

Primary Prevention Priorities for the National Summit on Women's Safety

6-7 September 2021

Introduction

Respect Victoria welcomes the opportunity to participate in the National Summit on Women's Safety, recognising the importance of this event in shaping the next [National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022](#) (the National Plan).

We are pleased to present this synopsis of key issues we believe should be given priority at the Summit and actioned in the National Plan. While these are the views of Respect Victoria as an independent statutory authority, they have been informed by discussions with a range of Victorian agencies engaged in primary prevention of violence against women and family violence of all forms.

We urge delegates to the Summit, together with other policy makers and influencers, to consider these primary prevention priorities and support action on these matters.

Primary prevention as a key focus for the National Plan

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. Without primary prevention, family violence and violence against women will continue indefinitely. It is critical that the National Plan make primary prevention central to its strategic approach and investment.

The gendered nature of this violence means that action to address gender inequality, including women's economic status, must be a critical focus for primary prevention. At the same time, we believe that a focus on gender equality must be complemented by effort to address other forms of systemic discrimination and disadvantage, including how gender inequality, racism, ageism, ableism and heterosexism intersect and combine to influence patterns of violence.

Particular attention needs to be paid to the specific effects of individual, institutional and societal racism, disadvantage and continuing impacts of colonisation that contribute to the severity and disproportionate impact of family violence on Aboriginal people and communities today.

The Victorian Government has led 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 in the 2016 Royal Commission into Family Violence Report has catalysed the approach taken to prevention and is supported by the inclusive definition of family violence in Victoria's legislative framework.

1. More comprehensive approach to family, domestic and sexual violence

The lack of a consistent national definition of what constitutes family violence and violence against women limits the capacity to address the experiences and needs of many Australians. An effective definition also needs to recognise the full spectrum of manifestations of physical, psychological, sexual and financial abuse. Over-segmenting different forms of family violence can do disservice to the complexity of the experiences of victims and closes off useful sharing of knowledge and resources between programs and communities.

With this in mind, we urge that the next National Plan:

- encompasses action on the drivers of all forms of family, domestic violence building on an intersectional understanding of how this violence is generated across the diversity of the Australian community, without diminishing the central importance of gender
- embraces the variety of relationships that can make up family and kinship structures, and the range of ways family violence can be experienced, including through family-like or carer relationships
- supports all jurisdictions to work towards a consistent and more comprehensive definition of family, domestic and sexual violence in relevant policy frameworks.

2. Whole of system primary prevention effort

To succeed in preventing violence, the next National Plan must prioritise a well-defined, planned, resourced and coordinated primary prevention system that integrates evidence-based approaches to the primary prevention of *all forms* of family violence and violence against women. This requires national level commitment to:

- effective national governance, infrastructure and coordination, including for research, standard setting, workforce development, monitoring and evaluation. This will ensure greater uptake, consistency and saturation of primary prevention effort across all jurisdictions.
- evidence informed, coordinated and sustained national and state-based social marketing campaigns focusing on various elements of family violence and violence against women. Any largescale campaign activity must be reinforced by targeted community education campaigns and other grassroots primary prevention programming.
- a dedicated research focus to better understand the drivers of all forms of family violence and how they manifest.
- a comprehensive Theory of Change for preventing all forms of violence, such as that which Respect Victoria is developing.
- draw from the lived experience of diverse groups of women in all dialogue regarding the development of appropriate person-centred approaches that address intersecting forms of discrimination.
- embed primary prevention approaches across early intervention, response and perpetrator accountability programs to “close the loop” and reinforce population level primary prevention.

3. Adequate and sustained investment in primary prevention

Increasing overall investment in family violence prevention and clearly delineating federal, state and territory governments accountabilities will create a more cohesive National Plan. Increased investment will generate better long-term outcomes for individuals, communities, government and society. To this end the next National Plan should:

- establish binding and transparent agreements with all jurisdictions for base level investment in and accountability for primary prevention. These agreements should commit all jurisdictions to work towards greater prevention investment as part of their overall commitments to address all forms of family violence and violence against women
- commit to developing a return-on-investment model that will increase the willingness of governments and other sectors to invest in prevention.
- extend the proposed National Partnership Agreement ensuring the sustainability and availability of crisis and response services to include primary prevention.
- develop a primary prevention action plan, which sits under the National Plan, to support implementation.

4. Data collection, monitoring and evaluation

Quantitative population-level surveys like the [National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey](#) and the [Personal Safety Survey](#) provide rigorous and transparent basis for monitoring and assessing progress on primary prevention over a sustained period of time. Greater investment in and alignment of outcomes-focused monitoring and evaluation is necessary, however, to understand incremental change and ‘what is working’ in prevention of family violence and violence against women over the short and medium term. To this end, the next National Plan should:

- establish robust monitoring, evaluation and learning systems to accurately track incremental progress and identify promising practice in primary prevention
- foster consistent and accessible monitoring and evaluation practice by primary prevention practitioners
- develop a national monitoring and evaluation framework for primary prevention drawing on relevant work from jurisdictions (such as Our Watch’s work in *Counting on Change* and Respect Victoria’s [Free from Violence Monitoring and Evaluation Strategic Framework](#)).
- extend population and community level data collection on underlying attitudes, norms and behaviours that drive violence against women. To make this data accessible, data collection should build on tools like Respect Victoria’s [Prevention of Family Violence Data Platform](#), and introduce data sharing agreements between jurisdictions.
- support partnerships between academic, community, industry and government bodies to develop and implement a strategic primary prevention research work. These partnerships should be informed by Respect

Victoria's developing research agenda, and the critical work of ANROWS and leading research groups across Australia.

All these efforts should draw on foundational frameworks like [Change the Story](#) and Victoria's primary prevention strategy, [Free from violence](#). Underpinned by a theory of change for the prevention of family violence, monitoring and evaluation will support and drive uptake of evidence-based programming and activity.

5. Expand and broaden primary prevention across jurisdictions, portfolios and sectors

Governments and the family violence sector can only achieve so much. To truly embed primary prevention across family violence and violence against women reforms, wider and more coordinated engagement is required with workplaces, industries, communities, education, media and advertising, local government, sport and recreation, legal and justice, finance, and the health and community services sector. To this end, the next National Plan must:

- consolidate primary prevention strengths and address gaps, identifying specific priorities for intensive cross-jurisdictional effort over each three-to-four-year implementation period.
- establish cross-portfolio mechanisms, agreements and co-investment so that all parts of government play their role to engage sectors and settings with the potential to shift the culture that drives family violence and violence against women
- create mechanisms at national level to engage leading organisations in business, community, media, sports, arts and other sectors to co-invest and promote attitudinal, behavioural and structural change.
- include the lived experience of diverse women through representation in all dialogue.

Effective primary prevention requires significant time, sustained investment and effort. These four priorities are critical to achieving an Australia free from family violence and violence against women in all its forms.

Specific opportunities for primary prevention

Respect Victoria would like to see primary prevention perspectives and actions profiled widely across the Summit agenda. Primary prevention must be both embedded across the National Plan and highlighted as a discrete area for action. We have identified the following panel and roundtable topics as specific opportunities to raise critical primary prevention concerns.

Safety and security for older women

Any effort to reduce elder abuse and ensure the safety of older women must address underlying drivers such as ageism and sexism. This includes primary prevention programs that foster positive attitudes to ageing, challenging systemic forms of discrimination and marginalisation like gender inequality. The next National Plan should:

- resource services and partnerships to tackle elder abuse – such as Victoria's Elder Abuse Prevention Networks. These should address community-wide drivers of violence against older women.
- engage organisations concerned with the rights, economic security and social participation of older people. Informed by these organisations, take action on structural and systemic factors impacting the independence and participation of older women.
- draw on emerging evidence of effective community based primary prevention of elder abuse programs, including Respect Victoria's work with the National Ageing Research Institute on intergenerational relationship building.

Prevention of coercive control

Primary prevention is the missing piece of the puzzle in discussions on coercive control. As with any form of family violence or violence against women, key to addressing coercive control is to recognise that it is the product of social norms and structural inequalities and the use of power and privilege. Any framework for addressing coercive control must support and advance a primary prevention approach. It is essential to centre the voices of experts and organisations who work with and represent diverse communities in this work. The next National Plan must:

- present a comprehensive spectrum of mutually reinforcing approaches to prevent coercive control
- commit to comprehensive community education to build greater awareness of coercive control, including identifying the norms, practices and attitudes that underpin and condone this behaviour
- recognise the different ways coercive control presents across different family relationships and communities, including the experiences of women, Aboriginal people, people from migrant and refugee backgrounds,

LGBTIQ+ people, older people, youth, and people with disability. These communities should be actively involved in dialogue and policy making on coercive control.

- include policies and programs that explicitly address coercive control as part of broader efforts to prevent family violence and violence against women. This work must be inclusive of and led by communities with diverse experiences of coercive control.

Experiences of LGBTIQ+ communities

The unique and diverse experiences of LGBTIQ+ people with respect to family violence and other gendered violence need particular focus. While there has been significantly increased recognition of these issues and some excellent work in Victoria and elsewhere, a clear national focus and commitment is lacking. This applies particularly to efforts to tackle the problem at a primary prevention level. The next National Plan should:

- advance research to clearly define the drivers of violence against LGBTIQ+ people, including homophobia, bi/panphobia, acephobia, transphobia, hetero and cisnormativity, intersex discrimination and gendered norms that marginalise LGBTIQ+ people and provide the context for family violence to occur.
- commit to specific actions and consider discrete complementary plans to prevent violence experienced by LGBTIQ+ people. This, along with any efforts to address violence experienced by LGBTIQ+ communities, should be co-developed with LGBTIQ+ communities, experts and organisations – including dedicated research bodies such as Rainbow Health Victoria and drummond street services' Centre for Family Research and Evaluation.
- incorporate the particular issues facing these communities into policies and programs to prevent violence against women across community environments, workplaces and public spaces. This should include the experiences of new LGBTIQ+ parents, as per [research conducted by Respect Victoria and drummond street services' Centre for Family Research and Evaluation](#).

Supporting women and children with disability

Legislation, policy and practice in Australia to prevent gendered violence against people with a disability, including those with an intellectual disability or psychosocial disability, lacks a clear focus on the underlying social, economic and cultural conditions that drive this violence. It is crucial to recognise the diverse nature of violence experienced by women with disability, and how this violence emerges and is perpetuated. For this reason, the next National Plan must:

- commit to specific actions and consider a discrete complementary plan to prevent violence experienced by women with disability.
- build capacity and investment in the disability sector and disability inclusion as part of a primary prevention and early intervention strategy for violence against women with disability, putting the voices of those with lived experience at the forefront.
- develop stronger theoretical understandings of the drivers and reinforcing factors for violence against women with disability.
- move beyond individualised interventions that build capacity of people with disability to recognise violence, learn safety skills and self-advocate, important as these approaches are. More focus must be placed on developing a social model of disability that challenges the ways in which gender inequality, disability discrimination and ableism influence social norms, systems and structures.
- invest in disaggregated data on the prevalence and experiences of violence against people with disability. This data should be supported by evidence on effective approaches to preventing this violence, drawing on the work of leading organisations like Women with Disabilities Victoria and [research undertaken by Respect Victoria and the University of Melbourne](#).

About Respect Victoria

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. We address *all* forms of family violence for *all* Victorian communities.

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 exist to drive primary prevention over the long-term and ensure prevention efforts are considered and coordinated. We deliver on commitments under Recommendation 187 of the Royal Commission and [Free from violence: Victoria's strategy to prevent family violence and all forms of violence against women](#).

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 for government, industry, organisations and communities.

We work collaboratively with others to promote awareness of and build primary prevention efforts in the community. Informed by research and evidence, we lead social marketing campaigns and engage with stakeholders across sectors to build a culture of respect for all Victorians.