system
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Inquiry Secretariat,

Re: Submission to the Parliamentary inquiry into a better family law system to support and protect those affected by family violence

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the inquiry.

Item 1(b) of the inquiry's terms of reference notes that the inquiry will consider "the legal and non-legal support services required to support the early identification of and response to family violence."

Medibank believes that support services are essential to effectively identify and respond to family violence.

We operate the 1800RESPECT service, which provides telephone and online counselling services for sexual assault and domestic violence victims.

The 1800RESPECT service is managed by Medibank through a grant agreement with the Department of Social Services.

Medibank is proud to deliver the 1800RESPECT service.

We have delivered the service since its inception in 2010.

The 1800RESPECT service provides support to a large number of women and children, often in violent situations including when they may be fearing for their lives and that of their families.

1800RESPECT has seen a significant increase in the volume of calls in recent years, as a result of the growth in community awareness about the prevalence of family and domestic violence and sexual assault in Australia.

All calls and online chats at 1800RESPECT are handled by experienced and qualified counsellors with a minimum degree level qualification in a relevant field, as well as training in trauma and no less than two years full time counselling experience.

To meet the growing demand, the Federal Government added \$9 million of extra funding to 1800RESPECT, allowing Medibank to make important changes to the service in August 2016. These changes meant more people are getting the help they need when they need it.

1800RESPECT can now answer thousands more calls and the average wait time for a caller to speak to a counsellor has reduced from over 10 minutes to just over 50 seconds. Since the changes, 1800RESPECT has

answered over 43,000 calls and webchats, compared to just over 9,000 calls for the same period the previous year. During that time, for every 1,000 calls the service received 2 complaints and 1.4 compliments.

Any complaint about the 1800RESPECT service is of great concern to us. All complaints are investigated by senior clinicians and improvements made to ensure callers receive the best possible support available.

The changes introduced in August 2016 have resulted in significant, positive outcomes for the community: more callers getting through to a counsellor and getting through more quickly.

1800RESPECT includes access to specialist counselling services, which are provided by a subcontractor.

The current contract for the specialist counselling service ends in June. We are undertaking a process to determine the capacity and capability of those in the sector to deliver the specialist trauma counselling service as part of 1800RESPECT.

1800RESPECT is a vital service for the Australian community, providing a range of information, support and counselling services to tens of thousands of Australians each year.

We will be delighted to provide the inquiry with any additional information you may require about the 1800RESPECT service.

Medibank remains committed to ensuring the 1800RESPECT service delivers high quality counselling services for the Australian community.

Yours sincerely,

Craig Drummond
Chief Executive Officer