

Report 1



September 2020

National primary prevention report



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Executive Summary

Violence against women is not inevitable but is preventable. By addressing the underlying drivers of this violence at all levels of society, primary prevention approaches contribute to the long-term social transformation that is needed to make a future where women and their children are free from violence a reality.

Australia has made significant gains in commitment from governments, civil society and private sector to prevent violence against women. A national approach to this issue is emerging, with key achievements in the past decade advancing this work. However, gaps remain and there are many opportunities to build on the foundations of existing work to create sustainable change to the underlying drivers of gender-based violence.

Like many other crises, COVID-19 is having specific and disproportionate health, social and economic impacts on women. The pandemic has shone a light on and amplified existing inequalities which drive gender-based violence, further reinforcing the need for continued commitment to this goal. Actions and reform aimed at preventing violence against women will be crucial to the crisis recovery period in Australia, to ensure that we both sustain the gains made in the past decade and continue to make progress towards the aims of ending violence against women and their children. Additionally, prevention efforts have needed to adapt to the environment in which they are being designed and implemented; and can continue to be responsive to this changing context.

The National Primary Prevention Hub (the Hub), funded by the Commonwealth Government under the Fourth Action Plan (2019-22) of the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children*, will guide and lead primary prevention efforts, including to better coordinate and consolidate; share evidence, expertise and learning; and facilitate collaboration in policy and practice across jurisdictions and the violence against women sector.

One of the Hub's activity streams is the development of national primary prevention reports to provide information about primary prevention nationally including themes, activities, gaps and opportunities. This first report provides information about primary prevention under two themes:

- Primary prevention Australia – taking stock of the current state of prevention in Australia including policy context, the prevention workforce, and an overview of prevention activity across the country
- COVID-19 and primary prevention of violence against women – providing information about the considerations for and examples of how prevention work has been/is being adapted in the COVID context

Key points

Primary prevention in Australia

- Australia's prevention workforce is emerging. Capacity to design and implement primary prevention activities across the country is critical for progress. To address the current gaps, there is an important opportunity for governments to plan for and invest in supporting the growth and sustainability of a prevention workforce.
- Effective national prevention approaches work at all levels of society. To progress Australia's efforts, it will be critical to build on the significant work happening with individuals and communities by implementing approaches to create change at the institutional and system level.
- Coordinating primary prevention actions at the national, state/territory and local levels can create a mutually reinforcing effect. This will amplify our prevention efforts by increasing the reach and impact of work to address the underlying drivers of violence against women.

COVID-19 and primary prevention of violence against women

- Given the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, it is more important than ever that primary prevention of violence against women remains a core priority and all stakeholders continue to contribute to this long-term goal. In parallel, it is crucial for the increasing incidence of this violence during the pandemic to be addressed.
- Changes to prevention activities will likely be necessary to adapt to the COVID context. This might include practical considerations such as flexibility in funding models and contracting, as well as adapting activities (informed by research and data) to respond to gender inequalities in the changing environment.
- Prevention activities engage people across the many settings where we live, work, learn, socialise and play. When planning, designing and implementing prevention activities during the pandemic, it will be important to consider the nature of the disruption in these different settings as well as the challenges and opportunities at hand.

An introduction to primary prevention of violence against women

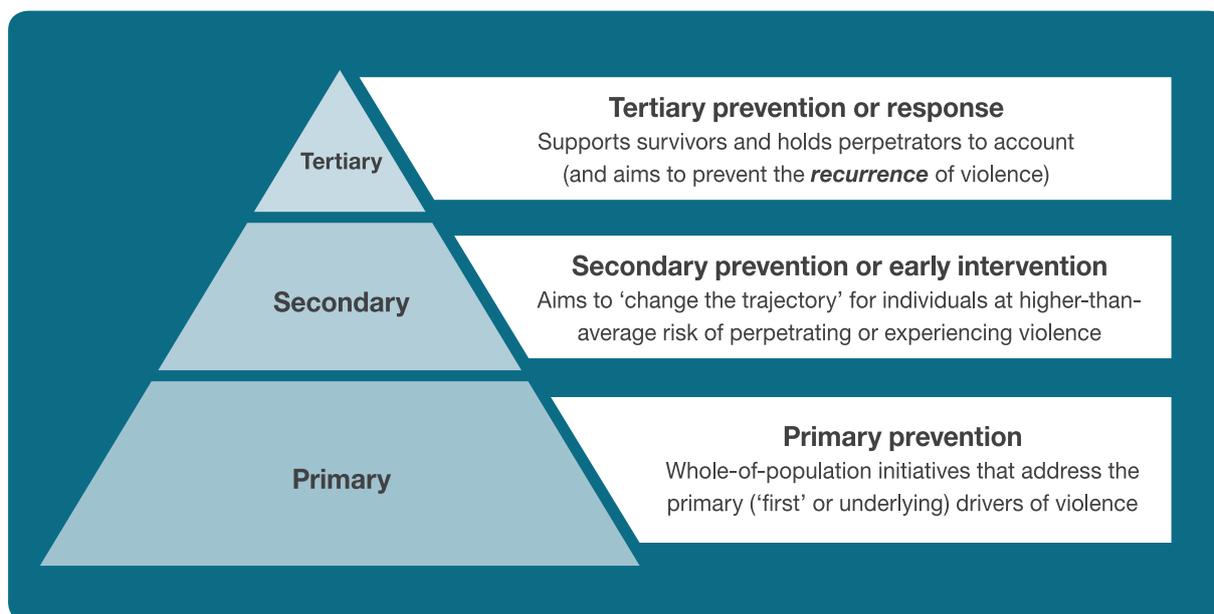
Violence against women takes many forms, including physical, sexual and psychological violence. As the *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women* (1993) sets out, they are rooted in, and are a contemporary manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women. Prevention efforts are underpinned by an understanding that the many forms of gender-based violence are interrelated, exist on a continuum and share many of the same drivers.

Earlier this year, in a report on the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the UN Secretary General reiterated that “decisive and coordinated action is needed to counter and prevent violence, harassment and the abuse of women human rights defenders”.¹ The Secretary General wrote:

“The need to prevent violence against women by addressing its root causes and risk factors is widely recognised. Prevention should, however, be pursued in synergy with adequate response services and functioning justice system. Prevention requires interventions at different levels – individual, relationship, community and society – to transform unequal gendered power relations and address gender inequality, including intersectional discrimination, as well as risk factors. No single intervention will end violence against women; combined, long-term strategies are more likely to be successful”²

Primary prevention aims to stop violence against women from occurring in the first place. It works to change the deep-seated gendered drivers of this violence, and the underlying social condition of gender inequality in which it arises. While response and early intervention approaches work with individuals who are already experiencing or perpetrating violence (or at risk of doing so), primary prevention is a whole-of-population approach that aims to deliver a future where all women and their children live free from violence.

Figure 1 The relationship between primary prevention and other work to address violence against women



Source: Our Watch, Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) and VicHealth (2015) *Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia*, Our Watch, Melbourne, Australia.

Primary prevention, early intervention and response are inextricably linked – and mutually reinforcing. For primary prevention to be effective, a well-resourced and well-functioning response and early intervention sector is needed, and conversely, to decrease demand on response services in the long-term, it is important to resource the kind of primary prevention strategies that will reduce the prevalence of violence.

Many organisations working to address violence against women may take a holistic approach and work across the whole spectrum of activity (primary prevention, early intervention and response), in order to meet the needs of their local communities.

Australia's shared prevention framework

Australia's shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children, *Change the story*, identifies gender inequality as setting the necessary social context in which violence against women occurs.³ The framework demonstrates that there are particular expressions or manifestations of gender inequality that are most consistently associated with higher levels of violence against women.

The gendered drivers of violence against women outlined in the framework are:

- Condoning of violence against women
- Men's control of decision-making and limits to women's independence in public life and relationships
- Rigid gender roles and stereotyped constructions of masculinity and femininity
- Male peer relations that emphasise aggression and disrespect towards women

Addressing these underlying drivers of violence against women is the hallmark of a primary prevention approach. *Change the story* sets out five essential actions that comprise such an approach. These are:

- Challenge condoning of violence against women
- Promote women’s independence and decision-making in public life and relationships
- Foster positive personal identities and challenge gender stereotypes and roles
- Strengthen positive, equal and respectful relations between and among women and men, girls and boys
- Promote and normalise gender equality in public and private life

Change the story also demonstrates that is crucial for a national approach to prevention to be multi-faceted and sustained, involving:

- multiple techniques in different settings (such as workplaces, schools, and sporting clubs);
- working across the life course; and
- supported by complementary strategies including public policy and legislation to make sustained changes to the underlying drivers of violence.

Single primary prevention programs and techniques (for example, direct participation programs, organisational development, and communications and social marketing) may have a positive impact but this is primarily limited to participants, and is likely to lessen over time if the message is not reinforced in other areas of those participants’ lives, and by other interventions and actions at other levels of society. Coordination can support a multi-faceted and mutually reinforcing approach that maximises the impact of distinct programs and techniques.

An intersectional approach to primary prevention

Change the story shows that, while gender inequality is always influential as a driver of violence against women, it cannot be considered in isolation, nor is it experienced in the same way by every woman. Other forms of systemic social, political and economic inequality, discrimination and disadvantage influence and intersect with gender inequality in complex ways, and at all levels of the social ecology and should also be considered and addressed in order to prevent violence against women. In some cases, they can increase the frequency, severity and prevalence of violence against women.

This means gender inequality needs to be considered and addressed alongside and together with a range of other factors that may be significant in some cases, such as racism, homophobia, the impacts of colonisation and ableism.

Australian resources that can support an intersectional approach to primary prevention include:

- *Changing the picture: A national resource to support the prevention of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their children*⁴
- *Hopeful, Together, Strong: Principles of good practice to prevent violence against women in the Northern Territory*⁵
- *Intersectionality Matters: A guide to engaging immigrant and refugee communities to prevent violence against women*⁶
- *Inclusive planning guidelines for the prevention of violence against women with disabilities*⁷
- *Preventing elder abuse*⁸
- *Pride in Prevention: A guide to primary prevention of family violence experienced by LGBTIQ communities*⁹

Primary prevention in Australia

Overview

In the past decade, Australia has taken positive steps to establishing a world-leading approach to the primary prevention of violence against women. This section provides an overview of some of the key elements of activity currently being undertaken across the country, including:

- A policy context with increasing focus on primary prevention approaches as part of efforts to address violence against women, alongside early intervention and response efforts;
- The emerging specialist prevention workforce, in addition to a broad range of professionals who contribute to prevention activity by developing, leading, implementing and/or contributing to efforts to address the drivers of violence in a diversity of settings, organisations and systems;
- Examples of prevention activities being developed and implemented across a broad range of settings and utilising a variety of approaches. This is not a comprehensive account of prevention activity in Australia, instead its aim is to provide a snapshot of prevention work currently underway in Australia; and
- Mechanisms in place to coordinate primary prevention and gender equality actions.

To build on these foundations, there is a need for investment to grow and sustain the prevention workforce, supporting a mutually reinforcing approach across different settings, and improving coordination mechanisms to support holistic and more effective efforts across the country.

Policy context

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) established the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women* (the National Plan) in 2010 to bring together the efforts of government across the nation to make a real and sustained reduction in the levels of violence against women. Primary prevention is a key focus of the National Plan and its four action plans, in recognition of the need to look to the long term, build respectful relationships and work to increase gender equality to prevent violence from occurring in the first place. This focus has been crucial to driving national commitment and action on primary prevention.

Since the introduction of the National Plan, almost all states and territories have included a focus on or mention of primary prevention within a relevant policy or strategy. Most state and territory government policies on violence against women, domestic and family violence, and sexual violence identify primary prevention as a priority and refer to *Change the story: A shared framework to prevent violence against women and their children*, take a gendered approach and refer to the gendered drivers of violence against women.

Leading international approaches including the *RESPECT Women: Preventing violence against women* framework¹⁰ and international human rights instruments and discourses also provide an important policy context for Australian prevention work.

Prevention workforce

Innovative and impactful primary prevention work being undertaken across Australia by a multidisciplinary workforce is increasing. The diversity of the workforce developing, leading and contributing to prevention work, as well as the settings in which they work, is a significant strength. The many forms of violence against women and its complexities necessitates that the delivery of primary prevention work is delivered across many settings by a diverse workforce with expertise across a range of approaches and prevention techniques.

Due to the nature of the workforce, it can be difficult to accurately identify and quantify it. Further contributing factors to this issue include:

- Professionals undertaking primary prevention activities come from a range of backgrounds.
- The relatively recent recognition of primary prevention work as separate from other forms of work undertaken by the violence against women sector. While primary prevention work in Australia is world-leading, it is still a new and developing discipline in comparison to tertiary response services and workforces.
- Primary prevention activities are part of a spectrum of interlinked work that includes early intervention and tertiary response. While demarking clear boundaries between these types of work and the workforce that undertake them often doesn't make sense, there is a need for a shared understanding of the nuanced differences between different types of activities and approaches.
- The development and delivery of primary prevention work at community level often occurs as a small part of an individual's workload or an organisation's program and service delivery.
- A significant portion of primary prevention work is delivered by professionals who do not necessarily identify as prevention workers, for example: teachers and early childhood educators delivering respectful relationships education, or human resources professionals undertaking gender equality work across their organisation

Despite this, it is clear, as confirmed by a stakeholder survey and in-depth stakeholder consultations undertaken by Our Watch, that there is a relatively small cohort of primary prevention specialists across Australia (that is, those professionals whose substantive role and expertise is primary prevention). Those who do make up this relatively small cohort tend to have backgrounds in family violence and violence against women response services, health or social policy roles.¹¹

These specialists are not evenly distributed across all of Australia's state and territory jurisdictions. As has been regularly observed, there are more primary prevention specialists in Victoria than other states and territories. There are a number of reasons for this including a longer history of focusing on primary prevention as a specific approach and discipline than other jurisdictions. For example, VicHealth undertook early foundational work that led to increased engagement with, and funding for, primary prevention activities in Victoria.¹² This has resulted in primary prevention having a higher profile in Victoria and continuing to attract more support within organisations in the violence against women sector as well as other organisations who have incorporated aspects of this work.

Primary prevention specialists in other states and territories are less likely than their Victorian colleagues to work exclusively on primary prevention. They tend to deliver primary prevention initiatives while also undertaking other forms of work, including early intervention and tertiary response to violence against women as well as other forms of social and community work.

As mentioned above, there are many primary prevention activities that are delivered by workers who may use prevention tools, resources and approaches in their role, but not primarily identify with the prevention workforce. There is significant diversity in this cohort, and many may not identify the work that they are undertaking to be primary prevention, but their work contributes to addressing the drivers of violence against women. These are people with expertise and substantive roles in various sectors and who undertake some prevention activities as part of their role. This includes (but is not limited to) maternal and child health nurses, human resource teams, public servants, sports administrators, journalists, teachers and early childhood educators. These professionals are critical to extending the reach of primary prevention into a range of settings throughout the Australian community.

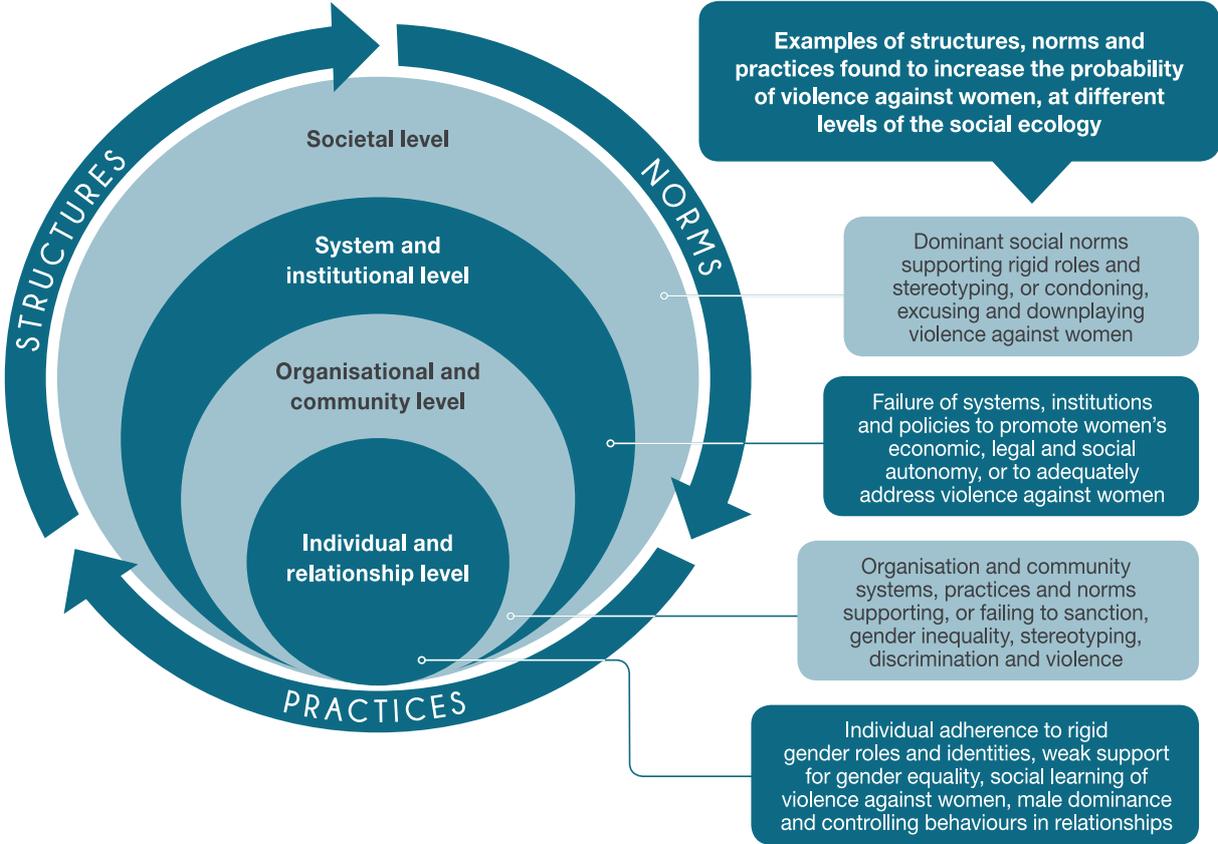
Additionally, a significant portion of primary prevention activity is undertaken by volunteers. For example, grassroots community-led activity and advocacy to all levels of government, for example submissions to inquiries and consultation processes. This report provides an overview of the primary prevention workforce in Australia, noting the complexities in providing a more definitive and quantitative account of the workforce undertaking primary prevention work.

While there are positive foundations, Australia has yet to develop the national workforce it needs to implement primary prevention activities ‘on the ground’ at the scale that is required for this work to be effective at population level. There are opportunities to grow and better sustain this workforce to lead and contribute to efforts across the country. Work being done under the Fourth Action Plan to map the workforce in more detail through a national workforce development project and connect practitioners through the National Primary Prevention Hub will contribute to this.

Australian prevention activity

As outlined above in the discussion of the primary prevention workforce, there is significant diversity in work across Australia to address the underlying drivers of violence against women. Primary prevention work occurs across all levels of the community including local, regional, state and national. It is delivered across the socio-ecological model, from programs that work with individuals and communities, through to system reform and advocacy that works at the institutional and societal level. The common thread amongst this diversity of settings and approaches is the aim of addressing, and changing, gender inequality and the underlying gendered drivers that we know cause violence against women. The publication of *Change the story* in 2015 enabled primary prevention activities to be understood and delivered in relation to a shared framework.

Figure 2 Socio-ecological model of violence against women



Source: Our Watch, Australia’s National Research Organisation for Women’s Safety (ANROWS) and VicHealth (2015) *Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia*, Our Watch, Melbourne, Australia.

In the following sections, we outline examples of activities occurring across different settings that use a variety of approaches. This is not a comprehensive account of prevention activity in Australia, instead its aim is to provide a snapshot of prevention work currently underway in Australia.

Health and community organisations

Women’s health and community organisations, as well as specialist violence against women response services, were critical in the development of much of the early primary prevention work in Australia. These organisations continue to be central for the development and delivery of prevention work. This work often includes community development and education and training. For example, Women’s Health Queensland facilitate the Equal and Together Alliance which is a partnership of organisations, businesses, clubs and networks that are working across Queensland to build respect and equity within their workplaces and communities.¹³ They also deliver training for professionals and organisations that range from introductions to gender equality and gendered violence through to designing a community based prevention program or strategy.¹⁴ Work by community organisations also often focuses on women’s leadership programs, such Women with Disabilities Victoria’s Enabling Women Leadership program.¹⁵ Women with Disabilities Victoria have also developed the Our Right to Safety resource.¹⁶ This resource aims to increase women with disabilities access to safe, useful and good practice information about their right to safety and respect that builds their confidence, knowledge and actions to identify and seek support if they experience violence and abuse.

Specialist services that respond to violence against women often collaborate with other organisations in their area to deliver prevention work that is localised and tailored to their context. For example, in Victoria EDVOS has undertaken the Thriving in the Valley Project. EDVOS, together with Department of Education and Training, Eastern Health, Inspiro and Yarra Ranges Council are working with the community in Upper Yarra to improve gender equality.¹⁷

Prevention in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities

Our Watch's *Changing the picture: A national resource to support the prevention of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their children* makes clear the extensive knowledge and experience that Aboriginal communities hold in relation to work towards the prevention of violence against women.¹⁸ Communities and Aboriginal-controlled organisations have led this work by developing and delivering initiatives across the response, early intervention and prevention spectrum that meet the needs of their communities, often with very limited resources. There is significant prevention work currently underway in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across the country. *Changing the picture* includes case studies of community prevention work and advocacy campaigns happening across the country.

At the community level, organisations such as Western Australia's Aboriginal Family Law Services (AFLS)¹⁹ and the Healing Foundation²⁰ work with communities to address and prevent family violence. The AFLS are members of the National Family Violence Prevention and Legal Services Forum (National FVPLS Forum), which was established in 2012.²¹ It is comprised of thirteen Family Violence Prevention Legal Service member organisations across Australia that provide holistic, specialist, culturally safe legal and non-legal supports to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experiencing or at risk of family violence – predominantly women and their children. The National FVPLS Forum connects the critical programs that members such as the AFLS deliver in their communities to a broader coordination and policy advocacy mechanism.

The Healing Foundation run a number of men's healing programs that take a holistic approach and focus on cultural, educational and therapeutic healing activities.²² They assist men to increase confidence and capacity to gain meaningful employment, and overcome issues such as family and domestic violence, incarceration, and poor health and wellbeing.

At the systems level, the Family Matters campaign, led by a coalition of organisations, aims to reduce the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out of home care.²³ Family violence is the primary reason that children are removed from families. The campaign details the policy and practice changes needed to secure improved safety and well-being outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. The campaign takes an evidence informed, strength-based, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led approach to the challenges facing communities.

Education settings

Education settings have been a key site for the delivery of primary prevention activities for some time, and interest in this area of work continues to grow. The delivery of best practice, well-resourced respectful relationships education in schools was one of the earliest areas that provided a robust evidence base for the efficacy of initiatives aimed at reducing gender-based violence.²⁴ In its early years, respectful relationships education in Australia tended to be delivered by women's and community organisations into schools, or by teachers who identified a need for such an approach in their school community. Over the last five to ten years, however, it has increasingly been taken up by education departments in state and territory jurisdictions. Taking a whole-of-school approach to respectful relationships education in schools and ensuring that the gendered drivers of violence are clearly addressed are central aspects of the model's success. A whole-of-school approach means providing students with multiple exposure to key messages across the curriculum and in different areas of the school and community and is more likely to result in sustained changes at the individual level. It involves engaging not just students, but school staff and the wider school community in the process of cultural change to shift the gendered norms, structures and practices that lead to violence against women.²⁵

Universities, as education institutions, workplaces and community hubs, are well placed to play a key role in preventing violence against women. University students have advocated for and led prevention efforts. For example, Flinders University Student Association developed a suite of resources as part of their Be A Better Human campaign to respond to and prevent gendered violence on campuses.²⁶ The resources are aimed at students and range across topics such as consent to bystander actions.

The whole school approach in school settings has also helped in providing a whole-of-institution model that can be used in other education settings. The Australian Human Rights Commission's 2017 report on sexual assault and sexual harassment at Australian universities, *Change the course*, made recommendations to support prevention work including on shifting deeply held norms and attitudes about women, their role in society and relationships between men and women.²⁷ The Commission recommended that education programs and communications to address the drivers of sexual assault and sexual harassment in universities target all levels of the organisation and be based on best practice and research.

A whole-of-institution approach has been taken in recent projects in higher education, notably the Respect and Equality in Universities work that Our Watch has partnered with Universities Australia and the Victorian Government to deliver. This approach to the prevention of gendered violence on Australian university campuses has been supported by developments such as the publication by the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) of a guidance note on preventing and responding to sexual assault and harassment in higher education settings.²⁸ As the regulator of Australian Universities, TESQA is critically placed to drive cultural change through the dissemination of this guidance.

Universities also have a long history of delivering gender equality work. Over recent years, the introduction of Science in Australia Gender Equality (SAGE) ATHENA Swan initiative in Australian Universities has had a significant impact.²⁹ ATHENA Swan aims to improve the representation and profile of women in sciences, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). It aims to achieve meaningful systemic and cultural change within organisations by using a proven national accreditation framework.

To date there has not been a significant amount of primary prevention work undertaken in the TAFE or Vocational Education and Training (VET) settings but there is increasing interest in their application in this area of the education sector. For example, a whole-of-institution approach to violence prevention in TAFEs is also currently being developed by Our Watch in partnership with the Victorian Government.

Engaging men and boys in primary prevention work

There has been an increasing focus in recent years on the need to engage men and boys in primary prevention work. There is momentum to build upon existing skills in engaging men and boys in primary prevention from policy and research settings through to local communities across Australia.

There have been several recent key developments in evidence and the release of guiding documents to provide a scaffold for this work over coming years. In late 2019 Our Watch released its *Men in focus* evidence review.³⁰ It provides an evidence base for taking an intersectional approach to working with men and boys to address the gendered drivers that lead to violence against women. This resource also provides best practice principles and encourages work along the socio-ecological spectrum in order to address the structures that reinforce dominant masculinity and gender inequality. In June 2020 VicHealth released their *Masculinities and Health Framework*.³¹ The Framework was developed in collaboration with Jesuit Social Services (JSS), who have been critical in this area by developing the evidence base through their Man Box study.³² A significant focus of this Framework is the promotion of gender equality, as well as encouraging healthier masculinities to improve men's health and wellbeing.

Recent grant rounds have supported the increasing focus on work to engage men and boys in prevention work. Following the release of their Framework, VicHealth have funded a number of programs as part of their Healthier Masculinities Partnership Grants.³³ These programs use the VicHealth *Masculinities and Health Framework* and are administered by local councils in Victoria.³⁴ In late 2019, as part of the Fourth Action Plan for the National Plan, the Australian Government Department of Social Services funded a round of grants focused on men as role models for preventing violence against women and their children.³⁵ Recipients included community based organisations undertaking a range of prevention activities in multiple jurisdictions.

As these examples demonstrate, it is anticipated that primary prevention focused work on masculinities and engaging men and boys will continue to gain momentum over coming years as work in this area progresses at the evidence and policy level as well as within communities.

Sports settings

Embedding gender equality and respectful relationships into sporting organisations, networks and communities is a key area of primary prevention work in Australia. Sport settings are popular social institutions, and as with other social institutions people learn and reproduce particular attitudes, behaviours and social norms in these settings. Sports settings therefore present an important opportunity to reach large groups and communities, and to help to reduce inequalities in our society.³⁶ There is a significant body of research examining the explicit links between sport and dominant norms of masculinity and highlighting the specific links between sport and violence against women.³⁷

Primary prevention activities in sporting settings take many different approaches. They include initiatives such as stand-down regulations by major national codes such as the National Rugby League (NRL).³⁸ The NRL no-fault stand-down regulations mean that players facing serious criminal charges cannot play until the conclusion of criminal processes. These regulations were introduced in response to players being charged with committing violence against women and inconsistent treatment of those players by NRL clubs.

Prevention activities in sport settings also work at the grassroots, community level. Two such examples include the NO MORE campaign³⁹ and GoActive.⁴⁰ NO MORE, started in 2006 by Charlie King, engages with sport as a way of encouraging men to take responsibility for family violence. Clubs who participate with the NO MORE Campaign develop a domestic violence action plan that is tailored to their organisation and the community in which it is located. GoActive, an initiative led by the Lebanese Muslim Association, is a health and fitness initiative enabling young women to participate in sport and recreation. The initiative works with young women, specifically focusing on Muslim women and socially disadvantaged women from across Western and South Western Sydney. The program's objectives include fostering community harmony and cross-cultural relationships through sporting initiatives in an inclusive environment; and empowering women through sports leadership and training.

Media

The media landscape is a critical site for challenging social norms relating to gendered violence and gender equality.⁴¹ Primary prevention with the media industry includes activities to improve the reporting of violence against women and help address the condoning of this violence, and to address gender inequality, gender stereotypes and disrespect towards women through media content and in media workplaces. The Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) is currently implementing the 50:50 project.⁴² The project has two main aspects:

- To increase the development of content that is relevant and interesting to women in order to better represent women's experiences and perspectives.
- To increase the representation of women as expert commentators and contributors across the ABC's programming.

Guidelines for reporting on violence against women, such as those developed by Our Watch⁴³ and the Australian Press Council,⁴⁴ support industry action by providing accessible and tailored resources that journalists can draw on in their daily work in fast paced environments. Our Watch's *Media Making Change* website⁴⁵ collates a range of resources to enable journalists to contribute to changing the culture and attitudes that drive violence against women.

Workplaces and employment

Workplaces are a key setting for the primary prevention of violence against women, as they provide a significant opportunity to reach large populations. Activities that influence aspects of organisational culture, work environment and practices, have strong potential to shape social norms and relationships. This means employers have a key role to play.

Gender equality and prevention of violence against women activity is often undertaken 'in-house', for example by HR and diversity and inclusion staff. This activity is also supported by non-government organisations and trade unions through the development of resources, provision of advice and guidance, and delivery of training. A range of organisations have developed guidance to support this work, including Our Watch's *Workplace Equality and Respect Standards*.⁴⁶ Agencies such as the Workplace Gender Equality Agency have contributed to national monitoring of the gender pay gap and promotion of good-practice workplace initiatives.

Building on recent work and attention on the issue of sexual harassment in the workplace, including the Sex Discrimination Commission's national inquiry,⁴⁷ the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission has released a guideline on preventing and responding to workplace sexual harassment.⁴⁸ The guideline is accompanied by resources including a gender equality framework. Male Champions of Change also recently released a resource on this topic to guide more effective organisational approaches to preventing sexual harassment in the workplace.⁴⁹

Communications and social marketing

National communications and social marketing strategies are an important way to address and prevent violence against women, when combined with other techniques in a multi-faceted approach. There are many campaigns in Australia that work across the spectrum of violence against women (primary prevention, early intervention and response). These include campaigns that:

- support help-seeking for women experiencing violence or men perpetrating violence (such as the *Help is Here*,⁵⁰ *Speak Out*,⁵¹ and *Break the Cycle*⁵² campaigns launched during the COVID 19 pandemic);
- raise awareness about violence against women and support positive behaviour change (such as the *Make No Doubt*⁵³ and *No Excuse for Abuse*⁵⁴ campaigns);
- aim to break the cycle of violence by encouraging adults to reflect on their attitudes and have conversations about respect with young people (such as the Australian Government's *Stop it at the Start*)⁵⁵
- promote bystander actions (such as the *Doing Nothing Does Harm*⁵⁶ and *Respect Women: Call it Out*⁵⁷ campaigns);
- challenge gender stereotypes (such as the *This Girl Can*⁵⁸ campaign);
- promote gender equality and the sharing of domestic and caring responsibilities, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic through the *Championing Gender Equality at Home* campaign;⁵⁹ and
- support women's rights and promote gender equality (such as the *Free to Be*⁶⁰ campaign).

Coordinating primary prevention

Change the story identifies that mechanisms are needed to enable coordination and collaboration across jurisdictions, sectors and settings, and to promote consistency between legislative and policy reforms, programs, communications campaigns and other prevention efforts.⁶¹

Currently, work to prevent, intervene in and respond to violence against women in Australia is coordinated a range of different ways:

- The Women’s Safety Council, which provides a forum for governments to drive national progress in reducing violence against women and their children
- The National Plan Implementation Executive Group, consisting of senior officials from Commonwealth, state and territory governments responsible for monitoring and reporting progress on the implementation of the Fourth Action Plan to the Women’s Safety Ministers. Other National Plan mechanisms have included the establishment of Our Watch and ANROWS.
- State/territory government mechanisms on violence against women and gender equality including councils and advisory groups on domestic, family and sexual violence, and women; and cross-government / inter-departmental working groups and committees
- The Australian Council of Human Rights Authorities, comprising the state, territory and federal human rights, equal opportunity and anti-discrimination authorities
- Peak bodies (funded and un-funded) and coalitions for violence against women. This includes national bodies such as the Australian Women against Violence Alliance (AWAVA), National Association of Services against Sexual Violence (NASASV) and National Family Violence Legal Prevention Services (FVPLS) Forum. At the state/territory levels, peak bodies include DV NSW, Embolden (South Australia), the Women’s Council for Domestic and Family Violence Services (WA), End Violence against Women Queensland, Domestic Violence Victoria and Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria (these two organisations are currently undertaking a merger). A range of time-limited and ongoing coalitions operate at the national, state/territory, and local level for example the National Advocacy Group for Women on Temporary Visas Experiencing Violence and the NSW Collaboration for the Primary Prevention of Gender-Based Violence.
- There are also many organisations and coalitions working to progress gender equality at the local, state/territory and national level. This includes the six National Women’s Alliances; and membership-based organisations such as Women with Disabilities Australia and the Australian Women’s Health Network.
- Many organisations contribute to coordination across social policy areas where their work intersects with or includes violence prevention activity. For example, the National LGBTI Health Alliance, Elder Abuse Action Australia, and the Family Matters campaign.

Gaps and opportunities

Primary prevention in Australia is being undertaken by a skilled multidisciplinary workforce who are delivering innovative and impactful work, often with limited resources and support. However, there is a need for more people designing, delivering, and contributing to primary prevention across the country, and for this workforce to be coordinated and supported more effectively.

Australia has yet to develop the national workforce it needs to implement primary prevention activities 'on the ground' at the scale that is required for this work to be effective at population level. Key reasons for this gap include:

- the emerging nature of the work;
- short-term funding of prevention activity;
- many people working on prevention who may undertake some prevention activities and whose expertise and substantial roles are in various other sectors. These workers may not identify the work that they are undertaking as primary prevention and are not necessarily linked to broader prevention work, coordinated, or well-resourced to manage the competing demands of their roles; and
- lack of coordination of investment in this workforce.

There is a critical need to address these workforce development issues. Accelerating development of the prevention workforce would provide a significant opportunity to expand and increase impact of prevention activities across the country. To be effective, this would need to include coordinated investment and planning at the state/territory and federal levels to ensure continued growth in the prevention workforce, particularly in areas where there are low numbers of workers currently able to specialise in prevention, and in rural and regional locations. The sustainability of the workforce, availability of employment and ongoing professional development and connection opportunities also need to be planned for.

Australia's prevention workforce is emerging. Capacity to design and implement primary prevention activities across the country is critical for progress. To address the current gaps, there is an important opportunity for governments to plan for and invest in supporting the growth and sustainability of a prevention workforce.

Across Australia, primary prevention efforts are being undertaken across a range of settings including sports, media, education, and workplaces. However, this work has not yet been translated into mutually reinforcing activities (either simultaneously or sequentially) across all levels of society. Many Australian prevention activities currently work at the individual level, with some working at the organisational level (notably in workplaces).

Mutually reinforcing activities work across all levels of society – individual, community, systems – at the same time. For example, social marketing campaigns targeting individual attitudes and behaviours won't be successful, without relevant policy changes and practical tools to enable individuals to make change.

There is a need to increase our efforts in prevention activities that support institutional, systematic and societal change. Planning for and investment in multi-faceted approaches that focus on effecting change at multiple levels of the social ecology would provide great opportunities for sustainable shifts to the drivers and reinforcing factors of violence against women.

Change the story has made a significant impact since its release in 2015 in providing a shared framework for prevention activity across Australia. It is now time to progress these gains in order to keep moving towards the long-term goal of preventing violence against women and their children in Australia. More work is needed to ensure that the basic conceptual endorsement of the framework *Change the story* is, over time, translated into concrete prevention actions including policy reform, programs and funding commitments of the kind and scale that the framework calls for from all Australian governments and other stakeholders.

The National Primary Prevention Hub will seek to build a deeper understanding about opportunities to develop mutually reinforcing approaches across the country and highlight the enabling factors that need to be in place to support these approaches.

Effective national prevention approaches work at all levels of society. To progress Australia's efforts, it will be critical to build on the significant work happening with individuals and communities by implementing approaches to create change at the institutional and system level.

Preventing violence against women requires coordinated actions and approaches across all prevention activity to support both efficacy and reach, ensuring activity in one area reinforces and is reinforced by activity in other areas. There are some coordination mechanisms currently in place in Australia, but very few with a specific focus on primary prevention and importantly mechanisms that can meaningfully coordinate prevention policy and funding.

To achieve multi-faceted approaches there needs to be consideration of how to better resource national, state/territory and local priorities at all levels across the socio-ecological model. Additionally, policy and funding settings need to be in place to support sustainability of activity and action at all levels (individual, organisational, community, system, institutional and societal).

Opportunities to improve coordination mechanisms include establishing and strengthening policy, governance and coordination mechanisms across portfolios, within jurisdictions, and between levels of government, to support coordinated, holistic and more effective efforts across the country. The development of the *Second National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children* is also an important opportunity to develop robust coordination mechanisms, including civil society and women's and specialist organisations that can build on and strengthen Australia's primary prevention approach.

Additionally, the National Primary Prevention Hub has a role under the Fourth Action Plan of the *National Plan* to support coordination, information sharing, learning and connection on primary prevention nationally.

Coordinating primary prevention actions at the national, state/territory and local levels can create a mutually reinforcing effect. This will amplify our prevention efforts by increasing the reach and impact of work to address the underlying drivers of violence against women.

COVID-19 and primary prevention of violence against women

Overview

The COVID-19 pandemic has shone a light on and amplified existing inequalities which drive gender-based violence, further reinforcing the need for continued commitment to this goal. The pandemic has also significantly disrupted all aspects of society, and the impacts are felt to different degrees in different states and territories depending on local conditions. This has implications for prevention programming and activity, including the need for organisations working on prevention to adapt quickly and in a changing environment to new challenges and opportunities as they arise.

In response to the pandemic, organisations have coordinated to assess the impacts of COVID-19 on women and identify and advocate for recommendations to address these impacts. This has been important in identifying how the drivers of violence against women are manifesting in the current environment; and identifying opportunities to progress essential actions to prevent violence, as set out in *Change the story*.

Online engagement has presented opportunities to engage larger and more diverse audiences in prevention activity, and to keep this activity going while in-person events and travel have not been possible. However, there are also challenges with a rapid transition to this type of engagement, including technological and safety concerns.

Gender equality in the workplace is sharply in focus because of the major disruption to working life caused by the pandemic, building on the prevention work that was being undertaken in Australian workplaces prior to the pandemic. Activity has focused on the actions that workplaces can take while employees work remotely or as workplaces change their working practices to be COVID-safe, but it is also important to keep an eye to the short- and longer-term impacts on women's employment and incomes.

Prevention efforts can be responsive to the environment in which they are being designed and implemented. There are many opportunities to embed prevention and efforts to advance gender equality in work to respond and recovery from the crisis, reimagining and transforming aspects of our society and economy.

Adapting primary prevention to the COVID context

UN Women has highlighted that prevention is even more pressing during the pandemic given the increase in violence against women that is already emerging in available data and the "rolling effects to be expected in the aftermath".⁶² It has also highlighted the challenges in continuing prevention programming during the pandemic due to restrictions on mobility, bans on congregating and suspension of many areas of everyday life.⁶³ UN Women advises "prevention modalities that have proven to work will require thoughtful consideration and adaptation to the current context created by COVID-19 to ensure that unintended harm is not committed and that women's safety is placed at the centre of any undertaking".⁶⁴

In Australia, parts of the country, groups in the community, and distinct sectors and industries have been affected in different ways by the pandemic. Levels of restrictions that impact on activity vary across states and territories depending on local conditions, and in turn this has led to different levels of disruption to prevention activity.

In considering how to adapt prevention work to the COVID context, it is crucial to keep an eye to emerging issues that can be addressed utilising prevention techniques such as public messaging, programming or policy reform. This includes understanding how the drivers of violence against women are being exacerbated or expressed differently during the pandemic, for example gender stereotypes may be playing out in a different way or be intensified.

Referring to their research on bushfires in Australia, the Gender and Disaster Pod reflects “our research found men’s inability to meet their own, and society’s expectations of them as men, as ‘protectors and providers’ after the fires, led to a loss of identity for many men. This is likely to be replicated in the current COVID-19 situation. It is exacerbated in that it is so widespread, including urban areas across the state [Victoria], Australia and the world. It is accompanied by fear and lack of control. As a result, much of our [the Gender and Disaster Pod] work is directly applicable to the coronavirus context”.⁶⁵ The Pod is working to adapt its existing resources to the pandemic.

UN Women have advised that it is “also critical [to ensure] that short-term prevention interventions tailored to the immediate circumstances are linked to the medium and longer-term work required around gendered power dynamics and discriminatory norms that can transform societies to be more equitable, rights-based and peaceful”.⁶⁶

Retaining and building upon existing prevention efforts during the pandemic is crucial to sustaining the gains that have been made in the past decade in Australia. This includes ensuring that primary prevention work continues to be resourced, that organisations are supported by funders and other stakeholders to adapt their work to the COVID context, and that active efforts are made to retain staff working on initiatives across the country who hold much-needed expertise in primary prevention of violence against women, gender equality, and addressing intersecting forms of discrimination and disadvantage that impact on women.

This also includes strongly linking COVID response and recovery planning at all levels of government to the development of the *Second National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children*, to ensure we harness the opportunity of this once-in-a generation crisis for transformative change to prevent this violence by addressing its underlying drivers and promoting gender equality.

Identifying and addressing the gendered impacts of COVID-19

Organisations have coordinated to assess the impacts of COVID-19 on women and identify and advocate for recommendations to address these impacts. This works plays an important role in identifying how the drivers of violence against women are manifesting in the current environment, including:

- the ways in which the health, social and economic crises caused by the pandemic are exacerbating gender and other social inequalities
- the amplification of gender roles, and the increased burden of unpaid work on women
- a greater focus on work undertaken by often under-valued female dominated industries
- reduced economic security for many women
- exacerbation of women’s experiences of violence

Work undertaken by civil society organisations during the pandemic has identified opportunities to progress essential actions to prevent violence, as set out in *Change the story*.

Addressing the expected increases in violence against women during the pandemic is also critical to longer term prevention efforts. Early intervention and response efforts provide the foundation for primary prevention efforts by sending a society-wide message that violence is not acceptable, establishing perpetrator accountability, and protecting women and their children from further violence. Raising Voices identified advocating for an appropriate government response to the pandemic that prioritises women's safety as a key action for organisations working on preventing violence.⁶⁷

Examples of this work to assess the impacts of COVID-19 include:

- Our Watch developed a position paper on COVID-19 and primary prevention. The paper sets out the implications of the crisis for gender equality and violence against women in Australia; and recommends strategies that help mitigate the predicted negative impacts, prevent violence against women, and advance gender equality in crisis responses and recovery planning.⁶⁸
- Advocacy at the state/territory and federal level to meet the needs of women experiencing violence during the pandemic, including for example the identification of five urgent actions for women's safety by AWAVA supported by over 70 groups in March 2020;⁶⁹ an open letter by the National Advocacy Group; and the identification of six key calls for action by the National FVPLS Forum to address violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women⁷⁰
- A joint statement supported by over 100 organisations committed to gender equity and women across Victoria calling for state and federal governments to recognise the gendered impacts of COVID-19. The statement lists 10 recommendations for governments to address the impacts of the pandemic on women and gender diverse people.⁷¹
- Recommendations developed by the Snap Forward Feminist Policy Network,⁷² convened by the 50/50 by 2030 Foundation at the University of Canberra, which represents a collaboration of academics and in conjunction with a national network of women advocates, policy consultants and gender equality organisations. The network is working to ensure a gender-responsive COVID-19 recovery over the immediate and longer term.
- Disabled People's Organisations Australia, who have issued open letters and statements of concern to advocate for actions required to support Australians with disability during the pandemic, including measures to ensure the safety of women and girls with disability.⁷³
- Equality Australia held a roundtable of LGBTIQ+ and allied organisations to identify specific issues facing LGBTIQ+ people in Australia due to COVID-19 and its impacts.⁷⁴
- Work to identify implications for women's health and make recommendations on addressing these during the pandemic include a policy brief⁷⁵ on women's mental health in the context of COVID-19 and recommendations for action from the Women's Mental Health Alliance,⁷⁶ and the establishment of the Women's Sexual and Reproductive Health COVID-19 Coalition to advocate for the sexual and reproductive health of women in Australia during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.⁷⁷

- Economic analysis of the short and longer term impacts on women and gender equality such as analysis that highlights that fiscal policy needs to consider gender equality from the Committee for Economic Development Australia and Sydney University,⁷⁸ analysis of the impact of stimulus measures from the Australia Institute,⁷⁹ and the Grattan Institute's analysis of opportunities for reforming the caring economy.⁸⁰

Coalition building and information-sharing has been an important feature of work to assess and address the impacts of COVID-19 on women. In one example of this work in Tasmania, stakeholders worked together to understand and address the impacts of the pandemic on women in the state. The Tasmania Council of Social Services (TasCOSS) facilitated a meeting in May 2020 that brought government and non-government stakeholders together to recognise the disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women in Tasmania. The meeting explored how the crisis has worsened and intensified pre-existing economic and social inequalities for women and how to influence government policy and decision makers to apply a gendered lens to short-term and longer-term recovery strategies for Tasmania. The information from the meeting has been used by TasCOSS and other stakeholders to inform submissions to the Premier's Economic and Social Recovery Advisory Committee (PESRAC). This is evident in the PESRAC interim report which recognises the need for a gendered lens to be used for recovery policy and has specific recommendations responding to the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on women in Tasmania.

Formal processes such as parliamentary inquiries have provided an important opportunity for civil society to provide analysis of the impacts of the pandemic and recommendations to governments on actions that could address gender and other social inequalities. For example, the Commonwealth Senate's Select Committee on COVID-19 has heard about the impacts of the pandemic on women from many organisations, including on women's caregiving and domestic work, employment and job security, experience and/or risk of violence, access to childcare, and access to services including healthcare and social security supports.⁸¹ In response to evidence examined by the committee including submissions from women's organisations, the interim report by the Victorian Public Accounts and Estimates Committee identified the impact of COVID-19 restrictions on female workers, the increase in women's unpaid care work (already high prior to the pandemic), the risk of increased rates of family and domestic violence, and the impacts on women's financial security.⁸²

The Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability held a public hearing in August 2020 into the experiences of people with disability during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.⁸³ Witnesses who appeared at this hearing raised concerns about the safety of women with disability, including risks of increased domestic and family violence and reduced access to supports and increased social isolation.

Online engagement

Hosting online events and training has a range of challenges, particularly when organisations have had to adapt quickly to digital delivery due to physical distancing and mobility restrictions. At the same time, hosting events online has allowed organisations to continue engagement and activity through the pandemic, reach larger audiences to engage them on prevention and gender equality, broaden networks and tailor their events in different ways.

This section sets out examples of online prevention engagement during the pandemic and identifies areas that will need ongoing attention as digital platforms are increasingly used in prevention activity including online safety.

The Australian Human Rights Commission released the *Respect@Work: National Inquiry into Sexual Harassment in Australian Workplaces* report in March.⁸⁴ Due to the pandemic, the Commission had to adapt its engagement plans following the release of the report to a digital program, with Sex Discrimination Commissioner Kate Jenkins participation in 20 webinars focused on *Respect@Work* to date. Moving *Respect@Work* advocacy online has allowed the Commission to hold events targeted at different stakeholder groups rather than based on geographical location, and focus discussion on the findings and recommendations of most relevance to the audience at each event. The Commission reports that the move to online engagement and ability to record the online webinars has also allowed them to engage a larger and more diverse audience, and to make the events more accessible for many people who may not have been able to attend in person events. The webinars also meant that the Sex Discrimination Commissioner could invite a range of panellists to bring their unique perspectives to discuss preventing and addressing sexual harassment in the workplace. However, the Commission has identified that technological issues were a challenge and added time to event planning. It can also be difficult to foster a sense of solidarity at an online event in the way that can be achieved during in-person events; this had been a key success of the in-person consultations that informed the report. On the other hand, the webinars expanded the Commissioner's network and social media following beyond traditional stakeholders and have resulted in new meetings and projects. The Commission's national engagement on the recommendations of the *Respect@Work* report demonstrates the rapid transition to online events which has taken place in 2020, and the benefits and challenges that this type of engagement can have.

Harmony Alliance has held an intersectionality discussion series in August and September 2020 via webinar. The series was part of the Alliance's longstanding commitment to embedding intersectionality, with the starting point for any conversation on this topic being the Alliance's relationship to the First Nations Peoples of Australia as migrant and refugee women living and working on their lands. The Alliance has hosted three webinars:

- Our position on intersectionality: Addressing power, privilege and colonialism – accompanied by the Alliance's position statement on intersectionality
- Intersectional discrimination: Racism, sexism, ableism and homophobia against migrant and refugee women
- Unpacking the power of language: Othering of culture as complexity in the context of violence against women

The topics of explored in this series contribute to an understanding of the drivers of violence against women and promotes discussion about addressing these intersecting drivers including creating a space to discuss systemic forms of discrimination and the power of language to challenge 'othering' of different communities. Through the online format, the Alliance was able to generate a lively and transformational dialogue and discussion, enabling engagement with over 500 participants across the country over the course of three webinars. The Alliance is planning to continue this engagement both online and offline and to harness the potential of intersectionality in their work on policy and practice.

Since moving from face to face to online delivery in March, the Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria (DVRCV) has needed to adjust approaches to training and other workforce capability building support, seminars and networking events for the prevention sector. Much of the support that the organisation provides is focused on both strengthening skills and knowledge about prevention and also fostering a sense of connectivity in the prevention sector through the Partners in Prevention (PiP) network and communities of practice.⁸⁵

In all online adaptation, DVRCV has been careful to assess the risks, benefits and changed outcomes that come from virtual rather than in person delivery. For example, moving a seminar series online was relatively straight-forward and has significantly increased audience reach, averaging more than 250 participants across four webinars (up from 30-50 in person and 40-50 online pre-COVID). Feedback from these events has been overwhelmingly positive and have also resulted in an increase in PiP membership. However, as a webinar is a broadcast rather than an event (even with the capacity to ask questions through chat functions), the opportunity for colleague to colleague connection before and after the event and to engage in person with presenters has been largely lost. DVRCV have worked to address some of this gap through providing PiP members with access to an electronic practice network, increasing the visibility and voice of practitioners in monthly PiP bulletins and plans to deliver the flagship conference *PreventX Online* in November with a focus on creating ways for practitioners to connect.

DVRCV have proceeded cautiously on adapting training to online delivery and will be piloting their first package in September/October. It is important to the organisation to ensure that they are confident in online delivery approaches that are fit for purpose in helping audiences to understand complex ideas and that ensure similar levels of safety and quality of learning outcomes as would be facilitated in a training room. DVRCV was already running a Community of Practice online for practitioners living outside of Melbourne before March, and other Communities of Practice had met prior to moving online. In this way the organisation was able to use an established model of online facilitation and benefited from groups who had existing, trusting relationships in place.

Along with technological capacity, safety is one of the key issues with a rapid move of prevention activity online. UN Women reports that, globally, "there has been growing documentation of violence against women increasing online as more and more people are using technology for professional, educational and social interactions... [The increase in online harms] create challenges to ensure that there is no unintended harm from prevention programming that may require online engagement".⁸⁶ In Australia, the eSafety Commissioner "has warned we could be facing an elevated incidence of online harms in the post COVID-19 world, as a landmark report reveals that along with our dramatically increased reliance on the internet, four in 10 Australians had a negative experience online during the first few months of the pandemic".⁸⁷ The issue of online harms is important to consider both for prevention workers and participants in prevention activities online.

Workplaces as settings for prevention

Gender equality in the workplace is sharply in focus because of major disruption to working life caused by the pandemic. The disruption of social distancing restrictions on Australian workplaces has been substantial, across all areas of working life. In some industries this has meant laying off or standing down significant proportions of workforces, in other industries it has meant increasing working hours and hiring staff, and in others it has meant doing more with less. At the same time, many women have experienced or continue to experience an increase to their unpaid caring and domestic work, which has impacts on their engagement in employment.

As with other changes in response to the pandemic, the impacts are felt to different degrees in different states and territories.

Australian workplaces have been key sites for gender equality and prevention of violence against women activity for some time. All workplaces have the power to make changes that will support progress towards gender equality in our society. Workplaces operate in different contexts in different industries, and employment types are also diverse including full-time, part-time, contract and gig economy work. Because of this diversity, it is crucial that prevention work in this setting is conceptualised across the socio-ecological model – effecting change at the individual, organisational and systems level (for example, training for workers, organisational cultural change processes and changes to workplace policies, and systems-level work such as improving conditions for workers and addressing gendered power imbalances in employment).

The disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has brought key issues sharply into focus and accelerated changes to the workplace, for example flexible working arrangements. For many industries, the pandemic provides an opportunity to drive change by developing policies and practices that proactively support women and men to equally share responsibilities and unpaid work, take up senior roles and be economically independent. With a focus on connecting virtually, or for changing in-person working arrangements to ensure COVID safe workplaces, there is also an opportunity to consider how to foster a respectful culture in this new environment and with new ways of working.

Because of this context, there has been a lot of activity examining the challenges, opportunities and potential actions that employers and workplaces can take to promote gender equality and prevent violence against women. For example, directly in response to the pandemic, Male Champions of Change have released resources to support actions during the pandemic, including resources on leading on gender equality,⁸⁸ workplace responses to domestic and family violence⁸⁹ and flexible ways of working.⁹⁰ Our Watch has released a tip sheet on promoting gender equality as employers and workplaces respond to the pandemic.⁹¹

The Diversity Council of Australia has held webinars for its members to provide information on the impacts of the pandemic on the workplace, share best practice, and discuss key issues. These webinars have included responding to COVID-19 – making flex work for you and your organisation (25 March 2020); staying connected and productive while working from home with caring responsibilities (15 April 2020); understanding and responding to domestic violence during COVID-19 (16 June 2020); what does an inclusive recovery look like post COVID-19? (1 July 2020); and a new world of work post COVID-19 (6 August 2020).

A range of other virtual events have explored the impacts of the pandemic on women's working lives, including a webinar about safe and respectful workplaces during the period of the COVID-19 pandemic hosted by We Are Union Women (1 May 2020); a virtual roundtable hosted by Women's Health & Wellbeing Barwon West and economic security4women on what COVID-19 has taught us about women's economic security (3 June 2020); and a La Trobe University event on Gender Equality and COVID-19 (17 June 2020).

At a macro level, it has been important to understand and monitor the impacts of the pandemic on women's employment and incomes. The International Labour Organisation advises:

“The COVID-19 crisis is different from previous economic crises in its depth and extent, as lives are being lost, employment and livelihoods are under threat and economies dramatically shrink. As with previous crises, however, its consequences are not being suffered equally. Like no other before, this crisis has laid bare the entrenched gender inequalities that, compounded with other inequalities, plague labour markets. The COVID-19 crisis is impacting women and men differently, depending on the sector they work in, the fragility of their employment situation, their access to labour and social protection, and their care responsibilities”⁹²

In the Australian context, the Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) has been publishing and updating its research on the impacts of COVID-19,⁹³ utilising data from agencies such as the Australian Bureau of Statistics, Australian Institute of Family Studies and Australian Institute of Criminology to assess how women are being affected and identify areas for continued research throughout and beyond the crisis.

As businesses, institutions and organisations focus on core business activity and recovering from the crisis, there is a risk that gender equality and primary prevention initiatives will not be priorities for employers. The capacity and interest of employers to focus on gender equality work will likely depend on the scale of the disruption in their industry and to their organisation, and on the strength of the commitment from leadership to this work.

Government and industry plans for the COVID-19 recovery will need to be gender responsive in order to support women's employment, which is crucial to women's long-term economic security.

Social marketing campaigns

Addressing expected increases in violence against women during the pandemic, alongside addressing the way that the gendered drivers of violence manifest during a crisis, is crucial to the longer-term goal of primary prevention.

The following campaigns were launched in Australia in response to the COVID-19 pandemic:

- Respect Victoria launched the *Championing Gender Equality at Home* social media campaign developed in response to COVID-19 restrictions, that challenges rigid gender roles and directs people to support pathways (such as Safe Steps, MensLine and Seniors Rights).⁹⁴ The *Respect Women: Call It Out* and *Respect Older People: Call It Out* campaigns were also re-released.⁹⁵
- The Commonwealth Department of Social Services developed the *Help is Here* campaign – A national awareness raising campaign to promote 1800 RESPECT and MensLine during the COVID-19 pandemic.⁹⁶
- The South Australian *Break the Cycle* campaign is aimed at people concerned about their own, or their partner’s behaviour, and encourages them to reach out and seek help.⁹⁷
- The NSW *Speak Out* campaign is designed to speak directly to victim-survivors in places where they may be away from perpetrators including shopping centres and medical centres.⁹⁸
- Our Watch re-released the *No Excuse for Abuse* campaign which aims to raise awareness of non-physical abuse and make it clear there is never any excuse for any type of abuse against women.⁹⁹
- The National Mental Health Commission launched the *Getting through this together* campaign in August 2020 in response to COVID-19 restrictions, which aims to support Australians’ mental health and wellbeing and includes campaign messaging that relates to family violence (*There is no place for domestic or family violence*).¹⁰⁰
- Family and Child Connect launched a social media campaign in July 2020 to connect Queensland families struggling with addiction, family violence or housing crisis to the right services to unite and recover from COVID-19.¹⁰¹
- Gender Equity Victoria developed a social media campaign sharing resources and accompanying infographics that highlight the impact of COVID-19 on women.¹⁰²

Research during the pandemic

Understanding the impacts of the pandemic on women's lives through research and consultation has been a crucial action undertaken by agencies, universities and civil society in Australia, supporting understanding of women's experiences and the drivers of gender-based violence. Research and consultation have investigated a broad range of topics including impacts on women's health, access to services, domestic lives, working lives and employment, finances, and experiences of violence. This has been important because many of the inequalities at the forefront during the pandemic have not been new but have been exacerbated and are manifesting in different ways.

As Counting on change: A guide to prevention monitoring sets out, in order to understand progress towards the shared national goal of a significant and sustained reduction in violence against women and their children, we need to measure not only prevalence rates but also changes to underlying drivers and reinforcing factors of this violence.¹⁰³

In a social and policy context sometimes there is an assumption that numerical evidence is more objective and less politicised than other forms of knowledge, which can undermine the importance of other kinds of evidence (for example, lived experience, practitioner and community knowledge, qualitative and narrative-based deep inquiry, program and policy evaluation, theory, and quantitative data). While data such as prevalence data is critical, it also has limitations, and in the context of COVID, these limitations can be exacerbated. For example, shorter-term prevalence rates of violence are typically measured through 12-month windows, and therefore can't provide 'real time' data in the context of COVID. Other data sources, such as police data, can only capture incidents that are disclosed by the individuals involved or recorded and/or reported to the relevant authorities- something that is more difficult during COVID.

To address some of these limitations, some research has been conducted to understand both the prevalence and nature of gender-based violence during the pandemic. For example, Monash University has undertaken research with practitioners on the nature of and responses to violence against women during the period of COVID-19 restrictions in Queensland and Victoria.¹⁰⁴ The Australian Institute of Criminology conducted a survey of 15,000 Australian women on their experience of domestic violence during the initial stages of the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁰⁵ The Australian Asian Alliance and Per Capita Thinktank have undertaken research to collect reports of COVID-19 related racism, identifying the experiences of racism that many Asian women have experienced in Australia during the pandemic.¹⁰⁶

A range of research has been undertaken to capture the impacts of the pandemic on women in Australia

- The Australian Bureau of Statistics *Household Impacts of COVID-19* survey has been a crucial data set for understanding how people in Australian households are managing in the changing social and economic environment, and dis-aggregation of this data (including by gender and age) has provided important insights to inform policy recommendations and development¹⁰⁷
- To understand women's experiences, their health and wellbeing during the pandemic, the Australian Longitudinal Survey on Women's Health deployed fortnightly online surveys to women participating in the study.¹⁰⁸

- The *Life during COVID19* survey, administered by the Australian Institute of Families Studies as part of the Families in Australia Survey series, ran from 1 May to 9 June 2020 to understand how families experienced and coped with the social and economic impacts of the pandemic.¹⁰⁹
- Women with Disabilities ACT undertook a survey to collect perspectives on the impact of COVID-19 on women and girls with disabilities in the ACT, finding that a lack of tailored responses had resulted in women with disabilities feeling left out, lacking essential information and being isolated to a greater degree than they usually experienced.¹¹⁰
- The *COVID-19 Carer Survey*, administered by the Caring Fairly Coalition, captured unpaid carers' experiences of the pandemic including impacts on work income, expenses, health, wellbeing and access to services.¹¹¹
- Marie Stopes Australia has developed situation reports detailing the ongoing impacts of the pandemic on sexual and reproductive health in Australia.¹¹²

There are also many different research projects currently in the field and in development which will give us a deeper Australian evidence base on women's experiences of violence, economic impacts of the pandemic, and impacts on women's health and wellbeing.

Research on the immediate and ongoing experiences and impacts of the pandemic will enable identification of prevention priorities and understanding of how to contextualise prevention in the changing environment. However, efforts to synthesise COVID-related research, make meaning from it, and translate this research into formats that are useful for policy-makers and the prevention sector will be crucial to meaningful application and analysis of research findings.

Gaps and opportunities

Primary prevention of violence against women remains an important priority throughout and beyond the pandemic. The exacerbation of social inequalities, including gender inequalities, during the pandemic has further reinforced the need for continued commitment to the goal of preventing violence against women.

Addressing increases in violence against women during the pandemic is also critical to longer term prevention efforts. Early intervention and response efforts can and do have important preventative effects: stopping signs of violence from escalating, preventing a recurrence of violence, or reducing longer-term harm. This work also provides a foundation for primary prevention efforts by sending a society-wide message that violence is not acceptable, establishing perpetrator accountability, and protecting women and their children from further violence.¹¹³

The crisis response and recovery plans provide an opportunity to reimagine and transform aspects of our society and economy in ways that will not only increase resilience and help the country emerge more rapidly from this crisis, but that will also boost and fast-track our efforts to prevent violence against women and advance gender equality. Prevention approaches can be built into the work that governments across Australia are undertaking across social policy, public health planning, and economic measures; and community-based prevention work can be responsive to the changing environment.

Given the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, it is more important than ever that primary prevention of violence against women remains a core priority and all stakeholders continue to contribute to this long-term goal. In parallel, it is crucial for the increasing incidence of this violence during the pandemic to be addressed.

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused disruption to all aspects of daily life, with the impacts being felt differently across the country depending on local conditions. There will be a continued need to adapt prevention activity, whether that be adopting online engagement strategies, or developing activities to assess and develop recommendations to address the impacts of the pandemic on the drivers of violence against women.

Funding models & contracting will need to be responsive to the changing environment, and the need for organisations to be flexible in their prevention programming over time.

Prevention work needs to be responsive to the environment in which it is being implemented. As identified by Raising Voices, there is an opportunity to continue social norm change and other prevention efforts in ways that reflect current realities.¹¹⁴ There is an opportunity to be responsive in our prevention efforts to the research and data showing experiences and impacts of the pandemic on women, noting the need for this research to be synthesised to best make meaning of the emerging evidence base.

Changes to prevention activities will likely be necessary to adapt to the COVID context. This might include practical considerations such as flexibility in funding models and contracting, as well as adapting activities (informed by research and data) to respond to gender inequalities in the changing environment.

As a whole-of-population approach, prevention needs to engage people across the many different environments where they live, work, learn, socialise and play.

Opportunities to progress primary prevention and gender equality in working life has been a key focus of many stakeholders in Australia, building on the prevention work that was being undertaken in Australian workplaces previously. There are opportunities to drive change in workplace policies, practices and culture as new ways of working are developed and implemented. Additionally, government and industry plans for COVID-19 recovery will need to be gender responsive in order to support women's employment, which is crucial to women's long-term economic security.

It will also be important to consider the challenges and opportunities of prevention in other settings. Many sectors and industries are facing significant challenges, for example news media, community and professional sport, and universities. These are all important settings for prevention, but there may be less capacity for work to address the underlying drivers of violence while these industries manage the impacts of the pandemic.

Prevention activities engage people across the many settings where we live, work, learn, socialise and play. When planning, designing and implementing prevention activities during the pandemic, it will be important to consider the nature of disruption in these different settings as well as the challenges and opportunities at hand.

Conclusion

Primary prevention of violence against women is an important goal, set out in the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women 2010-2022*, which seeks to change the underlying drivers of violence through whole-of-population approaches, and stop this violence from occurring in the first place.

There are important opportunities to accelerate Australia's prevention efforts – namely:

- Planning and investment in a primary prevention workforce
- Implementing approaches to create change at the institutional and system level, to support the significant work happening with individuals and communities; and
- Coordinating prevention at the national, state/territory and local level.

The gender inequalities exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic has further reinforced the need for continued commitment to primary prevention. Adaption of prevention activities to the COVID context will continue to be important, to ensure that these activities continue and are responsive to the changing environment.

Supported by funding from the Commonwealth under the Fourth Action Plan, the National Primary Prevention Hub will conduct ongoing environment scanning and stakeholder engagement to support a better understanding of prevention activity across the country. The Hub will build upon the existing work undertaken nationally by identifying and facilitating opportunities for stakeholders to share evidence, expertise and learning, connect and coordinate prevention efforts.

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