

## Key messages

- We can end violence against women by counteracting disrespectful attitudes and beliefs
- Violence against women starts with inequality and disrespect
- Primary prevention:
  - o addresses violence before it occurs
  - o focuses primarily on the gendered drivers of violence
  - o targets whole organisations, sectors and communities
  - o can promote safety and equality for people of all genders

## What is meant by primary prevention of violence against women?

Primary prevention is a public health approach that frames violence against women (VAW) within a whole-of-community lens. This lens empowers us to act on the social inequalities that reinforce VAW. The intent is to stop violence before it occurs, by acting in settings where we live, work and play<sup>1</sup>.

Primary prevention is integral to other types of prevention. For example, secondary prevention, which works with people or groups that are at-risk of violence and tertiary prevention, which works with victim-survivors, or perpetrators of violence. Primary prevention methods are unique in that they focus on addressing the societal attitudes, behaviours and beliefs that underpin VAW<sup>2</sup>.

## Why do we need primary prevention?

One third of Australian women experience violence by someone known to them and in 94% of cases, this is perpetrated by men<sup>3</sup>. Global research indicates strong links between dominant forms of masculinity and sexism with men's perpetration of VAW. The gendered patterns of this violence point to a national epidemic with its roots in the unequal distribution of power, resources and opportunities between men and women<sup>4</sup>.

Primary prevention strategies are aimed at reducing gender inequality and challenging the gendered drivers of violence. They counteract harmful attitudes, by questioning gender stereotypes and fostering healthier, more equal and respectful relationships in contexts like schools, homes and workplaces<sup>5</sup>. Primary prevention practice dismantles the core belief systems that give rise to violence in the Australian community and the outcomes of this can benefit all genders<sup>6</sup>.

## What are the 'gendered drivers of violence against women'?

Global research and a body of evidence by Australia's national primary prevention leader, Our Watch, has determined the four gendered practices that commonly underpin VAW:

- 1. Condoning of violence against women:** This refers to circumstances where violence is excused, downplayed, justified, denied or deflected through victim-blaming. If societies, institutions, or communities support or condone VAW, its incidence is significantly higher. An example of this could be attempts that are made to keep the incident quiet or tell victims that what they experienced 'wasn't that bad'<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Our Watch. (2021). Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women in Australia (2nd ed.). Retrieved from [ourwatch.org.au](http://ourwatch.org.au)

<sup>2</sup> Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria. (2022). Partners in prevention. Retrieved from [partnersinprevention.org.au](http://partnersinprevention.org.au)

<sup>3</sup> Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS). (2018). Violence against women: Accurate use of key statistics. Retrieved from [anrows.org.au](http://anrows.org.au)

<sup>4</sup> Our Watch. (2021). Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women in Australia (2nd ed.). Retrieved from [ourwatch.org.au](http://ourwatch.org.au)

<sup>5</sup> Our Watch. (2018). Challenging gender stereotypes in the early years: The power of parents. Retrieved from [www.ourwatch.org.au](http://www.ourwatch.org.au)

<sup>6</sup> VicHealth. (2020). Framing masculinity: Message guide. Retrieved from [vichealth.vic.gov.au](http://vichealth.vic.gov.au)

<sup>7</sup> Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria. (2022). Partners in prevention: Gendered Drivers Tipsheets. Retrieved from [partnersinprevention.org.au](http://partnersinprevention.org.au)

**2. Men's control of decision-making and limits to women's independence in public and private life:** At the individual level, this can include men controlling the social or financial choices of their partner. Public institutions or laws also perpetuate men's entitlement and ownership of women, by restricting their leadership and autonomy. Dominant community attitudes also feed the view that women are less capable, valuable, or worthy of respect. For example, a 2019 survey found that 24% of Australian respondents believed the need for leadership roles to be held equally by men and women is unnecessary<sup>8</sup>.

**3. Rigid gender stereotyping and dominant forms of masculinity:** This driver relates to the assumptions that men and women are naturally different in their interests, roles and capabilities. Violence is known to be more common in men that hold rigid views about manhood and masculinity. For example, a 2018 study found that 71% of male participants who held rigid stereotypes of what it means to be a 'real man', such as being the breadwinner or showing strength by hiding emotions, had perpetrated violence in the last month<sup>9</sup>.

**4. Male peer relations that emphasise aggression:** VAW is more likely to occur in circumstances where men form relationships or bond with one another through shared displays of dominant masculinity. This can involve social settings where hypersexualised, aggressive, dominant and controlling behaviours are underpinned by sexism and disrespect towards women. For example, taunting, whistling, telling sexist jokes in the sports locker room. A 2018 report highlighted that 34% of Australians held the belief that it is natural for a man to want to appear in control of his partner in front of his male friends<sup>10</sup>.

### What actions are considered primary prevention?

The 2021 edition of *Change the Story: A Shared Framework for the Primary Prevention of Violence Against Women in Australia* has outlined a comprehensive list of essential and supporting actions that are critical to primary prevention. For an initiative to adequately address the drivers of VAW, it must undertake one or more of the following:

#### Essential Actions

- 1 Challenge condoning of violence against women
- 2 Promote women's independence and decision-making in public life and relationships
- 3 Build new social norms that foster personal identities not constrained by rigid gender stereotypes
- 4 Support men and boys to develop healthy masculinities and positive, supportive male peer relationships
- 5 Promote and normalise gender equality in public and private life
- 6 Address the intersections between gender inequality and other forms of systemic and structural oppression and discrimination, and promote broader social justice
- 7 Build safe, fair and equitable organisations and institutions by focusing on policy and systems change
- 8 Strengthen positive, equal and respectful relations between and among women and men, girls and boys, in public and private spheres

<sup>8</sup> Australian Broadcasting Corporation and University of Melbourne. (2019). Australia Talks National Survey. Retrieved from abc.net.au

<sup>9</sup> The Men's Project & Flood, M. (2018). *The Man Box: A Study on Being a Young Man in Australia*. Jesuit Social Services: Melbourne.

<sup>10</sup> Webster, K., Diemer, K., Honey, N., Mannix, S., Mickle, J., Morgan, J., Parkes, A., Politoff, V., Powell, A., Stubbs, J., & Ward, A. (2018). *Australians' attitudes to violence against women and gender equality. Findings from the 2017 National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey (NCAS)* (Research report, 03/2018). Sydney, NSW: ANROWS.

## Supporting actions

- 9 Challenge the normalisation of violence and aggression as an expression of masculinity
- 10 Reduce the long-term impacts of exposure to violence, and prevent further exposure
- 11 Strengthen pro-social behaviour
- 12 Plan for and actively address backlash and resistance

## Where should we focus these actions?

Primary prevention actions can occur in diverse settings and ideally target all levels of the socio-ecological model<sup>11</sup>. According to this model, social or cultural norms can perpetuate harmful behaviours at multiple levels:

- **individuals**
- **in interpersonal relationships**
- **in communities and organisations**
- **in systems and institutions**

Based on this, prevention strategies need to address all socioecological levels to be effective. Targeted actions can also occur in specific settings or sectors:

## Current settings for primary prevention

- **Early childhood education and care and primary and secondary education** (early childhood education and care and early childhood services, primary and secondary schools and alternative education settings)
- **Tertiary education** including universities, TAFEs and vocational education and training organisations (academic, vocational and training environments)
- **Workplaces, corporations and employee organisations** (industry bodies, employers and employer networks, unions, employment agencies, public and private sector workplaces)
- **Sports clubs and institutions** (local and regional clubs, professional institutions, state and national professional sporting organisations)
- **Media** (industries and organisations that deliver media in all its forms – print, television, podcasts, digital and radio and includes both traditional and alternative media outlets)

## Additional settings that require further primary prevention focus

- **Public communications** (internet, digital and social media, popular culture, advertising and entertainment, including the variety of industries, mediums and corporations that contribute to popular culture and shape consumer choices and behaviour)
- **Arts and creative industries** (visual and performing arts, film, literature, designers and game developers, as well as community networks and professional organisations across the creative industries)
- **Human services sectors** (social, community and family, residential aged care and disability care services, healthcare services, including mental health and allied health and wellbeing services)
- **Leisure and recreation** (public and private facilities, spaces and transport)
- **Faith-based contexts** (organisations, networks and associations that are brought together on the basis of faith, religion or belief)
- **Legal and justice sectors** (youth justice, corrections, police, courts and legal services)

<sup>11</sup>Our Watch. (2017). Putting prevention into practice: How to change the story. Retrieved from ourwatch.org.au

## What types of actions can we take?

Primary prevention actions and methods are diverse. Strategies can include:

- **Direct participation programs** (involves individuals and groups of people learning skills and connecting with others to build more healthy, equal and respectful relationships)
- **Organisational development** (involves change within an organisation, its people, culture, systems and structures to improve equality and respect amongst genders)
- **Community mobilisation** (involves people and groups community together in numbers to shift the social norms that underpin VAW and increase equal access to resources and access to violence prevention opportunities)
- **Communications and social marketing campaigns** (involves raising awareness of VAW and challenging harmful attitudes via diverse channels, including: television, radio, print, online/digital, social media, cinema, outdoor media, billboards, community engagement and events)

## Primary Prevention in Action

**1** **The Good People Act Now Project** was established in 2014 in response to the high rates of family violence incidences in Hume. Since 2014, GPAN has trained hundreds of young people to be gender equity champions and active bystanders in their communities. GPAN are a youth-led community group in Broadmeadows, Victoria that promotes its messages through community campaigns, local events, sporting clubs and schools in a variety of ways, including live performance, info sessions, movie making and social media. Check out <https://www.goodpeopleact-now.org.au/>

**3** **The Active Dads Project** in Moreland is a partnership between Kildonan UnitingCare, Merri Health and Moreland Council. The project's objectives are to increase the skills, confidence and levels of active engagement between maternal and child health nurses and fathers and to increase new parents' capacity to maintain a positive relationship and effectively deal with challenges during the transition to parenthood. Check out <https://archive.moreland.vic.gov.au/globalassets/key-docs/policy-strategy-plan/preventing-family-violence-in-moreland-strategy---2016-2020.doc>

**5** **Darebin City Council** has **Levelling the Playing Field**, which focuses on increasing participation in sport and recreation for women and girls. Local government plays a vital role in addressing the gendered drivers of violence against women. Check out <https://www.darebin.vic.gov.au/Recreation-and-events/Libraries-and-leisure-facilities/Sport-and-leisure/Get-active-in-Darebin/Women-in-sport>

**2** **Equality@Work** is a partnership project between the Multicultural Centre for Women's Health (MCWH) and Mercy Health. It is the first workplace prevention program in Australia to address gender inequality and other intersecting forms of inequality which make immigrant and refugee women particularly vulnerable to family violence and other forms of violence against women. The project is funded through the Victorian Government's Free from violence Strategy. Check out <https://www.mcwh.com.au/project/equalitywor>

**4** In Alice Springs, the **Mums Can, Dads Can** Project is a family, domestic and sexual violence primary prevention pilot project being developed by Town Camp community members. It aims to challenge rigid gender stereotypes regarding the roles of men and women in regards to parenting. Check out **Mums Can, Dads Can | Tangentyere Family Violence Prevention Program** ([tangfamilyviolenceprevention.com.au](http://tangfamilyviolenceprevention.com.au))

**6** **The Communities of Respect & Equality (CORE)** project aims to inspire and connect community leaders, sectors, service organisations and government to work together on sustainable strategies for the primary prevention of family violence in Geraldton. Check out <https://communityrespectandequality.com.au/>