



# Monitoring the Family Violence Reforms

Respect Victoria submission

<b>Attention</b>	Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor
<b>Response to</b>	Call for Submissions: Monitoring the Family Violence Reforms
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## Introduction

Respect Victoria welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor's (FVRIM) call for submissions. Respect Victoria is an organisation dedicated to the primary prevention of all forms of family violence and violence against women. Our focus is stopping violence before it starts, by changing the norms, practices and structures that allow it to happen.

Respect Victoria is a statutory authority established under the Prevention of Family Violence Act 2018 (the Act) to fulfil Recommendation 188 of the Royal Commission into Family Violence (the Royal Commission). We deliver on commitments under Recommendation 187 of the Royal Commission, *Free from violence: Victoria's strategy to prevent family violence and all forms of violence against women (Free from violence)*. We are responsible for two of the five pillars outlined in *Free from violence* – research and evaluation and engage and communicate with the community. We also support the other three pillars: build prevention structures and systems, scale up and build on what we know, and innovate and inform.

Our work spans all manifestations of family violence and all forms of violence against women across all Victorian communities. The establishment of Respect Victoria under the Act demonstrates the Victorian government's recognition that primary prevention<sup>1</sup> — which is distinct from but complementary to secondary prevention (early intervention) and tertiary prevention (response) — is critical to bringing an end to violence. We exist to drive primary prevention over the long-term and ensure prevention efforts are considered and coordinated.

Respect Victoria's legislated responsibility under the Act includes providing advice to the Minister for the Prevention of Family Violence on policy, decision making and funding. We monitor and report on trends in family violence and violence against women. We undertake and disseminate research into the drivers of family violence and violence against women. Using this research, we develop and promote best practice primary prevention programming. We provide advice about what programs work and should be invested in.

Primary prevention's whole-of-population approach means we bring this work to all areas of Victorian life. Respect Victoria collaborates with government, industry, organisations and communities to promote awareness of and strengthen primary prevention. Informed by research, we lead social marketing campaigns and engage with stakeholders across sectors and settings to build a culture of respect for all Victorians. The establishment of Respect Victoria and the integration of Victoria's prevention sector into the overall response to family violence, provides an important model for realising state primary prevention reforms.

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<sup>1</sup> The 'primary prevention of family violence and violence against women' is referred to throughout this submission as 'primary prevention' or 'prevention'.

## How has the family violence system changed since the Royal Commission?

Victoria has an exceptional legacy in gender equality and primary prevention work, including leading work on Aboriginal-led primary prevention activity, whole of community and strengths-based approaches, and efforts to engage men and boys. Respect Victoria acknowledges this legacy and the dedication and commitment shown by the Victorian government and the broader community services sector since the Royal Commission into Family Violence, which has seen unprecedented investment across the family violence service system.

The Royal Commission into Family Violence was a monumental step towards a comprehensive family violence system in Victoria, responding to the advocacy of the primary prevention and gender equality sectors, and what was needed to occur to respond to the prevalence of violence; and importantly, prevent it from occurring. This significant milestone arose out of the advocacy and success of the prevention and gender equality sectors and success in Victoria and supported by legislation, underpins a robust approach to long-term social and behavioural change, over time.

With the launch of *Free from Violence, Safe and Strong*<sup>2</sup>, and more recently the introduction of the *Gender Equality Act 2020*, Victoria now has a strong policy platform, clear vision, and leadership in Victoria, which complements growing national infrastructure and leadership under the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022*<sup>3</sup>.

However, while the Royal Commission has created significant momentum in building a cohesive and interconnected family violence service system, further work is required to ensure primary prevention operates as an integrated part of this system, as well as a strong, coherent system in its own right.

Historically, Victorian investment in family violence has focused on response; rather than efforts to stop violence from occurring or escalating, and to prevent long-term harm. As a result, despite recent gains, there are continued unacceptable rates of violence experienced, predominantly by women and children. Addressing the drivers of violence through primary prevention is the only way in which the overall prevalence of family violence (and therefore demand) can be reduced. This requires strengthened investment and effort in order to realise Victoria's vision of ending family violence and violence against women in all its forms.

### Building sustainable investment

The establishment of Respect Victoria on the second anniversary of the Royal Commission saw the creation of the world's first organisation dedicated to the prevention of all forms of family violence and violence against women. It provided an opportunity for Victoria to be a national and international leader in the primary prevention of family violence and violence against women; and ultimately drive investment and effort to prevent violence from occurring and to keep all Victorians safe. If realised, this will not only ensure reduced costs across the social service system, including in housing and homelessness and health and emergency services, but positively impact those individuals and communities who will no longer experience violence.

As outlined in Respect Victoria's strategic plan, we know that significant and sustained investment has saved lives and reduce harm in other primary prevention initiatives across Australia, including smoking cessation, skin cancer reduction and road safety. **While investment in primary prevention of family**

<sup>2</sup> *Safe and Strong* is Victoria's Gender Equality Strategy, [www.vic.gov.au/safe-and-strong-victorian-gender-equality](http://www.vic.gov.au/safe-and-strong-victorian-gender-equality)

<sup>3</sup> *The National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022* was endorsed by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) and released in February 2011, <https://plan4womenssafety.dss.gov.au/>

**violence remains a small proportion of the total family violence budget, the opportunity for improved long-term outcomes are reduced.**

The recent three-year funding announcements for Victoria's women's health organisations, Our Watch, and ANROWS are positive steps. However, ongoing and sustainable funding models for primary prevention and gender equality are not yet realised. This includes in funding certainty for the key primary prevention program platform currently in Victoria, driven through schools in Respectful Relationships. Further commitments to ongoing sustainable funding for Respectful Relationships and other key primary prevention programming and activity will help ensure continued important early changes in attitudes and behaviours around gender inequality and other forms of discrimination; and continue to work towards preventing violence long term. **Further work is required overall to increase the overall level and sustainability of investment in the primary prevention of all forms of family violence and violence against women.**<sup>4</sup>

Respect Victoria will continue to work with government and organisations to support implementation of primary prevention across the community, including with new settings and sectors, and to help build investment and accountability including and beyond the government spheres.

### **Improving governance, systems, and coordination**

Respect Victoria is working towards increased, incremental uptake in primary prevention programming and coordination; and supporting government, organisations and community in effective governance. We work closely with partners across the family violence sector to support the strengthening of a coordinated and comprehensive primary prevention system in Victoria. Respect Victoria has forged diverse linkages with government, industry, organisations and communities, to strengthen primary prevention capacity and support the implementation and monitoring of evidence-informed programs. In some settings and sectors, primary prevention work is exceptional and advanced; in other areas it has barely started.

In efforts to prevent family violence, whole of settings and sector approaches are important. Victoria has made progress, including in whole of settings focus in schools and local government, but more needs to be done. The primary prevention sector has consistently advocated for strengthened coordination and support in the primary prevention system, and to ensure greater collective impact across Victoria in all communities and primary prevention settings. Victoria must continue to build a collaborative and comprehensive primary prevention system, to address and prevent all forms of family violence and ensure that primary prevention is embedded within other areas of Victoria's reform agenda.

**The Victorian government must finalise and formalise governance structures for primary prevention, to ensure effective program development, management, delivery, monitoring and evaluation of primary prevention, and clarity of outcomes and impact,** in line with recommendations from the second Family Violence Implementation Monitor report (as at 1 November 2018, tabled in Parliament 21 March 2019). This will help strengthen system-wide coordination and accountability for primary prevention, and ensure effective oversight, coordination and monitoring of primary prevention of family violence and violence against women activity. Respect Victoria is working to cement new partnerships in new settings and new sectors, to build a stronger, more coordinated approach to broader primary prevention activity in Victoria connected to, and beyond government spheres.

### **Building a diverse and intersectional approach**

As the focus of primary prevention expands across the state, Respect Victoria is leading work to improve understanding of the underlying drivers of all forms of family violence. Since our establishment, Respect

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<sup>4</sup> 9.5-12% is the total estimated optimal spend of primary prevention initiatives with corresponding social outcomes, including decreasing smoking prevalence, reduce incidence of sunburn and skin cancer, and a halving of the road toll. Investing in primary prevention of family violence: Discussion paper, PWC, for the Victorian Government, 2016.

Victoria has been working to generate new research and translating knowledge to address gaps in understanding of factors leading to family violence and how these can be prevented. Building on the foundational work of organisations such as ANROWS, Our Watch and VicHealth, we have advanced knowledge about the prevention of men’s violence against women, while working with others to help build the evidence base to prevent family violence and violence against women in all its forms. Our research and evaluation work on violence experienced by older Victorians, LGBTIQ Victorians and those Victorians with a disability innovatively addresses key questions and gaps in understanding, including how gender inequality, racism, ageism, ableism and heterosexism influence the patterns of violence perpetrated and experienced in society.

**To ensure we are driving the prevention of family violence and violence against women in all its forms, much more needs to be understood about the drivers of all forms of family violence and violence against women, including diverse and intersectional components; building on the excellent knowledge base on the drivers of men’s violence against women. Greater investment in research is needed to build this understanding and evidence base.**

Respect Victoria is leading and developing a comprehensive and consistent theoretical approach to the prevention of all forms of family violence to address this gap and help ensure consistency in programming across a strengthened primary prevention system. This approach will be used to help inform a shared state-wide primary prevention research agenda as a discrete component of the overall Family Violence research effort. Future research efforts will include exploring how understandings of diversity and intersectionality can be integrated into practice, and across the whole system; noting further investment and effort is required to support the delivery of primary prevention programming and activity for diverse communities. **As well as consistent building of diversity and intersectionality in the reform efforts, there needs to be a greater focus on the systems and structures to support the delivery of primary prevention programming and activity for diverse communities. This requires further focus and ultimately, investment by Government.**

## **Building progress in primary prevention and measuring success**

Building on the work in Government led by the Office for Women, Respect Victoria has been working since establishment to build progress in community engagement through the delivery of five state-wide behaviour change campaigns to raise awareness and change the social norms and attitudes that drive family violence and violence against women. This has been impactful and effective in engaging communities in conversations about the drivers of violence, the behaviour and attitudes in our culture which allow this violence to occur and driving change.

Consumer research undertaken in 2018 indicated that those who had viewed the campaigns had more positive attitudes towards gender equality, the police, and the government’s response to family violence and violence against women. People who had seen the campaign were also more likely to endorse the importance of respect and the impact that family violence and violence against women has, both on individual households and society.

Further building on the work in Government led by the Office for Women, Respect Victoria has been working to establish the development of a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation framework which will enable the assessment of outcomes and measure the impact of primary prevention activities and to ultimately implement this. Adoption of this framework by a wider range of programs and agencies in Victoria outside of the *Free from Violence* framework will help foster consistency and assess collective impact. This will help ensure prevention practice continues to be supported by a strong evidence base and that data is available and up to date so it can better inform primary prevention practice across Victoria.

The Royal Commission's findings also identified the need for a Family Violence Index to measure the extent of, and response to family violence in different communities and communicating progress over time. Respect Victoria has been leading work to establish a comprehensive Family Violence Data Platform to support measurement and trend analyses to build and communicate understanding of population-level progress, including in diverse communities.

To further ensure consistent and saturated primary prevention activity across the state Respect Victoria is leading the development of a primary prevention standards and an endorsement model, and will continue to work with government organisations and communities to build prevention, policy and practice through effective monitoring and evaluation.

However, the current base funding for Respect Victoria as the entity established to lead primary prevention effort in Victoria is insufficient to be able to deliver comprehensively on its legislative remit, including to undertake and disseminate research to understand the drivers of all forms of family violence in all its forms, promote and endorse programs, monitor and evaluate programs, provide advice to the Minister on policy and decision making, promote awareness in the community, and effectively report on progress. **The Victorian Government must increase base funding for Respect Victoria to deliver on its legislative remit and drive the primary prevention of family violence and violence against women in all its forms.**

## What has been the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic?

The COVID-19 pandemic, like other disasters, has highlighted how the scale and severity of family violence can erupt quite rapidly, with reporting indicating there has been a sustained increase in instances of family violence during the pandemic. Response agencies have reported increased invisibility of children and at-risk communities. At the same time, as the incidence of family violence rises as part of the COVID-19 pandemic, organisations have reported a shift of focus in some areas from prevention to response services and supports for victims and those at particular risk, as government and community organisations seek to make sense of delivery of primary prevention programming in a different context. This includes organisations experiencing reduced capacity and resourcing, and an increasingly responsive and reactive space. **Primary prevention programming for diverse communities and those with limited infrastructure has been particularly impacted by the current crisis. In addition, further roll-out and focus on primary prevention has been impacted.**

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Respect Victoria has maintained its focus on the drivers of family violence and violence against women, including considering those most likely to be impacted by the current pandemic. Respect Victoria's primary prevention focus therefore addresses understanding and responding to the gendered impacts of this pandemic, and the impact on diverse communities.

Respect Victoria is firstly trying to understand the specific impacts for Victorian communities, how this intersects with the drivers of violence, and the impact on the primary prevention workforce. Respect Victoria has commissioned research to better understand building primary prevention responses for older people and LGBTIQ communities in a disaster context, and the impact on the primary prevention workforce. What is understood so far, is that systemic and structural discrimination disproportionately impacts those most likely to experience family violence, and that experiences of gender-based inequalities and discrimination have been exacerbated in the current context. This includes intersections with sexism, racism, homophobia, biphobia, transphobia and intersexism, ageism and ableism. **What this means is that these experiences of systemic and structural discrimination have the impact and likely potential to drive an increase in family violence in the medium to longer term.**

Respect Victoria has developed a COVID-19 specific marketing campaign to respond to this crisis. *Respect Each Other: 'Call It Out'* focused on highlighting the drivers of family violence in the context of COVID-19 and linked with early intervention and response and promoting help-seeking behaviour for victims and perpetrators. The campaign considered the increased risks associated with physical distancing and self-isolation measures and the possibility of being forced to share spaces with perpetrators for extended periods of time, continuing to call attention to the drivers of violence and encourage bystander action where safe to do so.

Respect Victoria also collaborated with partners in the family violence prevention and response sectors to **develop a set of guiding principles to help maintain focus on the underlying drivers of family violence and violence against women during this time.** The principles following are designed to: ensure consistency in primary prevention efforts during the pandemic crisis and recovery phases, improve preparedness for future disasters, and ensure disasters do not further entrench family violence in our communities:

1. Strengthen primary prevention focus across whole of family violence reform effort.
2. Build understanding of the impact of intersecting forms of discrimination and disadvantage into all our prevention efforts.
3. Uphold the importance of independence and decision-making in public and private life.



4. Challenge rigid gender roles, advance gender equality and advocate for respectful gender relationships.
5. Engage men to adopt and maintain respectful and non-aggressive behaviours and peer relations.
6. Challenge attitudes that condone violence through association with external stressors.

A fuller explanation of these principles and how they apply in the context of COVID-19 and other disasters can be found at the Respect Victoria [website](#).

Preventing family violence is important, long-term cultural and behavioural change work. While the reduction and eventual elimination of family violence and violence against women will be incredibly positive for individuals, communities and society, primary prevention work is often impacted in times of crises. It remains critically important that primary prevention continues to be planned and undertaken as an integral part of the spectrum of responses to family violence, complementary to early intervention and response-oriented effort. To this end the promotion of longer-term investment in primary prevention must be maintained, visible and considered an urgent priority.

**Adequately resourcing primary prevention effort in disaster preparedness and recovery planning is essential, particularly for diverse communities, acknowledging the impacts of disasters on communities and the exacerbation of family violence and violence against women in this context.**

## Looking forward: what is still required in the family violence reforms?

Based on extensive stakeholder engagement conducted by and on behalf of Respect Victoria, the reform effort is progressing well, however, progress in primary prevention remains fragmented with outcomes not yet realised. While particular settings and approaches continue to develop (including in schools and local government), other areas are underdeveloped and require establishment and/or expansion, including for diverse communities. Primary prevention needs establishment and/or expansion in whole of community settings and sectors, including workplaces, community organisations and more.

Overall, investment in primary prevention is not where it needs to be, comparative to other successful primary prevention approaches and efforts. As a result, Victoria is not achieving the collective impact needed to save lives. This is not just the responsibility of government. It is however contingent on government investment in enabling infrastructure. This work needs better coordination and governance and requires a whole of systems approach.

To ensure the continued building of primary prevention, and to acknowledge while there have been significant reforms in information sharing and monitoring of those at high-risk of family violence, there needs to be a further focus on the 'early' end of early intervention, particularly for children and young people who are at risk or displaying concerning behaviours, including children in out-of-home care, and victims of family violence. This must be included as a key issue for future family violence reforms. In addition, developing a shared understanding of prevention across early intervention and response efforts remains a core priority for the primary prevention sector.

### Summary of recommendations for future action

Respect Victoria recommends that the Victorian Government:

- 1. Strengthen the primary prevention system through increased funding to save lives and reduce harm, like other successful social and behaviour change interventions, including through the establishment of ongoing, sustainable program funding models.**
- 2. Strengthen system-wide coordination and accountability for primary prevention, including finalising effective governance structures to ensure effective program development, management, delivery, monitoring and evaluation of primary prevention, and to ensure clarity of outcomes and impact.**
- 3. Increase investment in research to better understand the drivers of family violence and violence against women in all its forms.**
- 4. Strengthen focus on diversity and intersectionality, including the establishment of systems and structures to support the delivery of primary prevention programming and activity for diverse communities.**
- 5. Increase Respect Victoria's base funding to enable it to deliver on its legislative remit and drive the prevention of family violence and violence against women in all its forms.**
- 6. Ensure primary prevention of family violence is incorporated into disaster preparedness and recovery planning, recognising the disasters can drive an increase in family violence in the medium to longer term.**
- 7. Strengthen family violence reform focus on early intervention, particularly for children and young people at risk or displaying concerning behaviours, including children in out-of-home care, and victims of family violence.**

## Conclusion

Primary prevention is a critical, determining component of the family violence reform agenda. Though progress will require significant time, investment and effort, these steps are critical to achieving a Victoria free from family violence and violence against women in all its forms.