

## Specialist Victims Support Service

### Fact sheet: What is the Specialist Victims Support Service?

If you are a victim/survivor who is going through the **forensic mental health system**, this fact sheet can help you understand:

- what is the Specialist Victims Support Service,
- who is eligible for support from our team,
- the types of support that we can provide, and
- how you can access our support if you are an eligible victim.

► **Note:** “Victim” includes family victim. Although we will be referring to you as a victim in this fact sheet, we (the Specialist Victims Support Service) will ask you for your preferred term (for example, client or survivor), which we will use in future.

► The **forensic mental health system** deals with people who:

- have a cognitive or mental health impairment, AND
- are charged with an offence, AND
- are found act proven but not criminally responsible or unfit to stand trial for that offence

#### We will protect your privacy

Our team understands that you may be concerned about people (like the forensic patient or the Tribunal) accessing your private information.

**No one** will have access the information you provide us without your consent.

## What is the Specialist Victims Support Service?

The Specialist Victims Support Service (**our team**) is a dedicated support service for victims who are going through the forensic mental health system (rather than the ordinary criminal justice system). Our team sits within Victims Services and acts on behalf of the Commissioner of Victims Rights. We are independent from the Mental Health Review Tribunal (**the Tribunal**).

We also maintain the Specialist Victims Register (**the Register**) on behalf of the Commissioner of Victims Rights. If you are listed on the Register and would like to be told certain information about the relevant forensic patient, we can notify you (for example, when a Tribunal hearing is coming up or if the Tribunal is considering granting leave to the forensic patient).

Our team provides support to two types of clients:

- **Specialist Victims Support Service clients**
- **Specialist Victims Register clients**

► You can be referred as a **Specialist Victims Support Service client** if:

- you are a victim (or family victim) of an **act of violence**, AND
- the act of violence is being or will be dealt with in the **District Court or the Supreme Court** (for example, manslaughter), AND
- the accused person has a **mental health impairment and/or cognitive impairment**, AND has been (or may be) dealt with by the Tribunal.

► You can become a **Specialist Victims Register client** if you are a:

- **victim** of an act of violence committed by a forensic patient who has been found **act proven but not criminally responsible** or **unfit to stand trial with a limiting term imposed**, or
- **family victim**, where the victim has died as a result of the act of violence, and
- a court has found the forensic patient **act proven but not criminally responsible** or **unfit to stand trial with a limiting term imposed**.

► For more information about the Register, see the *Specialist Victims Register* fact sheet.

## You are a family victim if the victim has died as a result of the act of violence and you are:

- the victim's spouse,
- the victim's de facto spouse, or same sex partner who has lived with the victim for at least two years,
- a parent, step-parent or guardian of the victim,
- a child or step-child of the victim, or other child that the victim was guardian of, or
- a brother, sister, half-brother, half-sister, step-brother or step-sister of the victim.

## What can the service help me with? Our team provides support in five key areas:

### Early intervention

Our team will work closely with the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (ODPP) Witness Assistance Service to ensure that clients understand what is happening when an accused person enters the forensic mental health system. This will include **explaining court and Tribunal processes** and supporting victims as the matter progresses from the court to the Tribunal.

### Crisis referral

When clients are referred for crisis support, our team can **provide immediate referrals** to relevant supports for assistance with temporary accommodation and other immediate needs. We will assess each client's needs and priorities to determine how we can best support the client.

### Planned support

We will work with clients to ensure that they are **supported in all aspects of their lives**, by conducting client assessments and referring clients to appropriate services such as **housing assistance, counselling and financial support**.

### Communication and education

In addition to helping clients understand court and Tribunal processes, our team will manage the Register. This will allow us to **communicate with you** and notify you about important changes regarding the forensic patient. For more information about the Register, see the *Specialist Victims Register* fact sheet.

### Tribunal process support

Our team can help clients communicate with the Tribunal, prepare submissions and update their victim impact statements so that they **have a say in the process**. We will also have a dedicated hearing room in Parramatta where clients can attend Tribunal hearings via videolink. A member of our team will explain what is happening during the hearing to ensure that victims are supported.

## How can I access support?

If you are an eligible victim going through the forensic mental health system, you can **refer yourself** by contacting our team and completing a self-referral form. An agency that you have been in contact with can also refer you to our service.

## I would like to be referred to your team – Who can refer me and when?

**Any agency** can refer you to our team, for example:

- The ODPP Witness Assistance Service
- District or Supreme Court
- NSW Police Force
- Victims advocacy groups

**An agency** can refer you to our team when:

- the accused pleads act proven but not criminally responsible, OR
- the court finds the accused unfit to stand trial, OR
- a special hearing is listed.

*Please feel welcome to contact our team at the Specialist Victims Support Service if you have any questions.*

**Phone:** Victims Access line 1800 633 063 | Aboriginal Contact Line 1800 019 123 | **Email:** svss@dcj.nsw.gov.au

**Post:** Locked Bag 5118, Parramatta NSW 2124 | **Web:** www.victimsservices.justice.nsw.gov.au

(VS REV 03/2021)