

Fact sheet 8.

Council leadership and decision-makers



Leadership in local government is crucial to prevent violence against women. Leadership support helps to get the issue on your council's agenda and to keep it there. Leaders can be councillors, senior or middle managers, or council officers who are passionate and informed about the issue and can garner support and motivate people. They can reinforce prevention messages in their teams, within their networks and in their communities and look for opportunities to implement initiatives and strategies.

The role of council leadership in prevention

The role of council leadership in the primary prevention of violence against women involves:

- being leaders, influencers and, importantly, decision makers
- working with community and responding to community needs and concerns
- advocating externally, including to other tiers of government, to continue to promote and leverage the work that's currently underway, and for future funding opportunities
- modelling positive, inclusive and respectful behaviour and leadership.

Leadership support is critical in working towards preventing violence against women and in having gender equality adopted and embedded into key policies such as the council plan and health and wellbeing plans.

The role-modelling and leadership of elected members plays a critical role in councils' responsibility for the prevention of violence against women. It complements their roles as community leaders and councils' leadership role in this area. Positive, equal and respectful relationships and behaviours should be modelled by leaders, and any disrespectful conduct in the chamber – particularly sexism, sexual harassment,

racism or bullying – should be addressed using appropriate bystander interventions and through the development and implementation of supporting policies and processes.

Given the unique and critical role that the council CEO plays as the interface between the political leadership of council and council staff, securing the commitment of a CEO to support gender equality and violence prevention initiatives is vital. This can ensure commitment of resources and responsibility to do the work across the council, which can lead to more effective and sustainable outcomes.

Local government promoting women's leadership

Despite being just over half of the population, women are often absent or underrepresented in leadership roles, management positions and positions of power, including in local government. This contributes to one of the gendered drivers of violence against women: Men's control of decision-making and limits to women's independence in public and private life. The voices and perspectives of women with diverse backgrounds and life experiences are essential to ensure that policy, planning and decision-making best reflect the diversity of communities across Australia.

However, without processes designed to increase women's involvement in decision-making, women will continue to be unequally represented in leadership positions in the community, government and business sectors. Local government is in a unique position to encourage and foster women's leadership, equal representation and decision-making, both within their organisation and through their work with the community, and to provide women with a greater capacity to participate in the development and implementation of legislation, policies and services that affect their lives.

Some suggested activities include:

- reviewing women's representation on council and council committees and establishing annual targets and timelines for achieving gender equity
- setting up a council committee with responsibility for increasing women's participation and/or creating a resourced gender equality portfolio led by a councillor and supported by council officers
- establishing and resourcing a mentoring program involving newly elected women councillors, senior women executives and women officers
- establishing links and partnerships with women leaders and representatives from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, women with disabilities and LGBTIQ communities, to encourage their participation and leadership
- ensuring that diverse groups of women have the opportunity to participate on council and community decision-making bodies by identifying and rectifying any exclusion barriers – for example, meeting times, lack of childcare, inaccessible venues or lack of transportation.

Case studies

- Our Watch webinar – [Leading the primary prevention of violence against women in local government](#), for councillors and executive staff who have the opportunity to lead initiatives to prevent violence against women in their communities.
- Councillor Chontelle Stone from the City of Cockburn (WA), and president of the Australian Local Government Women's Association WA branch, speaking in the [Building Support in Prevention Violence in WA](#) webinar on why having women in leadership roles helps prevent violence against women.
- [Not in Our Backyard](#) – Queensland's 77 mayors were invited to demonstrate their councils' commitment to addressing domestic and family violence by capturing a photo or a video of themselves with a pledge sign. These pledges featured on the Local Government Association of Queensland website and councils' social media platforms. Support for this campaign sent a strong message to the community that domestic violence will not be tolerated, and that local government is committed to supporting efforts to eradicate it.
- City of Adelaide (SA) – the [I'm Not OK With That](#) campaign featured prominent South Australian leaders in government, business and community speaking about the importance of taking bystander action to prevent violence against women. The campaign also included free bystander workshops delivered to the community.
- City of Mandurah (WA) – this council developed an internal communications plan for staff to better understand their reasons for undertaking domestic and family violence prevention work. Council leadership modelled commitment from the top. [City of Mandurah signs Peel Says No to Violence Pledge for third consecutive year](#).
- LaTrobe City Council (Vic) – the [Gender Equality Leadership Statement and Action Plan](#) acknowledges council's important leadership role in promoting gender equality within its local community.
- Municipal Association Victoria – the [Women in local government](#) webpage contains information about the Women's Charter and a video of 100 years of women in local government.
- The Victorian [Women Leading Locally](#) program.
- See Our Watch's [Prevention toolkit for local government](#) for more information on setting up a local government working group and engaging leaders in your local government.