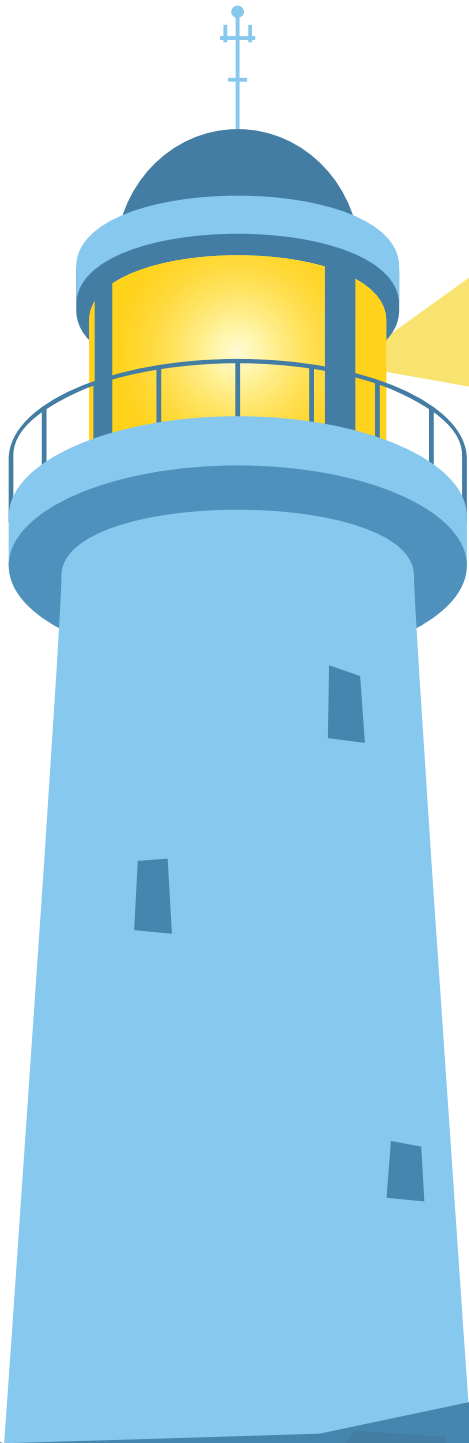


LIGHTHOUSE PROJECT



Guiding those experiencing
family violence and other
safety risks through the
family law system

WHAT IS THE LIGHTHOUSE PROJECT?

The Family Court of Australia and the Federal Circuit Court of Australia (the Courts) are leading the way in assisting families that have experienced family violence or other safety concerns to navigate the family law system.

Commencing in the Federal Circuit Court of Australia (FCC), the Lighthouse Project is an innovative approach to screen for risk, with a primary focus on improving outcomes for families involved in the family law system.

THE LIGHTHOUSE PROJECT INVOLVES:



Early risk screening through a secure online platform.



Early identification and management of safety concerns.



Assessment and triage of cases by a specialised team, who will provide resources and safe and suitable case management.



Referring high-risk cases to a dedicated court list, known as the Evatt List in the FCC.

The project forms part of the Courts' modernisation plan and has been assisted with funding from the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department. It will initially be piloted in the FCC in Adelaide, Brisbane and Parramatta to be extended to the Family Court of Australia in 2021 and the goal to secure additional funding for a national roll out.

FAMILY VIOLENCE IS A COMMUNITY CRISIS



**1 woman
per week**



**1 man per
month**



**1 child per
fortnight**

**are killed at the hands of an intimate
partner or family member every year**

Sources:

<https://lens.monash.edu/@politics-society/2020/03/18/1379841/coronavirus-fear-of-family-violence-spike-as-covid-19-impact-hits-households>

<https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/domestic-violence/family-domestic-sexual-violence-in-australia-2018/contents/table-of-contents>

61%
of women



**had children in
their care when the
violence occurred.**

Source: ANROWS - Violence Against Women: key statistics

1 in 3
(8,500)



**of the 21,400
hospitalisations for
assault injuries were
a result of family and
domestic violence**

Source: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports-data/behaviours-risk-factors/domestic-violence/about>

HOW DOES THE PILOT WORK?

1. Screening



When an Application or Response for parenting only orders is filed with the FCC, parties will be asked to complete a questionnaire via a confidential and secure online platform known as *Family DOORS Triage*. Developed specifically for the Courts, this can be completed safely and conveniently from any device including a PC, mobile or tablet.

Responses are confidential and are only used for risk screening and referral to health support, and to identify suitable case management to improve the safety and wellbeing for children and families.

2. Triage



Dedicated family counsellors will assess and direct cases into the most appropriate case management pathway, including online referrals to support services. Those cases needing greater support will be offered appointments with family counsellors to offer further referrals and safety measures.

3. Case Management



A highly skilled team, including registrars, family consultants and support staff with detailed knowledge in family violence and family safety risks will support the matter through the most appropriate case management pathway.

4. Evatt List



This specialist court list is designed to assist families that have been identified as being at high risk of family violence and other safety concerns. The Evatt List focuses on early information gathering and intervention, through a judge-led support team. The team has specialised training and is experienced in working with families where high risk safety issues have been identified.

FAMILY DOORS TRIAGE

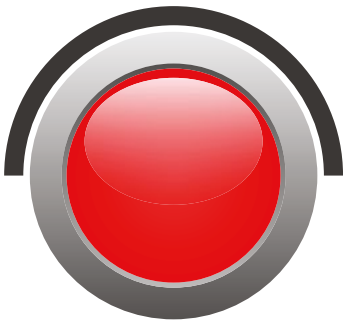


The *Family DOORS Triage* screening process has been specifically developed for use in the family law system. The process considers a range of safety risks that frequently arise in family law proceedings including family violence, mental health issues and drug or alcohol misuse.

A highly skilled team of family counsellors will review the risks raised to triage matters into high, medium and low risk case management pathways.

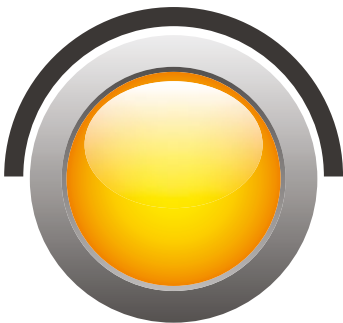
The screening of risk will enable the Court to provide tailored support for individual cases by targeted referrals to services and identifying the most appropriate case management pathway.

High Risk



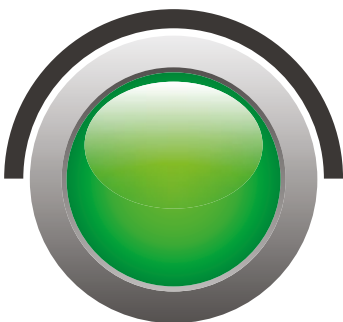
High risk cases will be referred for immediate action through a video conference, telephone, or as required, face-to-face appointment with a family counsellor. The family counsellor will provide a tailored, clinical follow up which includes a detailed risk assessment, safety and wellbeing plans, and service referrals. This entire process is confidential. The matter will also be referred to a Registrar for consideration to be placed on the Evatt List.

Medium Risk



Medium risk cases will be offered safety planning and service referrals as part of the secure online process. These cases will be considered for a range of case management pathways and directed to a suitable pathway based on the individual needs of the case.

Low Risk



Low risk cases may be targeted for court-ordered family dispute resolution, which provides an opportunity for the parties to resolve their dispute without having to go through the often costly and time-consuming process of court hearings.

HOW THE COURTS DEAL WITH ISSUES OF FAMILY VIOLENCE



Information sharing

Staff from police and child welfare agencies are located in many of the Courts' registries to facilitate the sharing of relevant information. Working with the Courts' registrars, the co-located agencies help to provide targeted documents in a timely way which greatly assists the Courts' ability to consider and assess family safety risks.



Electronic hearings

The Courts' capability of hearing matters electronically has multiple benefits for parties. Parties who may be concerned for their safety by physically attending court buildings, can seek to participate in their court appearance electronically, via telephone or through Microsoft Teams. The move to electronic or phone hearings will also increase access to justice by providing direct links to the Court for people living in regional or remote locations.



Harmonisation of Court rules

It is crucial that early identification of risk is consistent across both Courts. The Courts have agreed to use one form, called the *Notice of Child Abuse, Family Violence or Risk*. This simplifies the process for parties and allows the Courts to obtain more holistic information about multiple risk types such as mental health, substance misuse and parental incapacity. This new form will also assist judges in assessing risk and making orders in the best interests of the child.



Quick response to priority cases

Drawing on the success of the introduction of specialist lists to deal with urgent applications, like the National COVID-19 Lists (which successfully heard urgent family law disputes directly impacted by the pandemic within 72 hours), the Courts will launch an expanded national family law list to deal with certain priority cases.

YOU ASKED, WE ACTED

The Lighthouse Project is the Courts' response to calls for the family law system to better address and respond to family violence and other safety risks.

Recommendations for reforms of this kind have been made in successive reports including:

- Chisholm Report for the Attorney-General's Department (2009)
- Law Council Report on Families with Complex Needs (2015)
- Henderson Parliamentary Inquiry (2017), and
- Australian Law Reform Commission Discussion Paper – Review of the Family Law System (2018).

You Asked:

“The ALRC proposes that the Family Court consider establishing a registrar and family consultant team based process to direct matters to appropriate alternative dispute resolution processes and... should include specialist pathways for... high risk family violence matters”.

ALRC Discussion Paper 86, Review of the Family Law System, October 2018.

We Acted:

After the initial risk screening, a dedicated team will **triage cases according to their identified level of risk**. High risk matters will be resolved through a specialist list called the Evatt List. This is just in three registries. More broadly nationally we have trained and set up a national ADR and family dispute model to deal with dispute resolution.

You Asked:

“Initiate a standard screening, risk assessment and referral process nationally, to ensure public health, social and community services are trained to identify key safety risks early for people experiencing violence in their relationships, and able to refer them to the services that can help them achieve safety and recover.”

Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria, Statement to Women's Safety Ministers, March 2020.

We Acted:

The Lighthouse Project will allow early identification of risk and to triage matters to appropriate case management pathways. The Court has also introduced a harmonised Notice of child abuse, family violence and risk that supports early identification of risk.

**For more information about the
Lighthouse Project visit:**

www.familycourt.gov.au/lighthouse

www.federalcircuitcourt.gov.au/lighthouse

or contact us on:

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