

**Media release: 22 November 2011**

## **Swear to make a difference**

Relationships Australia Victoria (RAV) has urged Victorian men to join this year's White Ribbon campaign and take the oath to stop violence against women: "I swear never to commit, excuse or remain silent about violence against women. This is my oath."

RAV CEO, Dr Andrew Bickerdike, said by making this simple but powerful pledge, men would be sending a strong message that violence was not acceptable and should not be tolerated under any circumstances.

RAV supports White Ribbon Day, 25 November, an annual event of the White Ribbon Foundation to engage men in the campaign to end violence against women.

Dr Bickerdike said that one in three women experienced physical violence in their lifetime, and one in five would experience sexual violence.

"Violence not only manifests as physical or sexual assault, but also as the exercise of power and control which may include direct or indirect threats, emotional and psychological abuse, economic control, property damage and social isolation.

"Sadly, women are at most risk of violence from people they know, and often within intimate relationships. Yet people often turn a blind eye to family violence where they would not tolerate an assault in a public place. The fact is, an assault in the home or in the street is the same thing."

Dr Bickerdike said that living with violence was like being on a roller coaster ride, causing confusion and anxiety and sometimes leading to reactions such as depression, medical disorders and drug and alcohol abuse. The impact on children was confusion, anger and fear.

He said RAV strongly encouraged people to act and offer to help those who might be in abusive relationships.

It was also important that men who have committed family violence take responsibility for their actions and make genuine attempts to change their behaviour.

"Changing behaviour is not simply a matter of 'turning over a new leaf'. Permanent change can occur when men are engaged in taking responsibility for their destructive behavioural patterns and making different choices."

RAV offers family violence prevention programs at its centres in Melbourne and regional Victoria, together with men's behaviour change groups. It also offers a range of services to support the safety of women and children in relationships where violence is present.

**Media enquiries:** Bronwyn Thwaites, 03 8573 2243; 0458 558 078