

**Respect
Victoria**

Preventing
Family
Violence

Parliamentary inquiry into family, domestic and sexual violence

Respect Victoria submission

Attention	Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs
Response to	Parliamentary inquiry into family, domestic and sexual violence
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Introduction

Respect Victoria welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Parliamentary Inquiry into family, domestic and sexual violence (the Inquiry). We understand that through this inquiry the Committee will seek to inform the next National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children (National Plan).

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, May 2017 (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 support the other three pillars: build prevention structures and systems, scale up and build on what we know, and innovate and inform.

A world first, we are an organisation established and dedicated solely to the primary prevention of all forms and manifestations of family violence and all forms of violence against women, making the work of Respect Victoria distinct but complementary to that of primary prevention organisations like Our Watch, whose focus is on the primary prevention of violence against women and their children.

The establishment of Respect Victoria under the Act demonstrates the Victorian government's recognition that the primary prevention¹ of both family violence and violence against women — 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 responsibilities under the Act include providing advice to the Victorian 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 all forms of 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 and violence against women, provides an important model for realising state and national primary prevention reforms. The next National Plan is a critical vehicle for pursuing this model.

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

Submission overview

Respect Victoria acknowledges the importance of the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022* (the National Plan) in bringing together all states and territories to drive lasting change and ensure that all women and their children can live free from violence.

Critically, the National Plan has provided a guiding framework for all governments, sectors, organisations and communities to reduce violence against women and their children. The National Plan has enabled the critical establishment of Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) and Our Watch. In doing so, it has vastly driven improvements in the way Australia acknowledges violence against women and their children as an issue of significant national concern, and coordinates effective responses in relation to this effort.

Our response is focused on three of the 12 specific areas of the Inquiry, in line with our legislative remit, expertise and focus, to support and further build this focus:

- a) **Immediate and long-term measures to prevent violence against women and their children, and improve gender equality**
- h) **The experiences of all women, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, rural women, culturally and linguistically diverse women, LGBTIQ women, women with a disability, and women on temporary visas**
- i) **The impact of natural disasters like COVID-19 on the prevalence of family violence and provision of support services.**

Recommendations

Respect Victoria, in line with its legislative remit, expertise and focus, is well placed to advise on, and contribute to Australia's family violence reform agenda.

The following recommendations have been drawn from the themes of the submission outlined above and detailed in subsequent sections:

1. The scope of the next National Plan should both:
 - a. *elevate* the importance of primary prevention in Australia's family violence reform agenda as complementary to early intervention to response, and
 - b. *broaden* the focus to include the primary prevention of all forms of family violence and violence against women.
2. The design of the next National Plan should:
 - a. establish a coordinated strategic approach, for the prevention of family violence *and* violence against women in all its forms, recognising the significant overlaps and common underlying causal factors. This should include a dedicated research focus to understand the drivers of all forms of family violence, and impacts of population diversity and individual intersectionality
 - b. establish a whole of system model that embeds primary prevention firmly within it. This must include effective governance, infrastructure and coordination for primary prevention across all jurisdictions
 - c. establish binding financial agreements with all jurisdictions guided by a robust return on investment model to ensure required investment in the primary prevention of family violence and violence against women, to complement early intervention and response
 - d. require robust monitoring, evaluation, learning systems and data sharing agreements between jurisdictions to support and drive uptake of evidence-based programming and activity, underpinned by a theory of change for the prevention of family violence

- e. build and strengthen cross-portfolio mechanisms and agreements to engage all sectors and settings that have potential to shift cultural norms, attitudes and behaviours that drive family violence and violence against women
 - f. ensure shared identification of priorities across and within jurisdictions, and the identification of a small number of specific priorities for intensive cross-jurisdictional effort over each three-four year implementation period.
3. In the context of disaster preparedness and recovery planning:
- a. the primary prevention of family violence and violence against women should be considered a critical and planned priority in at all levels of government and across all jurisdictions, recognising that disasters can drive an increase in family violence in the medium to longer term
 - b. adequately resourcing is essential to addressing the varied impacts of disasters on diverse communities, and the exacerbation of family violence and violence against women with deeper understanding of the impact of intersecting forms of discrimination and disadvantage.

Progress will require significant time, investment and effort. The priorities recommended above are critical to achieving greater equality, a shared vision for an Australia free from family violence and violence against women in all its forms, and a clear pathway towards achieving this.

Immediate and long-term measures to prevent violence against women and their children, and improve gender equality

Primary prevention of family violence and violence against women

Respect Victoria applies a primary prevention approach to family violence and all forms of violence against women. Primary prevention is a term used across the preventative health field and is applied here in the context of both family violence and violence against women. In this context, primary prevention is a long-term approach focused on preventing violence from happening in the first place. It works by identifying the underlying causes or drivers of violence. Critically, these include the social norms, practices and structures that influence individual attitudes and behaviours. Rather than focusing solely on the behaviour of perpetrators, primary prevention goes deeper. It focuses on the whole community and the systemic, structural and social conditions that allow violence to happen in the first place. Primary prevention is distinct from secondary and tertiary prevention, which are also known as early intervention and response. These activities focus on stopping violence from escalating or recurring.

Establishing an effective and coordinated primary prevention approach supports and complements early intervention and crisis response, reducing pressure on these parts of the system in the medium-long term. It is indeed the only way to stop violence from occurring in the first place. As outlined in the Fourth Action Plan of the National Plan, primary prevention is the most effective way to eliminate violence. By driving social and cultural change across a wide range of settings, primary prevention has the potential to have the largest impact on the prevalence of violence and challenging the notion that violence is inevitable.

The *Gender Equality Act 2020* (the GE Act) is a component of the Victoria's whole of system approach to progressing gender equality and preventing family violence and violence against women. In addressing gender inequality as a known driver of family violence, the GE Act serves as a supportive structural platform. It complements and strengthens existing efforts to drive workplace reform, such as the Workplace Equality and Respect and OH&S sexual harassment reforms. Critically, by supporting structurally focused, place-based and culturally appropriate responses to gender equality in local communities, the GE Act supports a broader primary prevention approach.

As detailed later in this submission, a focus on gender equality must be complemented by addressing other forms of systemic discrimination and disadvantage, including how gender inequality, racism, ageism, ableism and heterosexism influence the patterns of violence perpetrated and experienced in society. Over-segmenting different forms of family violence and affected population groups can do disservice to the complexity of the experiences of many victims of family violence. It also risks closing off crucial learning and sharing of resources between programs and communities. **While there has been significant effort in understanding and acting on the drivers of violence against women, further work is needed to understand the drivers of all forms of family violence and how to prevent it.**

Respect Victoria's work to develop a comprehensive and consistent theoretical approach for the prevention of all forms of family violence could provide considerable value towards a national effort to address all these factors within an integrated framework, helping to ensure consistency in programming across a strengthened primary prevention system. **The next National Plan must have a coordinated strategic approach, including appropriate governance, to address both the prevention of family violence *and* violence against women in all its forms, recognising the significant overlaps and common underlying causal factors. This must include a dedicated research focus to understand the drivers of all forms of family violence and impacts of population diversity and individual intersectionality.**

Primary prevention coordination and governance

While the National Plan has created significant momentum in building a cohesive and interconnected approach to reducing violence against women and their children, work to strengthen primary prevention to stop family violence and violence against women from occurring in the first place is urgently required. **To succeed in preventing violence, future national family violence reforms must follow a whole of system approach that embeds primary prevention firmly within it. This must include effective governance and coordination for primary prevention programming and activity across all jurisdictions.**

As Victoria's response to the *Royal Commission into Family Violence 2015* demonstrates, improving coordination and consistency across primary prevention, and developing a shared understanding of prevention across early intervention and response are critical priorities for whole family violence reform efforts. Respect Victoria was established to lead efforts to embed primary prevention across Victoria's family violence reforms and driver further uptake and collective impact. This includes working with key partners to consider the specific governance and infrastructure required to coordinate and strengthen that system. The foundational work of Respect Victoria in helping shape a strengthened coordinated primary prevention system for family violence and violence against women in all its forms has broad applicability for national efforts to establish similar prevention infrastructure and governance. This includes the establishment of systems and structures for oversight and coordination of research, standard setting, monitoring and evaluation, and social marketing campaigns designed to challenge the attitudes and culture that drive violent behaviour.

Investment

While critical to reducing the impact of family violence and violence against women, response and crisis services must be better balanced with increased primary prevention effort. Primary prevention is the only way to reduce the overall prevalence of family violence and violence against women, and the demand for response services they create. Increasing the overall investment in family violence prevention activity and clearly delineating federal, state and territory governments accountabilities in this regard, will create a more cohesive National Plan and help to generate better long-term outcomes for individuals, communities, government and society.

Significant and sustained investment has saved lives and reduced harm in other primary prevention initiatives across Australia, including smoking cessation, skin cancer reduction and road safety². By increasing and sustaining investment in the primary prevention of all forms of family violence and violence against women, Australia will save lives, prevent harm and injury, and achieve positive societal impact. Respect Victoria has demonstrated how focused investment and effort is translated into effective change. Consumer research undertaken in 2018 indicated that those who had viewed one of 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.

Pursuing a whole of system approach for 'collective impact' to primary prevention is central to achieving change. This can be measured in terms of real decline in deaths, mental and physical ill health, economic loss and social disruption. **A "return on investment" methodology for the prevention of family violence and violence against women, supported by solid economic modelling, will increase the**

² 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.

willingness of governments and other sectors to invest in this work. With collective investment and impact, lives will be saved sooner.

There is an opportunity during the design phase for the next National Plan to build more sustainable primary prevention and family violence service systems with better accountability mechanisms. This can be achieved by establishing collective funding mechanisms that commit federal, state and territory governments to minimum level investments across the family violence system, including in primary prevention activity. **A national agreement must establish binding commitments with all jurisdictions to ending family violence and violence against women through increased investment in, and accountability for, primary prevention.**

Monitoring and evaluation

The first National Plan took important steps toward investing in data to measure the prevention of violence against women. The National Community Attitudes Survey (NCAS) measures changes in community attitudes towards violence against women. The Australian Bureau of Statistic's Personal Safety Survey (PSS) measures prevalence of violence against women. While these population-level quantitative datasets provide rigorous and transparent basis for monitoring and assessing progress, greater investment and alignment of outcomes-focused program monitoring and evaluation is necessary to understand 'what is working' in primary prevention of family violence and violence against women in all its forms.

Respect Victoria is in the process of establishing a Family Violence Prevention Data Platform. The Platform is designed to bring together state-level data against long, medium and short-term indicators of population-level progress on prevention. The ability to combine disaggregated datasets and triangulate information to form a cohesive picture is central to understanding and acting on the complex attitudes, behaviours and structural conditions that drive family violence and violence against women in all its forms. Critically, this data can inform a shared and comprehensive primary prevention monitoring, evaluation, measurement and learning framework on a national scale.

There are already key foundational frameworks for measuring short, medium and long-term population-level progress on primary prevention.

At the national level, *Counting on change*³ identifies a raft of indicators and existing data sources aligned with prevalence outcomes (long-term measures), gendered drivers and reinforcing factors of violence against women (medium-term measures), and infrastructure-building process markers (short-term measures). This underpins the theory of change for the prevention of men's violence against women: *Change the Story*⁴.

At the state level, Respect Victoria is developing a theory of change for the prevention of family violence and building a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation framework for primary prevention of family violence in all its forms. This builds on work developed on the prevention of violence against women and their children as outlined in *Change the Story*, and builds on the diverse and intersectional approach led in Victoria, including through *Free from Violence*. Adoption of a framework to encompass a wider range of programs and agencies in Victoria to prevent family violence in all its forms, will help foster consistency and assess collective impact; an approach that could be considered in other jurisdictions, and that could contribute to a comprehensive national monitoring and evaluation program.

Future family violence reform must learn from these foundational theories and frameworks. **The next National Plan should include and require robust monitoring, evaluation, learning systems and**

³ *Counting on change* (Our Watch, 2017) is a guide for policy-makers, researchers and advocates on measuring population-level progress towards the prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia.

⁴ *Change the Story* (Our Watch, 2015) is the national framework for a consistent and integrated approach to preventing violence against women and their children in Australia.

data sharing agreements between jurisdictions in a comprehensive framework to support and drive uptake of evidence-based programming and activity. This should be underpinned by a theory of change for the prevention of family violence, aligned with *Change the Story*.

Cross-portfolio engagement

Government, industry, organisations and communities have greater prevention impact when working together to end family violence and violence against women. Despite goodwill and engagement from many, whole of setting and sector approaches as central components of a functioning family violence prevention system have not been sufficiently developed or realised. While integration of primary prevention with other components of family violence work has important benefits, this can also serve to downplay and dilute the very significant prevention role and impact that some sectors and settings should have on identifying and addressing fundamental drivers of family violence.

A first step is to identify partnerships within all jurisdictions that can help build uptake of primary prevention activity, and develop jointly owned activities across jurisdictions. These plans would identify resourcing to be contributed by these portfolios and ensure full alignment and integration of policies.

They would also provide a basis for wider engagement with industry and non-government organisations within those portfolio areas. Settings and sectors for focus of primary prevention engagement include, but are not limited to; workplaces, industries, community settings, education, media and advertising, local government, sport and recreation, legal and justice, finance, and the health and community services sector including parenting and early childhood. **Future reform efforts must build stronger cross-portfolio mechanisms and agreements to engage all sectors and settings that have potential to shift cultural norms, attitudes and behaviours that drive family violence.**

Strategic focus

The next National Plan must take a more focused approach to consolidating strengths and addressing gaps over the three-year period. Building on a similar model already employed, **the next National Plan should ensure shared identification of priorities across and within jurisdictions, and the identification of a small number of specific priorities for intensive cross-jurisdictional effort over each three-four year implementation period, supported by accountability, monitoring, evaluation and review mechanisms.**

This could be achieved by establishing a new 'Action Plan' model whereby Commonwealth, state and territory governments collectively agree on reform areas that would benefit from intensive effort; for example, primary prevention targeted towards children and young people. This model could utilise national agreements to target investment at a chosen reform area.

The experiences of all women, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, rural women, culturally and linguistically diverse women, LGBTIQ women, women with a disability, and women on temporary visas

Family violence is a deeply gendered issue. While family violence takes many forms and affects many in our community, structural inequalities and unequal power relations between women and men mean women are more likely to experience it. It is also recognised that structural, community and individual factors intersect in complex ways so that family violence is experienced differently by different communities across Australia.

Intersectionality is a core principle that cuts across all of Respect Victoria's work, including research and social marketing campaigns. The term intersectionality is used to describe an approach to understanding how structural and systemic forms of discrimination and marginalisation intersect in multiple ways. These intersections not only compound the risk of family violence and violence against women, they also create new and different risks. The Victorian Government leads Australia as the first state to articulate intersectionality as a key approach in policy regarding gender equality, violence against women and family violence. The use of the concept of intersectionality in the 2016 Royal Commission into Family Violence Report has catalysed its inclusion in various state policies and guiding documents.

Viewing experiences of family violence in all its forms through an intersectional lens is critical to understanding how diverse communities may experience barriers to reporting violence. It also explains why their experience of violence may be less visible and understood than the population at large. More evidence is needed on the drivers and reinforcing factors of these experiences of family violence. What is evident, however, is that addressing systemic discrimination and inequality, strengthening communities and championing marginalised peoples' rights, resilience and positive contributions will simultaneously support people's health and well-being, and protect them from the violence and abuse.

Respect Victoria is developing a shared state-wide primary prevention research agenda as a discrete component of the overall family violence research effort. This complements existing research and evaluation work on violence experienced by older Victorians, LGBTIQ Victorians and Victorians with a disability, by identifying key questions and gaps and generating new research to build understanding of factors leading to all forms of family violence and how these can be prevented. It is important for the next National Plan to consider the drivers that impact diverse populations (at the individual level) and systemic discrimination and inequality (at the societal level). An understanding of these drivers is essential to effectively addressing the primary prevention of family violence and violence against women in all its forms.

Primary prevention efforts that consider the intersection of individual identities create inclusive and non-discriminatory systems that can successfully respond to the needs of diverse populations. These diverse communities should not be considered as 'vulnerable groups.' Instead, they are resilient change-makers. Primary prevention efforts must be led by and draw on the strengths of these communities by engaging representational groups and honouring self-determination. Any comprehensive family violence policy must address barriers to these groups of people proactively through policy and program design. **The next National Plan should integrate a coordinated and intersectional strategic approach that embraces the prevention of family violence and violence against women in all its forms, recognising the significant overlaps and common underlying causal factors.**

The impact of natural disasters and other significant events such as COVID-19, including health requirements such as staying at home, on the prevalence of domestic violence and provision of support services.

Ten years of disaster research in Australia and in other high-income countries demonstrates that violence against women increases in disaster contexts. Anecdotal evidence suggests that in the difficulty and urgency of responding to family violence, organisations may divert primary prevention practitioners to response work. This is problematic as, at the same time the focus is removed from primary prevention, the drivers of violence against women (emphasising rigid gender roles for example) can be compounded and increase.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted how the scale and severity of family violence can erupt during a disaster. Reporting indicates there has been a sustained increase in instances of family violence during the pandemic. As the incidence of family violence rises as part of the COVID-19 situation, organisations have experienced a shift of focus in some areas from prevention to response services and supports. Organisations working directly with at risk-communities have reported that COVID-19 has reinforced that systemic and structural discrimination disproportionately impacts those most likely to experience family violence, that experiences of social and gender-based inequalities and discrimination have been exacerbated under the pandemic. This has the potential to drive an increase in family violence in the medium to longer term.

It remains critically important that primary prevention therefore continues to be planned and undertaken as an integral part of the spectrum of responses to family violence, including during the pandemic and beyond. **Australia must maintain long-term investment in primary prevention, and ensure this includes primary prevention of family violence and violence against women as a critical and planned priority in disaster contexts, in order to continue to reduce and ultimately prevent such violence.** Approaches need to be positioned as complementary to early intervention and response. Adequately resourcing this work is vital to meet the community’s expectation that the prevention sector will minimise incidence of family violence associated with COVID-19, the bushfire season, and future disasters, and to ensure new gains are not lost.

As COVID-19, as with all disasters, further entrenches existing social and economic inequalities, all aspects of programming must focus on addressing the drivers of discrimination and inequality throughout the disaster cycle of preparedness, response, management and recovery to “build back better.” As Australia moves into a period of phased and staggered recovery, primary prevention has the advantage of addressing systemic disadvantage while also presenting positive opportunities to transform traditional power dynamics and inequalities.

In collaboration with Victorian partners in the family violence prevention and response sectors, Respect Victoria has developed a set of guiding principles to maintain focus on the underlying drivers of family violence and violence against women during the pandemic. These principles 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 full explanation of these principles and how they apply in the context of COVID-19 can be found at [Respect Victoria's website](#).

Adequately resourcing primary prevention effort in disaster preparedness and recovery planning is essential to addressing the varied impacts of disasters on diverse communities, and the exacerbation of family violence and violence against women with deeper understanding of the impact of intersecting forms of discrimination and disadvantage.

End of submission.