

NATIONAL PLAN TO END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND CHILDREN 2022-2032

Consultation on the Second Action Plan 2027-2032

Respect Victoria submission

Attention	Department of Social Services, Australian Government
Response to	Consultation on the Second Action Plan (National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032)
Closing date	Friday 31 July 2026 (extension to Friday 14 August)
Submitted by	Respect Victoria
Contact	Laura Vines, Manager Prevention Policy and Influence Laura.Vines@respectvictoria.vic.gov.au



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Respect Victoria acknowledges Aboriginal peoples throughout Victoria as the First Peoples and Traditional Owners and Custodians of the lands and waterways. We pay our respects to their Elders, past and present. We proudly acknowledge Aboriginal communities throughout Victoria and their ongoing strength in practising the world's oldest living cultures. We recognise the significant and ongoing impacts of colonisation and commit to working alongside First Nations communities to effect change.

LIVED EXPERIENCE ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Respect Victoria acknowledges the significant impact of family violence, violence against women and all forms of gendered violence on individuals, families and communities. We recognise the strength and resilience of the children, young people and adults who have, and are still, experiencing this violence.

We pay our respects to those whose lives were taken, and to their loved ones. We keep at the forefront in our minds all those who have experienced gendered violence and abuse, and for whom we undertake this work.

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INTRODUCTION

At the time of writing this submission, thirty-seven women and seventeen children have been killed because of alleged murder, manslaughter and neglect in Australia in 2026, according to the Australian Femicide Watch project (1). Murdered women represent the most visible and devastating manifestation of gendered violence but every year, thousands of other Australian women and children are subjected to the trauma of physical, sexual, psychological and financial abuse and coercive control, predominantly from men (2). Recognising violence against women and children as a national crisis is essential but ending it requires urgent action and significantly greater investment to recognise the immense scale of the problem across the family violence continuum, particularly primary prevention.

Australia has reached a critical point in our efforts to end domestic, family and sexual violence (hereafter called 'gendered violence'). The Second Action Plan marks the transition from seeding activity and establishing strong foundations to a new phase of strategically funding, scaling, embedding and connecting work across the nation if the government wants to end gendered violence in one generation.

Respect Victoria welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the development of the Second Action Plan under the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022 - 2032 (the 'National Plan'). We commend the Commonwealth Government's continued commitment to ending violence against women and children, including National Cabinet's decision to maintain violence against women and children as one of its six national priority areas (3).

This commitment must now be matched by strong national leadership, coordinated action across governments at every level and investment commensurate with the magnitude of harm. Crucially, if we truly want to achieve the generational change needed to end gendered violence, the Second Action Plan must include dedicated, evidence-based and appropriately resourced actions directed to both primary prevention and early intervention as discrete yet complementary and essential fields of work.

Gendered violence remains endemic in Australia.

1 in 4 women have experienced intimate partner violence since the age of 15

2 in 5 recorded homicides are family violence related

More than **1 in 3 men** aged 18-65 have used intimate partner violence in their lifetime – with an estimated 120,000 men starting to perpetrate violence for the first time every year

1 in 6 women and **1 in 9 men** experienced physical and/or sexual abuse before the age of 15 (4)

The burden of violence continues to impact people unequally across our community. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women experience disproportionately high rates of gendered violence, exacerbated by racism, structural inequality and the ongoing impacts of colonisation (5). People with disability, culturally and racially marginalised people, people from LGBTQIA+ communities and people living in regional and remote communities also experience intersecting forms of discrimination and structural disadvantage that increase their vulnerability to violence and create additional barriers to safety, justice and support. Gendered violence contributes to poorer physical and mental health outcomes, homelessness, intergenerational trauma, disruptions to education and employment and reduced workforce participation (6). Collectively these impacts create significant costs to governments, public and private sector and the broader Australian economy which are outlined in part 1 of this submission.

Despite primary prevention being the only sustainable way to reduce gendered violence over time, it continues to receive only a small proportion of total family violence investment (7). While demand for

specialist family and sexual violence services remain critical, the Second Action Plan should rebalance investment across the family violence continuum by substantially increasing long-term funding for primary prevention alongside urgent resourcing for response, early intervention, behaviour change, recovery and healing.

The enduring prevalence of gendered violence is occurring alongside profound social change. Australians are increasingly living their lives online while rising economic insecurity, social isolation, declining trust in institutions and global backlash against gender equality are reshaping the social conditions in which gendered violence occurs, entrenching the harmful social norms, attitudes, systems and behaviours that drive violence against women and children. These global and domestic forces all coalesce to make primary prevention of gendered violence more challenging and more urgent. Online misogyny and manosphere content are increasingly shaping the beliefs, identities and behaviours of young men and boys, reinforcing harmful gender norms, fuelling disrespect towards women, and presenting a new frontier for violence prevention that requires sustained investment, innovation and cross-sector collaboration. While community understanding of diverse forms of violence has improved over time, support for gender equality among some cohorts has declined – pointing to the crucial importance of continuing to invest, sustain and scale effective primary prevention and early intervention across Australia (8).

Primary prevention seeks to build the social conditions in which everyone can feel safe, respected and live free from violence. When supported by sustained investment and strong infrastructure, primary prevention stops violence before it starts through shifting harmful attitudes, norms, behaviours and systems, providing the foundations for safe and inclusive communities. These outcomes are fundamental not only to preventing gendered violence, but also to building a more resilient society capable of responding to the complex social challenges of the future.

Given this, the National Plan's success will ultimately be determined not only by the reforms it delivers, but by how effectively they are implemented across Australian communities. Primary prevention is deeply relational work that relies on trusted partnerships, local leadership and sustained engagement across the settings where people live, learn, work and socialise. National leadership, sustained investment and the structures needed to support primary prevention at scale provide the foundation for this work. There is growing recognition that primary prevention has the greatest opportunity to create safer and more inclusive communities when these foundations are combined with community-led and place-based approaches that adapt to local contexts and are relevant to and owned by different communities while maintaining strong fidelity to the evidence base (9).

OVERVIEW OF OUR SUBMISSION

As Victoria's dedicated agency for the primary prevention of family violence and violence against women, Respect Victoria brings a prevention systems lens to the development of the Second Action Plan.

The recommendations and advice that follow outline practical actions to strengthen implementation of the Second Action Plan and accelerate progress toward ending gendered violence in one generation. They draw on Respect Victoria's statutory role as Australia's only state-based agency dedicated to the prevention of family violence and all forms of violence against women, as well as implementation experience and findings from our 2025 Three Year Report to Parliament, *Maintain the Momentum*.

In Part 1, our submission outlines core principles that should inform the design and implementation of the Second Action Plan. These include maintaining a strong focus on gender inequality as the primary driver of gendered violence, adopting a life course approach as an organising framework for action, and recognising the distinct but complementary roles of primary prevention and early intervention as part of the entire continuum of addressing gendered violence.

In Part 2, we set out specific recommendations for strengthening prevention across a number of priority areas in the Second Action Plan, including engaging men and boys in violence prevention, preventing technology-facilitated abuse, expanding dedicated action to prevent violence affecting LGBTQIA+ communities and supporting children and young people.

In Part 3, we consider the broader national primary prevention system and the essential enablers for success of the Second Action Plan. We make recommendations to strengthen Australia's national primary prevention system, including opportunities to fund prevention more effectively and support stronger coordination, evidence-building, evaluation and workforce development. The role of place-based, community-led prevention approaches are also explored in this section.

Finally, Part 4 focuses on opportunities for the Commonwealth Government to better embed primary prevention of gendered violence across its policies, functions and reform agendas to maximise impact through a genuine whole-of-government approach.

This submission should be considered alongside the significant body of work already underway in parallel to the National Plan, including through *Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices: National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Plan to End Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence 2026–2036*, work to address misogyny and gender-based violent extremism and broader reforms to address child sexual abuse occurring outside domestic and family violence contexts. While these initiatives have distinct purposes, strong alignment between the Second Action Plan and these streams of work will maximise their collective impact, ensure reform coherence and support a more coordinated national approach to preventing gendered violence across the Australian community.

Respect Victoria looks forward to working with the Commonwealth, state, territory and local governments, the family violence sector, community-led organisations, victim-survivor advocates, researchers and communities across Australia to develop the Second Action Plan and support its successful implementation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To continue and strengthen the focus on primary prevention of gendered violence, particularly all forms of violence experienced by women and children in the forthcoming Second Action Plan of the *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032*, this submission makes the following recommendations.

Recommendation 1

Maintain a clear focus on gender inequality as the primary driver of gendered violence while recognising the intersecting forms of discrimination and inequality that shape the prevalence and experience of violence across different communities. This should include:

- a) Ensuring primary prevention activities funded through the National Plan are grounded in Australia's evidence base on the gendered drivers of violence and are gender transformative in their design and implementation
- b) Applying an intersectional approach that recognises how gender inequality interacts with factors such as racism, ableism, age, sexuality and socioeconomic inequality to shape experiences of violence, safety and respect
- c) Maintaining a clear distinction between the gendered drivers of violence and the reinforcing factors that can increase harm, to ensure each receives appropriate policy attention and investment, consistent with Australia's primary prevention evidence
- d) Supporting a whole-of-government approach that advances gender equality through complementary reforms across health, education, employment, housing, justice, digital and social policy.

Recommendation 2

Increase investment in primary prevention under the Second Action Plan. This should include:

- a) A significant uplift in Commonwealth and state and territory investment to a level commensurate with the scale and impact of gendered violence
- b) Establish a nationally consistent approach to defining, mapping and reporting on investment in primary prevention to support decision-making, transparency, accountability and future planning
- c) Commissioning and publishing updated national estimates of the social and economic costs of violence against women and children to strengthen the evidence base for future policy and investment decisions.

Recommendation 3

Recognise primary prevention and early intervention as distinct but complementary and essential approaches to addressing gendered violence under the National Plan, ensuring activities under each pillar are appropriately designed, resourced, implemented and evaluated. This should include:

- a) Clearly articulating the distinct purposes, evidence-bases and intended outcomes of primary prevention and early intervention within the Second Action Plan
- b) Maintaining separate but aligned policy, funding implementation and evaluation frameworks that recognise the different objectives, target populations, workforces, professional skillsets and measures for success under each pillar
- c) Supporting coordinated implementation across the family and sexual violence continuum, ensuring primary prevention and early intervention reinforce one another through strong referral pathways and partnerships without conflating their roles
- d) Investing in implementation guidance and capability building to support governments and practitioners to apply these approaches consistently and with fidelity to the evidence base
- e) Promoting coordinated planning across Commonwealth, state and territory governments so that primary prevention and early intervention investment activity are mutually reinforcing.

Recommendation 4

Embed a comprehensive, evidence-based life course perspective across all pillars of the Second Action Plan to ensure prevention, early intervention, response and recovery and healing activities are identified,

prioritised and coordinated across key developmental stages and activated across systems and settings with greatest potential for impact.

Recommendation 5

Sustain and strengthen evidence-based primary prevention under the Second Action Plan. This should include:

- a) Continuing and growing investment and implementation support for established evidence-based prevention initiatives across the Commonwealth, states and territories.
- b) Sustaining and protecting the national, state and local infrastructure required to support evidence translation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation and continuous improvement
- c) Continuing targeted investment in emerging prevention priorities, innovation and research to ensure primary prevention efforts remain responsive to changing evidence, technologies and patterns of violence.

Recommendation 6

Sustain, grow and scale new and existing community-led and place-based prevention initiatives, including 'saturation' pilots. This should include:

- a) Investment, implementation and evaluation timeframes being guided by the latest place-based primary prevention and early intervention evidence alongside community needs to support continuous learning, adaptation and long-term impact
- b) Strengthening state, regional and local wrap-around support services, systems and prevention infrastructure required to support community-led organisations and effective implementation of place-based approaches
- c) Learning from the development and implementation of the Respect Ballarat project and the South Australian models and building the workforce and system readiness required to pilot similar initiatives across Australian states and territories.

Recommendation 7

Strengthen alignment between the National Plan and the First Nations Family Safety Plan by including:

- a) Dedicated actions and enablers under both plans that support collaborative governance, reciprocal knowledge sharing, evidence generation, workforce development and monitoring and evaluation
- b) A commitment to adequate, long-term and flexible funding for First Nations-led prevention under the Second Action Plan (in addition to Our Voices)
- c) Dedicated actions and responsibilities for mainstream family violence services and prevention organisations under the Our Voices implementation approach to ensure the mainstream family violence system is culturally safe and accessible for First Nations women and children and to support and enable whole-of-population primary prevention efforts that target social norms, attitudes, systems and behaviours within the mainstream community that drive and enable violence against First Nations women and children.

Recommendation 8

Strengthen national action to prevent gendered violence across childhood and adolescence through a coordinated approach that:

- a) Sustains funding and support for whole-of-school implementation, quality assurance and workforce capability for Respectful Relationships Education across all jurisdictions

- b) Expands funding for evidence-based prevention across the systems shaping children's lives including early childhood education, community sport, primary healthcare, youth mental health, parenting supports and child and family services
- c) Strengthens children and young people's capacity to safely participate in digital environments through complementary primary prevention and harm reduction initiatives alongside regulation, such as rolling out online media literacy programs that specifically equip children to critique and challenge harmful gender stereotypes and violence-supportive content
- d) Invests in specialist early intervention workforce capacity for children and young people who use violence or display harmful sexual behaviours.

Recommendation 9

Implementation of the Commonwealth Government's commitment to developing a coordinated national approach to engaging men and boys in preventing gendered violence must be:

- a) Grounded in Australia's primary prevention evidence and gender-transformative practice, with funding, commissioning and evaluation mechanisms that do not reinforce or condone the drivers of violence, and align with National Plan's objectives
- b) Co-designed and implemented through partnerships between experts in primary prevention, men's health, research, education, men's behaviour change experts and other relevant disciplines, recognising that engaging men and boys effectively requires multidisciplinary expertise
- c) Developed in conjunction with related Commonwealth and jurisdictional reforms, including the National Men's Health Strategy 2020-2030 recognising the complementary opportunities to improve men's wellbeing and preventing gendered violence
- d) Closely integrated with the Attorney-General Department's work to address the risks of online misogyny and gender-based violent extremism, recognising their shared foundations in the harmful gender norms, stereotypes, attitudes and behaviours addressed through targeted and population-level primary prevention approaches.

Recommendation 10

Strengthen national action to prevent technology-facilitated gender-based violence through a multi-pronged approach that combines primary prevention, industry accountability and regulation. This should include:

- a) Dedicated investment across Commonwealth, state and territory governments to prevent technology-facilitated gender-based violence commensurate with the scale, impact and complexity of ongoing harm
- b) Strengthening coordination across related Commonwealth initiatives, including the national approach to engaging men and boys in violence prevention, online safety reforms and the Attorney General's work to address the risks of online misogyny and gender-based violent extremism, recognising the mutually reinforcing potential of these initiatives to prevent technology-facilitated gender-based violence
- c) Ensuring Australia's first National Media Literacy Strategy embeds action to prevent technology-facilitated gender-based violence, reduce harm and interrupt the influence of online misogyny and other radicalising content related to gendered violence through strengthening digital consent literacy and the skills required to critically evaluate and challenge misinformation, disinformation and other harmful content
- d) Supporting and resourcing partnerships between the technology sector, researchers, primary prevention experts and family violence sector organisations to develop evidence-informed responses to emerging harms

Recommendation 11

Strengthen national leadership and action to prevent violence affecting LGBTQIA+ people and communities through:

- a. Resourcing implementation of *Changing with Pride: A National Framework to Prevent Violence Against LGBTQIA+ People* (forthcoming), supported by sustained investment in LGBTQIA+-led organisations
- b. Expanding dedicated primary prevention interventions that target the shared and distinct drivers of violence against LGBTQIA+ people, including trans and gender diverse people
- c. Supporting primary prevention partnerships between LGBTQIA+ communities and organisations and the family violence, women's and men's health sectors
- d. Creating stronger linkages across the Second Action Plan and the National Action Plan for the Health and Wellbeing of LGBTQIA+ People 2025-2035 to support nationally coordinated implementation of action across the full prevention continuum from primary prevention to early intervention, response, and recovery.

Recommendation 12

Strengthen national leadership and investment in the prevention of sexual violence by:

- a) Sustained and adequate investment in evidence-informed prevention across the life course, including comprehensive respectful relationships and sexuality education that reflects the diversity of Australian communities and addresses affirmative consent, healthy sexuality, pornography and harmful online behaviours in developmentally appropriate ways
- b) Strengthening the confidence and capability of parents and caregivers, educators and youth workers with tools and resources to support young people's healthy sexual development and improve critical media literacy
- c) Investing in research, evidence generation and evaluation to improve our understanding of the specific drivers of sexual violence and the effectiveness of targeted prevention approaches for different population groups.
- d) Providing sustained investment to build the capacity of the specialist sexual violence sector to deliver primary prevention and early intervention, including interventions that address harmful sexual behaviours in children and young people.

Recommendation 13

Strengthen Australia's national, state and territory primary prevention infrastructure to support coordinated, high-quality implementation of the National Plan. This should include:

- a) Sustained and longer-term investment in the leadership, organisations and implementation support needed to deliver primary prevention at scale, including specialist prevention agencies at the national, state and territory and local government level, place-based initiatives and community-led organisations, with mechanisms to support long term, sustainable and collaborative funding models that align with the evidence on what is required to achieve population-level change
- b) Stronger national governance, coordination and accountability mechanisms that provide clear oversight of implementation, draw on specialist primary prevention expertise, improve alignment across Commonwealth, state and territory and local governments, and monitor progress towards shared national primary prevention outcomes
- c) Formal mechanisms for cross-jurisdictional knowledge exchange and implementation support enabling governments, researchers, specialist prevention organisations and community-led organisations to share evidence, implementation lessons and innovative approaches.

- d) Investment in national and state and territory-based data, evidence and knowledge infrastructure, including improved data collection, funding transparency, evidence generation, evaluation and knowledge translation.
- e) Developing and implementing a National Primary Prevention Workforce Strategy that strengthens workforce planning, capability, career pathways and professional development, while recognising connected workforce needs across early intervention, response and recovery and healing.
- f) A coordinated approach to monitoring, evaluation, and learning that ensures prevention initiatives are rigorously evaluated, that population-wide medium and long term progress measures are appropriately tracked and that successful approaches are embedded, sustained and expanded.

Recommendation 14

Systematically map, coordinate and strengthen the primary prevention contribution of broader Commonwealth reforms across gender equality, health, inclusion, housing, employment, education and digital policy, including *Working for Women: A Strategy for Gender Equality* and the *National Men's Health Strategy 2020-2030*, to ensure these reforms actively support the prevention of gendered violence and the objectives of the *National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022-2032*.

Recommendation 15

Position prevention as a shared responsibility across Federal government portfolios and identify Federal levers and opportunities to address the drivers and reinforcers of violence through systems and settings across the life course. This should include examining opportunities to address systems abuse, building on the work the Commonwealth Government has already done as part of the Rapid Review.

ABOUT RESPECT VICTORIA

Respect Victoria is Australia's only dedicated organisation for the prevention of family violence and violence against women. Our vision is a Victorian community where all people are safe, equal and respected, and live free from family violence and violence against women. To achieve our vision, we lead and support evidence-informed primary prevention and act as a catalyst for transformational social change.

Primary prevention aims to stop violence from occurring in the first place, by changing the culture that drives it. We drive coordination and effectiveness of the prevention system. We build and promote primary prevention knowledge and evidence. We keep prevention on the public and policy agenda. We guide prevention wherever Victorians live, work, learn and play. We raise awareness that violence against women is preventable and influence community conversations to fuel social change.

We are an independent voice, with functions, powers and duties enshrined in legislation.

Terminology

The following submission uses the term 'gendered violence' to mean any form of physical or non-physical violence or abuse enacted against a person or group of people because of their sex, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression. While people of all genders can experience gendered violence, the term is most often used to describe violence against women and girls, because the majority of cases of gendered violence are perpetrated by men against women'.¹ The term gendered violence also

¹ Our Watch, Universities Australia. Educating for equality: glossary of key terms and definitions. Melbourne: Our Watch; 2021.

explicitly includes violence against LGBTIQ+ people, noting the shared and overlapping drivers of violence against women and violence against LGBTIQ+ people, particularly trans and gender diverse people, and the importance of uniting efforts to prevent both forms of violence which we have explored in detail in a recent submission to the Victorian Parliamentary inquiry into anti-LGBTIQ+ hate crimes in Victoria in Victoria (10). Where appropriate we may also use the term domestic, family and sexual violence to align with terminology used in the National Plan.

PART 1: BUILDING ON THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE FIRST ACTION PLAN

The First Action Plan established strong foundations for achieving the objectives of the National Plan through significant policy development, evidence generation and reform. It delivered major national milestones including *Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices: National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Safety Plan*, the *Rapid Review of Prevention Approaches*, *Working for Women: A Strategy for Gender Equality for Gender Equality*, the *National Higher Education Code to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence* and the Australian Law Reform Commission's *Inquiry into Justice Responses to Sexual Violence*. Importantly, it also created the conditions for jurisdictions to strengthen their own family violence policy frameworks, governance arrangements and implementation approaches.

Collectively, these reforms have driven significant activity across jurisdictions. They have paved the way for a more strategic, coordinated and long-term approach to investment that prioritises strong system infrastructure and sustained implementation. The Second Action Plan should now focus on strengthening, embedding and scaling what works.

The following section outlines a set of evidence-based principles that should guide the design and implementation of the Second Action Plan. Together, they provide a framework for ensuring that prevention efforts across every jurisdiction remain grounded in the evidence, coordinated across the family violence continuum and are scaled to achieve lasting, population level change.

1.1 Maintain an evidence-based approach to primary prevention

Primary prevention focuses on stopping violence before it starts by changing the conditions that allow it to happen in the first place. It addresses the attitudes, social norms, practices, structures and power imbalances that influence individual behaviour.

The Second Action Plan should continue to position gender inequality that arises from gender-discriminatory institutional, social and economic structures, social and cultural norms, and organisational, community, family and relationship practices as the primary driver of family violence, violence against women and all forms of gendered violence.

Primary prevention activities under the Second Action Plan should also continue to be informed by Australia's shared national framework for the prevention of violence against women, *Change the story*, as well as other complementary frameworks such as:

- *Changing the picture* which sets out specific drivers of violence against Aboriginal women
- *Changing the landscape* which sets out drivers and reinforcing factors of violence against women with disability (11)
- *Changing with pride* (forthcoming) which sets out the drivers and reinforcing factors of violence against LGBTIQ+ people

These frameworks, built on decades of research, clearly articulate the specific drivers of gendered violence and the corresponding actions and settings required to address them (11). They are regularly reviewed and updated in line with the evidence base and are crucial to an effective and intersectional approach that recognises and addresses the shared and unique drivers of violence, oppression and discrimination on the basis of gender, race, Aboriginality, disability, age, class and sexuality. These frameworks are further supported by an increasingly sophisticated body of implementation and practice evidence and guidance, including on gender-transformative practice, recognising that effective primary prevention requires approaches that actively transform the gendered norms, roles, power relations and systems that drive violence, rather than simply acknowledging or raising awareness of them (12).

A comprehensive approach to primary prevention requires action to address both the underlying gendered drivers of violence and the reinforcing factors that can increase the likelihood, frequency or severity of violence – such as alcohol and drug abuse, prior exposure to violence in childhood and broader social inequalities (11). However, addressing the gendered drivers and addressing specific reinforcing factors often require distinct, tailored efforts and expertise to be effective. It is therefore important not to conflate the two categories of work.

Factors such as alcohol misuse, exposure to violence and broader social inequalities can exacerbate violence, but they do not alone drive violence; targeting them in isolation from addressing the underlying gendered drivers will fail to produce the long-term sustainable change required to bring down rates of violence and keep them down over time. Understanding and distinguishing between the primary drivers of gendered violence and the ‘reinforcing factors’ or ‘risk factors’ will ensure policy and investment remain focused on the primary drivers of violence while also supporting, complementary action to address the factors that can increase or exacerbate existing threats of violence (11).

The Second Action Plan should continue to apply the established evidence base articulated in Change the Story while recognising that experiences of violence and opportunities to prevent, intervene and respond differ across life stages, settings and population groups. A life course approach provides an important framework to strengthen this work by helping to identify where the gendered drivers of violence emerge, how they are reinforced over time, and where interventions can have the greatest impact. A life course approach is further discussed at Section 1.4.

Recommendation 1

Maintain a clear focus on gender inequality as the primary driver of gendered violence while recognising the intersecting forms of discrimination and inequality that shape the prevalence and experience of violence across different communities. This should include:

- a) Ensuring primary prevention activities funded through the National Plan are grounded in Australia’s evidence base on the gendered drivers of violence and are gender transformative in their design and implementation
- b) Applying an intersectional approach that recognises how gender inequality interacts with factors such as racism, ableism, age, sexuality and socioeconomic inequality to shape experiences of violence, safety and respect
- c) Maintaining a clear distinction between the gendered drivers of violence and the reinforcing factors that can increase harm, to ensure each receives appropriate policy attention and investment, consistent with Australia’s primary prevention evidence
- d) Supporting a whole-of-government approach that advances gender equality through complementary reforms across health, education, employment, housing, justice, digital and social policy.

1.2 Invest in primary prevention at the scale required for long-term impact

Changing entrenched attitudes, social norms and behaviours that drive violence and permeate every part of our society, institutions and systems requires long-term, sustained and coordinated investment. Despite the profound harms and impact of gendered violence on Australian communities, current investment in primary prevention is not commensurate with the scale and complexity of gendered violence or the National Plan's ambition to end violence against women and children within a generation.

The scale of this economic impact is substantial (see the economic cost of violence against women and children below).

THE ECONOMIC COST OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND CHILDREN

\$21.7 billion

Estimated annual cost of violence against women and children in Australia

\$10.4 billion

Estimated annual cost of pain, suffering and premature mortality associated with violence against women and children in Australia

\$1.9 billion

Lost workforce productivity

\$1.4 billion

Health system costs (13)

Importantly, the estimates above are widely recognised as conservative. They pre-date recent increases in reported gendered violence and do not adequately capture underreported or unreported violence including violence experienced by First Nations women, women with disability, pregnant women and women experiencing homelessness. KPMG estimated that accounting for violence experienced by these groups alone could increase the annual cost of violence against women by approximately \$4 billion, highlighting that the true cost of gendered violence is likely to be considerably higher (13).

The economic case for increasing investment in primary prevention is compelling. Like other forms of prevention and health promotion, investing early to reduce risk before harm occurs delivers long-term social and economic benefits while reducing future demand for more intensive and costly interventions. The Australian Government has recognised this principle within the health portfolio, noting that every dollar invested in preventative health saves an estimate \$14.30 in health care and other costs (14). The same principles applies when it comes to preventing violence. Well-resourced and effective primary prevention has the potential to reduce future demand for crisis response, policing, courts, health care, housing, child protection and other public services, while improving health, wellbeing, workforce participation and productivity (6). However, because these benefits are realised over longer timeframes and across multiple government portfolios, traditional funding approaches can systematically undervalue the potential impacts of primary prevention.

The Australian Government has invested over \$4.4 billion under the National Plan since 2022, reflecting significant commitments across prevention, early intervention, response and recovery (15). However,

while it remains difficult to quantify, the level of investment in primary prevention appears to have remained disproportionately low (16). Greater transparency and disaggregation of funding would help tell this story and ensure the National Plan can appropriately and adequately invest in primary prevention. Currently, funding is distributed across multiple Commonwealth and jurisdictional portfolios and service systems, with no consistent national framework for defining, tracking or reporting expenditure. This limits Commonwealth, state and territory governments' ability to identify gaps, avoid duplication, strategically target funding and assess whether investment reflects the scale of need. Recognising this, the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission has recommended the development of a national funding mapping framework with agreed definitions and consistent reporting of investment across the National Plan (17).

Respect Victoria notes that collaborative work to develop prevention strategies across the Commonwealth, state and territories under the First Action Plan remains ongoing (18). This work presents an important opportunity to substantially strengthen investment in primary prevention as part of the Second Action Plan, recognising that current funding levels are not commensurate with the scale of gendered violence or the human and economic costs it imposes. Increased investment will be essential to sustain and scale evidence-based prevention initiatives, strengthen prevention infrastructure and build workforce capacity and capability across Australia.

Future investment should also extend beyond the specialist prevention sector to support the integration of primary prevention across mainstream systems, including health, education, local government, justice and family law. This approach could effectively embed actions to address the gendered drivers of violence into the policies, decision-making processes, workforce practices, service provision and organisational cultures and policies of the institutions that shape people's everyday lives. Doing so will help to ensure preventing violence becomes part of how these systems operate and mobilise them toward promoting gender equality and shifting the attitudes, norms and behaviours that drive gendered violence.

Alongside increased funding, maximising the impact of public investment also requires changes to how prevention is funded. True impact necessitates funding models that support the long-term, collaborative and systems-change focused nature of primary prevention. Considerations relating to funding design are discussed further in Part 3.

Recommendation 2

Increase investment in primary prevention under the Second Action Plan. This should include:

- a) A significant uplift in Commonwealth and state and territory investment to a level commensurate with the scale and impact of gendered violence
- b) Establish a nationally consistent approach to defining, mapping and reporting on investment in primary prevention to support decision-making, transparency, accountability and future planning
- c) Commissioning and publishing updated national estimates of the social and economic costs of violence against women and children to strengthen the evidence base for future policy and investment decisions.

1.3 Recognise the distinct roles of primary prevention and early intervention

The Second Action Plan should continue to recognise the distinct but complementary roles of primary prevention and early intervention. While both approaches are essential to achieving the objectives of the National Plan, they have different purposes, require different capabilities and should be supported through targeted policy, investment, workforce development and evaluation. Being clear about the different roles that primary prevention and early intervention fulfill is critical to ensuring both receive the distinct policy focus and investment required to respond to increasing demand.

Primary prevention works at the whole-of-population level and seeks to create the social conditions in which violence is less likely to occur by addressing the underlying drivers and strengthening the conditions that promote gender equality, respect and inclusion (11). Early intervention is further downstream; it seeks to identify and respond to emerging risks, behaviours and experiences of violence before they become entrenched – often working with individuals or groups who have already been identified as being at particular risk of experiencing or perpetrating violence (19). Both are critical components of a comprehensive approach to ending all forms of gendered violence and can only work effectively when implemented alongside high quality and well-resourced response, recovery and healing services.

COORDINATING PRIMARY PREVENTION AND EARLY INTERVENTION THROUGH A PLACE-BASED APPROACH

Designed by Respect Victoria, the place-based, primary prevention initiative Respect Ballarat demonstrates how primary prevention and early intervention can be intentionally resourced and coordinated while maintaining their distinct objectives. Recognising that pregnancy and the transition to parenthood are both a critical opportunity for prevention and a period of increased risk for gendered violence, the model brings together complementary interventions across the early years system.

Baby Makes 3, an evidence-based primary prevention program embedded in antenatal education and maternal and child health services, promotes gender equality, respectful relationships and equitable caregiving among all first-time parents within the program's region (20). Alongside this, **For Baby's Sake** provides targeted early intervention for expectant parents at risk of family violence, working intensively with both parents from pregnancy until the child's second birthday to interrupt cycles of violence (21).

These initiatives are reinforced through broader early years prevention activity and dedicated local implementation support to build workforce capability, address barriers to uptake and identify opportunities for systems change. Together, they demonstrate how primary prevention and early intervention are most effective when they are coordinated, not conflated. Each has a distinct purpose, evidence base and target population, but when implemented effectively they reinforce consistent messages, strengthen referral pathways and improve outcomes for children and families across the continuum.

Primary prevention has not yet been funded at the scale and consistency required to achieve the objectives of the National Plan. It must remain a distinct pillar of the Second Action Plan to ensure it is not diluted or displaced by increasing demand for early intervention and response services and interventions. This requires both dedicated investment and activity alongside stronger integration of prevention across the family violence continuum. While primary prevention, early intervention, response and recovery are

distinct pillars requiring different expertise and approaches, primary prevention provides a critical foundation for the broader system. Embedding an understanding of the gendered drivers of violence across schools, health services, community organisations, police and justice settings strengthens the quality of early intervention and response, challenges the attitudes and norms that excuse or condone violence, and supports the long-term systems change required to eliminate gendered violence (11).

Early intervention was identified in *Maintain the Momentum*, Respect Victoria's 2025 Three Yearly Report to Parliament on the progress of prevention in Victoria, as a key gap in the Victorian family violence system requiring a stronger policy architecture, evidence base and level of investment to effectively respond to people at higher risk of using violence or demonstrating early signs of harmful behaviours (22). The Second Action Plan should retain a priority on primary prevention while also separately, increasing focus on early intervention as a standalone area for reform and investment to ensure opportunities to intervene before violence escalates are not missed.

Recommendation 3

Recognise primary prevention and early intervention as distinct but complementary and essential approaches to addressing domestic, family and sexual violence under the National Plan, ensuring activities under each pillar are appropriately designed, resourced, implemented and evaluated. This should include:

- f) Clearly articulating the distinct purposes, evidence-bases and intended outcomes of primary prevention and early intervention within the Second Action Plan
- g) Maintaining separate but aligned policy, funding implementation and evaluation frameworks that recognise the different objectives, target populations, workforces, professional skillsets and measures for success under each pillar
- h) Supporting coordinated implementation across the family violence continuum, ensuring primary prevention and early intervention reinforce one another through strong referral pathways and partnerships without conflating their roles
- i) Investing in implementation guidance and capability building to support governments and practitioners to apply these approaches consistently and with fidelity to the evidence base
- j) Promoting coordinated planning across Commonwealth, state and territory governments so that primary prevention and early intervention investment activity are mutually reinforcing.

1.3 Adopt a life course perspective to coordinate primary prevention activity

A life course perspective provides a strategic framework for targeting investment where prevention efforts can have the greatest and most enduring impact. It identifies key stages of life and developmental transitions where evidence indicates universal and targeted prevention interventions are most likely to influence attitudes, norm formation and risk and protective factors (23).

Preventing violence requires sustained, reinforcing action across the life course rather than one-off interventions. While universal, population-level approaches are essential, the primary prevention evidence base identifies a number of developmental stages or transition points that present critical opportunities to address the gendered drivers, when attitudes, beliefs, behaviours and social identities are being formed, reinforced or reshaped (23). These critical periods include early childhood, adolescence, pregnancy and the early stages of parenthood and later life (24).

A life course perspective enables more strategic and coordinated investment. It supports governments to align mutually reinforcing interventions across important settings to effectively reach large sections of the population at critical developmental stages. Applying a life course lens also assists prevention interventions to adapt and respond to the complex ways in which the gendered drivers of violence

intersect with other forms of inequality over a person’s life, including racism, homophobia, ableism, transphobia and the ongoing impacts of colonisation on First Nations people (11).

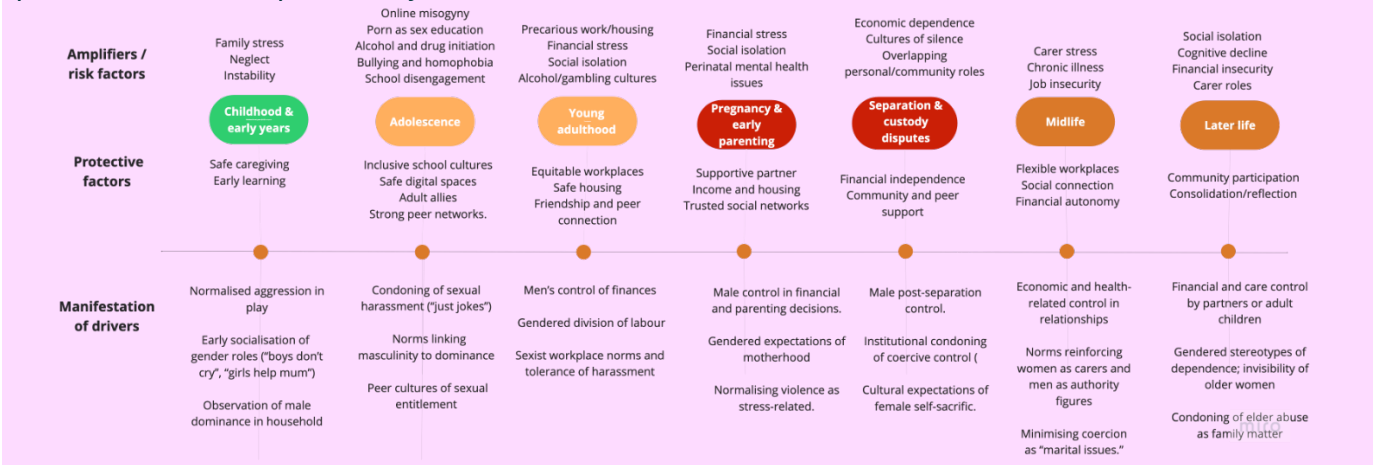
A life course perspective helps to strengthen integration across the family violence continuum. It can identify periods where the risk of experiencing or using violence is heightened and where strengthened early intervention or response interventions may be particularly important, including for children exposed to family violence, young people displaying harmful sexual behaviours and following relationship separation (25). Aligning interventions across different stages of life helps to ensure people receive the right support at the right time while also recognising the distinct roles of specialist primary prevention, early intervention, response, recovery and healing approaches.

APPLYING A LIFE COURSE PERSPECTIVE TO PRIMARY PREVENTION ACTIVITY PLANNING

Respect Ballarat is a place-based primary prevention initiative, designed to strengthen coordinated action to prevent gendered violence across the Ballarat community. As part of the work to design the model, Respect Victoria developed a life course mapping exercise to demonstrate how the drivers of violence, and key risk and protective factors, emerge and interact across different stages of life and key developmental transition periods.

Rather than distributing primary prevention and early intervention activity evenly across the lifespan, this mapping tool identified key transition points, such as starting school, entering adolescence, forming intimate relationships and becoming a parent, where changing identities, relationships and social roles create important opportunities to strengthen protective factors and promote primary prevention principles.

The life course perspective provides a practical planning tool that Commonwealth, state and territory governments can use to identify where primary prevention effort is likely to have the greatest impact, strengthen universal primary prevention approaches at critical transition points, and better align primary prevention with complementary action across the continuum.



Recommendation 4

Embed a comprehensive, evidence-based life course perspective across all pillars of the Second Action Plan to ensure prevention, early intervention, response and recovery and healing activities are identified, prioritised and coordinated across key developmental stages and activated across systems and settings with greatest potential for impact.

1.4 Sustain and scale evidence-informed prevention approaches

The First Action Plan established important foundations for strengthening primary prevention across Australia. While prevention has long been recognised as an essential component of efforts to end gendered violence, it has never been funded at the scale required to achieve its objectives. Prevention interventions and the systems, workforce and infrastructure that enable their delivery remain underfunded and underdeveloped, despite growing public awareness and demand for action on issues like rising online misogyny, dating violence, technology-facilitated abuse and the persistent prevalence of intimate partner violence (26).

The challenge for Australian governments will be staying the course and ensuring that current prevention initiatives are allowed the time, resources and supportive infrastructure to generate impact and start to shift deeply entrenched harmful attitudes, norms and behaviours. The Second Action Plan should therefore prioritise sustaining and scaling reforms established through the First Action Plan. Many initiatives remain in the early stages of implementation, promising approaches have yet to be expanded nationally, and important reforms continue to be delivered as time-bound projects rather than embedded within enduring systems, institutions and funding arrangements.

The challenge for Australian governments will be staying the course and ensuring that current prevention initiatives are allowed the time, resources and supportive infrastructure to generate impact...

Preventing violence against women and family violence is a long-term goal that requires sustained investment, longer implementation periods and continuous learning (27). Rather than continually shifting attention to new priorities, the Second Action Plan should focus on consolidating what has been established, strengthening capability and scaling evidence-informed approaches across Australia.

The Second Action Plan should prioritise sustaining and strengthening evidence-based prevention initiatives and activities established under the First Action Plan, including:

- Implementation of state and territory primary prevention plans and frameworks to provide strategic direction, coordination and accountability across governments.
- Consent and respectful relationships education across all jurisdictions to ensure children and young people receive consistent, evidence-based education through a whole-of-school approach.
- Our Watch's national role in developing, maintaining and translating Australia's primary prevention evidence base, including continued development of national frameworks, guidance and implementation resources that support consistent, evidence-based primary prevention across all jurisdictions and settings.
- Respect Victoria's role as Victoria's dedicated primary prevention agency providing leading and supporting system coordination, evidence-building, monitoring and evaluation of Victoria's prevention activity, sharing lessons of national significance and designing and delivering nation-leading campaigns and prevention models, such as Respect Ballarat.

- Robust implementation support for nationally consistent, evidence-based primary prevention frameworks for different population groups, including the forthcoming *Changing with Pride* framework to guide primary prevention of violence against LGBTQIA+ communities.
- Expansion of primary prevention initiatives that strengthen capability across systems and settings, including justice, workplaces, the health system and early childhood settings i.e. Victoria's Family Violence Prevention Training for justice frontline workers and staff
- National and state and territory primary prevention grant programs to support community-led prevention and enable evidence-based approaches to be sustained and innovated over time, i.e. the Australian Government's Preventing Tech-Based Abuse of Women Grants Program (18)

At the same time, national and state-based prevention systems must remain agile and responsive to emerging challenges. Rapid technological change, evolving forms of technology-facilitated abuse, shifting social norms, growing online misogyny and other emerging issues are reshaping the landscape in which violence occurs and is prevented (3,26). Continued investment in targeted innovation, research and evaluation will be essential to ensuring current prevention interventions are given the necessary time to be implemented, sustained and scaled while continuing to adapt where new evidence, technologies and emerging issues demand it.

Recommendation 5

Sustain and strengthen evidence-based primary prevention under the Second Action Plan. This should include:

- a) Continuing and growing investment and implementation support for established evidence-based prevention initiatives across the Commonwealth, states and territories.
- b) Sustaining and protecting the national, state and local infrastructure required to support evidence translation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation and continuous improvement
- c) Continuing targeted investment in emerging prevention priorities, innovation and research to ensure primary prevention efforts remain responsive to changing evidence, technologies and patterns of violence.

1.5 Prioritise community-led, place-based prevention approaches

Preventing gendered violence across Australia depends on coordinated action across national, state and territory, regional and local levels. National frameworks, the Australian evidence base and mechanisms for coordinating, measuring and aligning activity provide an enabling environment, while state and territory prevention infrastructure, local governments, community-led organisations and place-based approaches each play a distinct and complementary role in creating population-level change (27).

Community-led and place-based prevention approaches are central to this effort. Community-led organisations hold trusted relationships, cultural knowledge and specialist expertise to design and deliver prevention initiatives that are relevant, effective and safe. Place-based approaches coordinate prevention across local organisations, settings and institutions where people live, work, learn and socialise (16).

Importantly, these community approaches do more than deliver activities. They are also powerful drivers of system reform. They generate implementation evidence about what works, strengthen workforce capability, develop innovative and inclusive practice, build partnerships and improve the capacity of mainstream organisations to respond to diverse community needs. The benefits of local and community-

led prevention therefore extend beyond individual projects or programs, strengthening Australia's prevention system and improving the return on government investment (3,16).

Australia already has strong examples of this work. Aboriginal community-controlled organisations (such as Djirra and VACCA in Victoria) demonstrate the value of self-determined, culturally grounded approaches that integrate First Nations ways of knowing, being and doing, while addressing the intersecting impacts of gender inequality, colonisation and racism. Community-led organisations such as the Zoe Belle Gender Collective in Victoria strengthen mainstream prevention practice by building capability to respond to the needs of LGBTQIA+ communities.

DJIRRA'S KOORI WOMEN'S PLACE

The Koori Women's Place at Djirra demonstrates the value of Aboriginal community-controlled, culturally grounded approach to addressing gendered violence. Prevention is woven throughout connection to culture, healing, community and early intervention activities, recognising that these cannot be separated from the ongoing impacts of colonisation, racism and intergenerational trauma. Through trusted relationships, cultural activities and community connection, the program strengthens protective factors while creating pathways into primary prevention, early intervention, response and healing. Its success in Victoria highlights the importance of flexible, long-term funding that support community-led approaches, self-determination and outcomes defined by the community.

Community-led organisations and place-based approaches are central to effective primary prevention, but they do not operate in isolation. To achieve sustained impact, they must be supported by a broader prevention system that includes mechanisms for ongoing implementation support, evidence translation, coordination, monitoring and evaluation and workforce development. In Victoria, Women's Health Services provide this backbone support across large geographic regions through Regional Primary Prevention Partnerships. They work with local governments, community organisations and other partners to translate evidence into practice, coordinate key partners build workforce capability, support implementation and monitor progress to facilitate continuous learning to improve outcomes (28).

Australian governments have increasingly recognised the potential of intensive place-based approaches to coordinate primary prevention across communities (7). While stronger investment in place-based prevention has been strongly advocated for by prevention sector organisations for many years, it has rarely been funded at the scale or over the timeframe required to demonstrate population-level impact. Respect Ballarat represents a significant step forward (29, 16, 22). Announced in 2024 and led by Respect Victoria, it is Australia's largest dedicated investment in place-based primary prevention and early intervention of gendered violence. Importantly, the initiative is designed not only to stop violence before it starts in Ballarat, but also to generate implementation evidence, build system capability and inform future place-based investment across Victoria and Australia.

RESPECT BALLARAT: A NEW FRONTIER FOR PLACE BASED PRIMARY PREVENTION

The Ballarat community took to the streets in 2024 in a powerful protest against gendered violence, following the disappearance of Samantha Murphy and the deaths of local women Rebecca Young and Hannah McGuire. The Victorian Government responded to this call for change and announced \$9.8 million over four years to fund the design and delivery of an evidence-informed, place-based 'saturation' approach to preventing gendered violence.

Led by Respect Victoria and drawing on Australian and international evidence, Respect Ballarat links mutually reinforcing prevention and early intervention approaches to ensure they reinforce the same attitudes, behaviours, beliefs and norms that prevent gendered violence and support equality and respect (30). Building on the work of the existing regional prevention partnership, the CoRE Alliance

led by Women's Health Grampians, Respect Ballarat brings together and coordinates activity across many parts of the Ballarat community, including sporting clubs, workplaces, health services and community organisations. Alongside its coordinating function, Respect Victoria provides backbone support through implementation guidance, monitoring and evaluation, evidence translation and wrap-around capability building for funded organisations to strengthen quality, consistency and continuous learning.

Respect Victoria is working alongside the local community to reduce rates of gendered violence over the long term and demonstrate that meaningful, measurable change is possible through a place-based prevention approach designed in collaboration with the community. As recognised in *Maintain the Momentum*, sustained investment over at least five to ten years will be essential to demonstrate population-level change and realise the full potential of place-based primary prevention. (22)

The Second Action Plan should recognise community-led organisations and place-based prevention approaches as essential components of Australia's ongoing efforts to end gendered violence. When supported by strong system infrastructure, their value extends far beyond program delivery to create enduring local capability and implementation evidence that can inform broader prevention policy, practice and investment.

Recommendation 6

Sustain, grow and scale new and existing community-led and place-based prevention initiatives, including 'saturation' pilots. This should include:

- a) Investment, implementation and evaluation timeframes being guided by the latest place-based primary prevention and early intervention evidence alongside community needs to support continuous learning, adaptation and long-term impact
- b) Strengthening state, regional and local wrap-around support services, systems and prevention infrastructure required to support community-led organisations and effective implementation of place-based approaches
- c) Learning from the development and implementation of the Respect Ballarat project and the South Australian models and building the workforce and system readiness required to pilot similar initiatives across Australian states and territories.

1.6 Strengthen investment, alignment and knowledge sharing with First Nations, community-led prevention

The Second Action Plan should connect with, amplify and mutually reinforce implementation of the *Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices: National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Plan to End Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence 2026–2036* (Our Voices), in recognition that neither plan can achieve its aims in isolation.

Respect Victoria welcomes the Australian Government's recent investment in Our Voices in the 2026 Federal Budget and notes that long-term funding commitments and sustained implementation support are essential to reducing all forms of family violence and abuse against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children by at least 50 per cent by 2031 (Target 13 under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap) (31). Attaining this goal will only be possible with adequate, flexible and long-term investment in Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) and First Nations leadership, particularly those ACCOs and Leaders with expertise in developing and delivering culturally safe primary prevention and wholistic prevention initiatives.

We must remember, however, that establishing Our Voices does not abrogate the responsibility of mainstream family violence response and prevention organisations to contribute to the prevention of violence against First Nations women and children. As outlined in *Changing the Picture* (11), violence against First Nations women and children is perpetrated by men from a range of different cultural backgrounds and is driven by the intersection of racism, the ongoing impacts of colonisation and gender inequality (i.e. the shared gendered drivers that lead to violence against other women in Australia). Primary prevention targets these underlying drivers and must necessarily include work designed to dismantle racist, colonial and gendered systems, structures and attitudes within the broader Australian population. In other words, prevention efforts must target and transform the mainstream Australian population, not stigmatise First Nations communities. Mainstream organisations have an obvious role to play here in genuine partnership and allyship with First Nations communities.

Mainstream family violence response and prevention sectors also have a great deal to learn from First Nations-led prevention approaches, particularly in Victoria. While the mainstream sector is now beginning to understand the value of taking a life course approach and leveraging the preventative potential of all parts of the family violence system (from primary prevention to early intervention, response, recovery and healing), Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and First Nations communities in Victoria have been exemplifying wholistic approaches to prevention for years. The Second Action Plan should recognise the broader contribution that First Nations community knowledge systems, leadership and wholistic approaches can contribute to mainstream systems. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander approaches to wellbeing, connection, healing, culture, Country and community offer important insights for preventing violence and strengthening protective factors (32). Mainstream prevention and family violence initiatives should actively learn from and, where appropriate, be informed by these strengths-based approaches, while respecting First Nations ownership, sovereignty, leadership and self-determination. Victoria's Dhelk Dja Partnership Forum provides an illustrative example of how First Nations communities, government and the mainstream family violence system can partner to support self-determination, allyship and shared accountability for preventing violence against First Nations communities.

The success of both the National Plan and Our Voices therefore relies on collaborative implementation, reciprocal learning, knowledge sharing and accountability, and mutually reinforcing actions, investment and outcome measurement.

Implementation should avoid creating parallel or siloed reform agendas. Instead, mechanisms should be established to support collaborative governance and reciprocal knowledge sharing, workforce development and monitoring and evaluation across both plans and sectors. Activities under the Second Action Plan and Our Voices should prioritise investment in First Nations, community-led and culturally safe approaches to preventing and responding to violence experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. There is also an opportunity to strengthen the evidence base through First Nations led research, evaluation and knowledge translation to better understand what works to prevent gendered violence in different community contexts.

Recommendation 7

Strengthen alignment between the National Plan and the First Nations Family Safety Plan by including:

- a) Dedicated actions and enablers under both plans that support collaborative governance, reciprocal knowledge sharing, evidence generation, workforce development and monitoring and evaluation
- b) A commitment to adequate, long-term and flexible funding for First Nations-led prevention under the Second Action Plan (in addition to Our Voices)
- c) Dedicated actions and responsibilities for mainstream family violence services and prevention organisations under the Our Voices implementation approach to ensure the mainstream family

violence system is culturally safe and accessible for First Nations women and children and to support and enable whole-of-population primary prevention efforts that target social norms, attitudes, systems and behaviours within the mainstream community that drive and enable violence against First Nations women and children.

PART 2: PRIORITY AREAS FOR PRIMARY PREVENTION ACTION

Building on the core and overarching principles for design and implementation of the Second Action Plan outlined in part one above, the following section sets out Respect Victoria's advice on specific prevention actions to be prioritised in the Second Action Plan. They represent areas where the greatest opportunities lie to strengthen Australia's prevention efforts, address emerging challenges and accelerate progress to end gendered violence.

2.1 Strengthen prevention in childhood and adolescence

Prioritising the safety and wellbeing of children and young people is central to achieving the long-term objectives of the National Plan. While policy, service design and programming have traditionally positioned children and young people as bystanders or collateral victims of men's violence against women, prevention and early intervention efforts can sometimes focus predominantly on shaping their future adult relationships. The Second Action Plan should adopt an intersectional, life-course approach that recognises children and young people as a diverse cohort with different developmental stages, identities, experiences and support needs.

Ending gendered violence in Australia will require coordinated prevention investment across the systems that shape children and young people's lives. Universal primary prevention initiatives like Respectful Relationships Education remain the foundation of this approach and must continue to receive sustained investment, implementation support, workforce capability building and quality assurance. However, for school-based prevention programs to be effective, they must be complemented by mutually reinforcing interventions tailored for early childhood education, community sports settings, primary healthcare, youth mental health, child and family services and parenting supports, recognising that children and young people develop attitudes, relationships and identities through their relationships and interactions across multiple settings rather than through one-off interventions (33). Place-based prevention initiatives such as Respect Ballarat demonstrate how a life course perspective can be used to coordinate prevention activity aligned with Respectful Relationships Education to reinforce consistent prevention learning throughout childhood and adolescence.

As children and young people's engagement with digital environments grow, so too does their exposure to technology facilitated gender-based violence, image-based abuse, the impacts of violent pornography and harmful online interactions all amplified by the increasing influence of generative Artificial Intelligence (26,3). New evidence also points to the increasing influence of online misogyny and manosphere content in shaping attitudes and behaviours among boys in Australian schools (34).

Evidence demonstrates that children and young people engage most effectively with prevention initiatives that reflect their lived experiences, relationships and increasingly digital lives. While primary prevention remains essential to addressing the underlying drivers of violence, there is growing recognition that our efforts to make online spaces safer could also benefit from harm reduction approaches that acknowledge the central role of digital technologies to children and young people's lives. Rather than assuming disengagement from online environments is possible, harm reduction seeks to reduce the risks and

negative consequences associated with technology through education, capability building, safer digital environments and accessible supports.

The Commonwealth Government's online safety reforms, including social media minimum age restrictions, and the introduction of affirmative consent legislation across jurisdictions are important measures. However, regulation alone cannot equip children and young people with the knowledge, critical thinking, digital literacy and social and emotional skills they need to safely navigate increasingly complex online environments (33). These reforms should therefore be complemented by sustained investment in primary prevention including Respectful Relationships Education and targeted critical online media literacy (further discussed at below 2.3) (33). As digital technologies and online harms continue to evolve, so too must prevention practice. Educators, parents, carers, youth workers and other practitioners working with children require ongoing professional learning, implementation support and evidence-based resources to confidently respond to emerging issues and ensure prevention remains relevant to children and young people's rapidly changing digital lives (35).

PRIMARY PREVENTION IN DIGITAL SPACES

Respect Victoria and Body Safety Australia's *Your image belongs to you* research introduces the concept of image autonomy, the idea that every person, including children, has the right to decide when, how and by whom their image is taken, altered and shared. Extending the concept of bodily autonomy into digital environments provides a practical framework for strengthening consent, respect and healthy online relationships from an early age. The research demonstrates how emerging prevention evidence can respond to rapidly evolving technologies, including AI-generated image-based abuse. It highlights the need for primary prevention to evolve alongside children's digital lives and equip young people and the adults who support them with capabilities to safely navigate increasingly complex digital environments.

The Second Action Plan should also recognise that the proliferation and strengthening of interventions aimed at children and young people using violence or showing early warning signs of harmful sexual behaviour is both an early intervention and long-term prevention priority. Opportunities to identify and respond to adolescent violence in the home remain fragmented and inconsistent across Australian jurisdictions and families have limited options to access specialist, appropriate support (36). Strengthening these service systems will improve outcomes for children, young people and families while creating important opportunities to interrupt trajectories into future violence.

Recommendation 8

Strengthen national action to prevent gendered violence across childhood and adolescence through a coordinated approach that:

- e) Sustains funding and support for whole-of-school implementation, quality assurance and workforce capability for Respectful Relationships Education across all jurisdictions
- f) Expands funding for evidence-based prevention across the systems shaping children's lives including early childhood education, community sport, primary healthcare, youth mental health, parenting supports and child and family services
- g) Strengthens children and young people's capacity to safely participate in digital environments through complementary primary prevention and harm reduction initiatives alongside regulation, such as rolling out online media literacy programs that specifically equip children to critique and challenge harmful gender stereotypes and violence-supportive content
- h) Invests in specialist early intervention workforce capacity for children and young people who use violence or display harmful sexual behaviours.

2.2 Coordinate national action to engage men and boys in primary prevention

Respect Victoria welcomes the Commonwealth Government's recent commitment to developing a coordinated approach to engaging men and boys in violence prevention. The Second Action Plan enables the ongoing development of policy and practice related to men and boys and has the opportunity to deliver appropriately resourced, impactful and fit-for-purpose work that is informed by and accountable to, women, feminist principles and primary prevention evidence and expertise to ensure a 'do no harm' approach. Building healthy masculinities and engaging men and boys has been a strong focus of many prevention organisations (such as Our Watch and Respect Victoria) for years and it has been embedded in Change the Story since 2015 (11). The increasing emphasis on engaging men and boys in prevention and more men's health organisations entering this space is welcome. It is important that such violence prevention efforts are complementary and challenge the drivers and reinforcers of violence. We are starting to see promising examples of gendered violence prevention and men's health fields coming together through networks such as Men Engage. To build on and support such work in future, existing primary prevention infrastructure and expertise must be maintained to allow new initiatives and organisations focused on men and boys to partner, build and support this work in mutually reinforcing ways for maximum impact.

Violence against women and children remains a profound and persistent problem. Women and children continue to experience significant injury, trauma and death because of men's violence. Preventing this violence must remain the central objective of efforts to engage men and boys. At the same time, the evidence demonstrates that the rigid gender norms, restrictive constructions of masculinity and gender inequality within relationships, systems and institutions that drive violence against women can also contribute to poor mental health outcomes, social isolation, reduced help-seeking and restrictive social expectations for men and boys (37). Recognising these broader impacts reinforces the importance of gender-transformative approaches that challenge harmful attitudes, norms and structures while promoting healthier, more equitable relationships (12).

PRINCIPLES FOR ENGAGING MEN AND BOYS IN PRIMARY PREVENTION EFFORTS

In recent years, there has been increasing recognition of the important role men and boys can play in preventing gendered violence. As investment and attention has grown, so too has the evidence on what constitutes effective practice. While efforts to engage men and boys will necessarily draw on a range of approaches and methodologies to reflect the diversity of men and boys in Australia, there are a number of evidence-informed principles that consistently underpin effective practice for engaging men and boys in the prevention of gendered violence. These include:

- Maintaining women's safety and the prevention of gendered violence as the primary objectives, ensuring engagement with men and boys strengthens, rather than displaces, the leadership, expertise and evidence developed through decades of feminist primary prevention scholarship and practice (Men in Focus Evidence review).
- Adopting a gender-transformative approach that actively challenges the gendered drivers of violence, including rigid gender roles, unequal power relations and harmful peer cultures, rather than reinforcing or accommodating them.
- Promoting diverse, equitable, caring and emotionally healthy masculinities, recognising that masculinities are socially constructed and can be transformed to support healthier relationships, gender equality and violence prevention

- Applying an intersectional and culturally responsive approach and supporting engagement that is responsive to men and boys' many different experiences and identities (38).

The rapid growth of online misogyny and resistance to gender equality has fundamentally changed the primary prevention landscape. Increasingly, online manosphere platforms and content are providing boys and men with a sense of belonging, identity and purpose while overtly or covertly shaping harmful ideas about masculinity, gender roles, relationships and respect. Australian and international research has found social media recommendation algorithms can expose boys and men to misogynistic and anti-feminist content even when they have shown no prior interest and are engaging with mainstream interests such as sport, fitness or gaming, with exposure becoming more frequent and more extreme over time and as engagement increases (39). These online environments can reinforce grievance, harmful masculine norms and, for some, create pathways towards broader extremist ideologies and violence. Researchers have described this phenomenon as “misogynist radicalisation” (40). It highlights the importance of primary prevention approaches that engage men and boys early, before harmful attitudes become entrenched and generate violent behaviour (24). It also underscores the importance of ensuring any nationally coordinated approach to engaging men and boys in violence prevention under the Second Action Plan is closely connected with broader reforms to address misogyny, gender-based violent extremism and online safety while remaining firmly grounded in Australia's primary prevention evidence base and gender transformative practice.

Primary prevention, early intervention, health and mental health promotion play distinct but complementary roles in this work and should be recognised and supported accordingly. As investment grows, governments should build on this existing evidence and practice rather than creating parallel approaches. Building on the *Healthy Masculinities Trial and Evaluation*, the *National Men's Health Strategy 2020-2030* and the *Australian Longitudinal Study on Male Health (Ten to Men)*, the Second Action Plan should support shared workforce capability, evaluation, practice standards and a common theory of change, while allowing different approaches to be adapted to different communities and settings. Funding agreements, grant criteria, commissioning processes and evaluation frameworks should explicitly align with Australia's primary prevention evidence base, gender transformative practice and the objectives of the National Plan alongside objectives to encourage help-seeking and protective behaviours among Australian men and boys.

Australia has developed significant expertise in engaging men and boys across the life course through the work of specialist prevention organisations like Respect Victoria, Jesuit Social Services, Women's Health organisations and Victoria's peak body Safe and Equal. Importantly Aboriginal community-controlled organisations, researchers, sporting organisations and community-led organisations should also be engaged given their wealth of expertise and knowledge and experience engaging men and boys where they live, work and socialise (41). Mechanisms for partnership between the primary prevention sector and men's health and mental health organisations will ensure work in this burgeoning area contributes to preventing violence rather than inadvertently reinforcing harmful gender norms or undermining existing prevention efforts.

The following case study demonstrates how evidence-based primary prevention interventions and men's mental health and wellbeing promotion are complementary, not competing objectives. By encouraging help-seeking, emotional literacy and positive relationships, prevention interventions like Respect Victoria's [*What Kind Of Man Do You Want To Be?*](#) campaign can provide constructive alternatives to the harmful gender norms, attitudes and stereotypes often promoted through online misogynistic communities.

WHAT KIND OF MAN DO YOU WANT TO BE?: A STRENGTHS-BASED APPROACH TO ENGAGING MEN AND BOYS IN PRIMARY PREVENTION

Respect Victoria's *What Kind of Man Do You Want To Be?* campaign demonstrates how evidence-informed, strengths focused communications can engage men as partners in preventing violence against women. Featuring real Victorian men reflecting on the social pressures associated with masculinity, the campaign encourages men to reflect on the role they can play in building respectful relationships and challenging harmful gender norms that drive and enable gendered violence. The campaign has also been adapted for multicultural communities, featuring men from different cultural backgrounds to ensure messages resonate with the breadth of Victoria's community while maintaining a consistent primary prevention message.

The campaign demonstrates the value of meeting men where they are by delivering prevention messages through the platforms and channels they already use. Since June 2025, the campaign has reached more than 3.1 million Victorians, resulted in more than 22.5 million video views and generated stronger engagement than any of Respect Victoria's previous statewide prevention campaigns. Across digital channels (Meta, TikTok, YouTube and Search) the campaign delivered more than 5.1 million impressions, with 82% of total impressions (4.2 million) by men aged 18-44.

Forthcoming evaluation findings indicate the campaign not only achieved strong reach among its intended audience but also shifted attitudes towards lower endorsement of harmful masculine norms among surveyed men. Agreement decreased across most harmful attitudes measured following campaign exposure, demonstrating that strengths-based, gender transformative primary can successfully engage men and shift attitudes that underpin gendered violence (42).

Recommendation 9

Implementation of the Commonwealth Government's commitment to developing a coordinated national approach to engaging men and boys in preventing gendered violence must be:

- a) Grounded in Australia's primary prevention evidence and gender-transformative practice, with funding, commissioning and evaluation mechanisms that do not reinforce or condone the drivers of violence, and align with National Plan's objectives
- b) Co-designed and implemented through partnerships between experts in primary prevention, men's health, research, education, men's behaviour change experts and other relevant disciplines, recognising that engaging men and boys effectively requires multidisciplinary expertise
- c) Developed in conjunction with related Commonwealth and jurisdictional reforms, including the National Men's Health Strategy 2020-2030 recognising the complementary opportunities to improve men's wellbeing and preventing gendered violence
- d) Closely integrated with the Attorney-General Department's work to address the risks of online misogyny and gender-based violent extremism, recognising their shared foundations in the harmful gender norms, stereotypes, attitudes and behaviours addressed through targeted and population-level primary prevention approaches.

2.3 Take action to prevent technology-facilitated gender-based violence

Australians increasingly live, work, learn and socialise through digital technologies. As online and offline lives become increasingly interconnected, technology is reshaping how gendered violence is perpetrated, experienced and prevented. Technology-facilitated-gender-based-violence (TFGBV) is no longer a niche or emerging form of gendered violence. It affects children, young people and adults, occurs across schools, workplaces, universities and homes and takes many forms including image-based abuse, technology-facilitated coercive control, online sexual harassment, cyberstalking, gendered misinformation or disinformation and AI-generated abuse (43). The Second Action Plan should recognise TFGBV as a growing national primary prevention priority requiring a coordinated, national approach that combines regulation, industry accountability and harm reduction measures with strong primary prevention interventions.

The Commonwealth Government's has established important foundations through reforms to the Online Safety Act, continued investment in the eSafety Commission and social media age restrictions. However, regulation and enforcement alone cannot keep pace with rapidly evolving technologies or prevent the rapid normalisation of online misogynistic content and increasing rates of TFGBV (44). A comprehensive national approach to preventing TFGBV should combine stronger regulation, industry accountability and safety-by-design measures with sustained investment in primary prevention, harm reduction and online media literacy.

Despite the rapid growth of TFGBV, investment in primary prevention tailored for digital environments has not kept pace. Few jurisdictions have explicitly recognised TFGBV within family violence or prevention policy frameworks and there are very few dedicated funding streams to support primary prevention initiatives, workforce capability building, knowledge sharing or evidence generation. This represents a significant gap in the National Plan's efforts to prevent gendered violence. Digital environments are no longer simply settings where violence occurs, they are active spaces where attitudes towards gender, relationships and violence are formed, reinforced and challenged (45). Strong investment and activation of primary prevention of gendered violence approaches across digital environments is therefore essential – not only to prevent TFGB but to effectively address the underlying drivers of all forms of gendered violence where they are fostered and sustained.

Respect Victoria recently co-convened a national forum with the eSafety Commissioner bringing together prevention practitioners, researchers, technology experts, regulators and governments to identify emerging evidence and practical policy solutions to prevent TFGBV. The forum highlighted the importance of drawing on specialist primary prevention expertise to build the capability of policy makers and the technology industry, while also equipping prevention experts with the knowledge and skills to understand how digital platforms operate and the ways in which technologies shape online experiences, influence behaviours and create opportunities for primary prevention intervention. Dedicated funding and better integration of TFGBV across every pillar of the Second Action Plan will be essential to ensure momentum in this area is harnessed. Respect Victoria will shortly publish further guidance on harm reduction in digital environments and critical media literacy to support governments and practitioners in this rapidly evolving area.

As digital technologies become increasingly embedded in everyday life, primary prevention should be strengthened and complemented by harm reduction approaches that recognise that most people cannot simply opt out of engaging in online environments. A harm reduction approach offers a promising framework by focusing interventions at both the interpersonal and ecological levels (46). At the interpersonal level, harm reduction includes initiative such as critical digital literacy, consent education and giving users a choice to opt in or out of social media algorithms, such as the Teach Us Consent [Fix Our Feeds](#) campaign. At the ecological level, it includes measures that make digital environments safer

by design, including platform accountability and Safety by Design measures (46). As the evidence base continues to develop, there is an opportunity to embed primary prevention and harm reduction approaches within national initiatives that seek to improve online safety and digital participation. Further discussion of the application of harm reduction to digital environments will be available in Respect Victoria's forthcoming paper, *Conceptualising harm reduction in digital spaces for the prevention of gender-based violence*.

The Commonwealth Government's [recent](#) commitment to develop Australia's first National Media Literacy Strategy provides an important opportunity to embed primary prevention of TFGBV and harm reduction within media literacy initiatives across the life course. For example, alongside respectful relationships education, online media literacy should equip children and young people with the knowledge, skills and critical thinking needed to recognise TFGBV, understand digital consent and safely navigate increasingly complex digital environments. Importantly, it must also build the capability of all Australians to question and challenge online misogyny, harmful gender stereotypes and manipulative online content. This is increasingly important given evidence that social media recommendation algorithms can expose users – particularly men and boys – to manosphere content even where they have not actively sought it out (47). Strengthening online media literacy will complement regulatory reform if it effectively embeds primary prevention principles and addresses the attitudes, norms and behaviours that underpin TFGBV.

Initiatives such as the Commonwealth's Preventing Tech-based Abuse of Women Grant Program provide important opportunities to develop and test innovative approaches. These initiatives should be rigorously evaluated, shared across jurisdictions and scaled where effective, ensuring prevention of TFGBV evidence-based approaches are proliferated and embedded rather than remaining short-term and project based.

Recommendation 10

Strengthen national action to prevent technology-facilitated gender-based violence through a multi-pronged approach that combines primary prevention, industry accountability and regulation. This should include:

- e) Dedicated investment across Commonwealth, state and territory governments to prevent technology-facilitated gender-based violence commensurate with the scale, impact and complexity of ongoing harm
- f) Strengthening coordination across related Commonwealth initiatives, including the national approach to engaging men and boys in violence prevention, online safety reforms and the Attorney General's work to address the risks of online misogyny and gender-based violent extremism, recognising the mutually reinforcing potential of these initiatives to prevent technology-facilitated gender-based violence
- g) Ensuring Australia's first National Media Literacy Strategy embeds action to prevent technology-facilitated gender-based violence, reduce harm and interrupt the influence of online misogyny and other radicalising content related to gendered violence through strengthening digital consent literacy and the skills required to critically evaluate and challenge misinformation, disinformation and other harmful content
- h) Supporting and resourcing partnerships between the technology sector, researchers, primary prevention experts and family violence sector organisations to develop evidence-informed responses to emerging harms

2.4 Expand dedicated action to prevent violence affecting LGBTQIA+ communities

Violence against women and violence against LGBTQIA+ communities is deeply interconnected, with drivers of both forms of violence rooted in many of the same harmful beliefs, attitudes and behaviours. LGBTQIA+ communities (particularly trans and gender diverse people) are impacted by many of the same gendered drivers of violence as cisgender heterosexual women, including rigid gender roles and stereotyped constructions of masculinity and femininity (48). Australia's established primary prevention evidence base provides a strong foundation for addressing these common drivers. At the same time, violence affecting LGBTQIA+ communities is also shaped by distinct and overlapping forms of discrimination – including homophobia, biphobia and transphobia – which are supported and enabled by cismativity, heteronormativity and rigid gender binaries (49). This necessitates inclusive and tailored prevention approaches.

The National Plan recognises LGBTQIA+ people as a priority population, particularly because they experience disproportionately high rates of gendered violence (19). Of respondents to the 2019 Private Lives 3 survey, almost two in three (64.9%) had experienced family violence, three in five (60.7%) had experienced intimate partner violence and almost one in two (48.6%) had experienced sexual assault. These rates were much higher for LGBTQIA+ people with disabilities and for trans and gender diverse people (50).

Rigid gender stereotypes, particularly associated with masculinity, also underpin homophobia, biphobia and transphobia. These attitudes are often used to police and punish people who do not conform to dominant gender norms and contribute to violence affecting LGBTQIA+ communities and to gender inequality more broadly (51). Respect Victoria's *What Kind of Man Do You Want To Be?* campaign, demonstrates that prevention initiatives that challenge harmful norms about masculinity can also shift attitudes associated with gender inequality and transphobia. Forthcoming evaluation findings show reduced endorsement among surveyed men of the belief that 'a trans man is not a real man' (42). These findings reinforce the importance of gender-transformative primary prevention approaches that address the shared drivers of violence.

The First Action Plan delivered the *National Survey of LGBTQIA+SB Experiences of Sexual Violence*, workforce capability building initiatives and several pilot programs focused on testing inclusive prevention and response interventions for certain cohorts within the LGBTQIA+ community (18). However, overall, investment dedicated to prevention of violence against LGBTQIA+ people and communities was minimal. The Second Action Plan presents an opportunity to expand efforts and ensure they are commensurate with the very high rates of violence experienced by LGBTQIA+ communities.

LGBTQIA+ community-led organisations have significant expertise in designing and delivering culturally safe, inclusive and evidence-informed primary prevention initiatives. Increasingly, these organisations are partnering with the broader primary prevention sector to strengthen prevention across community, institutions and systems (52). Many of these organisations – particularly those led by trans and gender-diverse communities – continue to experience insecure funding and limited capacity, thereby constraining their ability to sustain prevention initiatives, contribute to policy development and participate in long-term systems reform. Actions under the Second Action Plan must be designed and delivered in partnership with LGBTQIA+ community-controlled organisations to ensure they reflect the needs and experiences of the many subpopulations within the LGBTQIA+ community. This includes adequately funding these organisations to ensure they are properly resourced and remunerated so that they can contribute to policy and legislative reform.

The forthcoming *Changing with Pride: A National Framework to Prevent Violence Against LGBTQIA+ People*, developed in partnership by Our Watch and Rainbow Health Australia, will establish the roadmap for a national coordinated approach to preventing violence affecting LGBTQIA+ communities. It will

articulate shared drivers, principles and accountabilities across sectors and settings. Adopting *Changing with Pride* to guide implementation of activities under the Second Action Plan will ensure nationally consistent, coordinated and evidence-informed prevention approaches across every jurisdiction, while simultaneously supporting tailored interventions that are responsive to the diversity of LGBTQIA+ communities.

Implementation of the Second Action Plan should also be closely aligned with the *Action Plan for the Health and Wellbeing of LGBTQIA+ People 2025-2035*, ensuring these complementary national strategies can drive a coordinated and consistent approach to both preventing and addressing the impacts of violence experienced by LGBTQIA+ communities.

Recommendation 11

Strengthen national leadership and action to prevent violence affecting LGBTQIA+ people and communities through:

- a. Resourcing implementation of *Changing with Pride: A National Framework to Prevent Violence Against LGBTQIA+ People* (forthcoming), supported by sustained investment in LGBTQIA+-led organisations
- b. Expanding dedicated primary prevention interventions that target the shared and distinct drivers of violence against LGBTQIA+ people, including trans and gender diverse people
- c. Supporting primary prevention partnerships between LGBTQIA+ communities and organisations and the family violence, women's and men's health sectors
- d. Creating stronger linkages across the Second Action Plan and the National Action Plan for the Health and Wellbeing of LGBTQIA+ People 2025-2035 to support nationally coordinated implementation of action across the full prevention continuum from primary prevention to early intervention, response, and recovery.

2.5 Prioritise primary prevention of sexual violence

Recent reform, including changes to consent legislation across many jurisdictions and the Australian Law Reform Commission's Inquiry into Justice Responses to Sexual Violence, have rightly strengthened the national focus on sexual violence. While sexual violence shares many of the same gendered drivers as other forms of gendered violence, it also requires a distinct primary prevention approach that warrants greater policy attention and dedicated investment.

New analysis of National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women (NCAS) by Respect Victoria demonstrates that attitudes relating to sexual violence, including victim-blaming and understandings of consent, remain among the most resistant to change, highlighting the need for sustained evidence-informed prevention approaches that extend beyond legal reform and crisis response to address the entrenched, harmful social norms, attitudes and behaviours that underpin sexual violence (8).

Legislation can establish expectations and accountability, but it cannot on its own shift the community attitudes, norms and behaviours that underpin sexual violence. Emerging evidence supports relationships-centred approaches that teach consent as an active, ongoing communicative practice rather than a narrow legal concept (53). Justice reform across every jurisdiction, including national harmonisation of affirmative consent laws, should therefore be complemented by targeted comprehensive relationships and sexuality education that builds understanding of consent, power, boundaries, healthy sexuality and respectful relationships in developmentally appropriate ways across the life course (33). Victoria's affirmative consent reforms demonstrate the value of this approach. Alongside legislative change, the Victorian Government invested in targeted education and primary prevention initiatives, including the *Supporting Young People to Understand Affirmative Consent* program delivered by Sexual Assault Services Victoria, YAC Vic and Safe and Equal. This integrated approach illustrates ways in

which primary prevention can offer wrap-around support for legislative reform and strengthen its implementation and impact.

The Second Action Plan should prioritise further research and stronger primary prevention approaches that explicitly address sexual violence across the life course. This should include sustained investment in Respectful Relationships Education and comprehensive relationships and sexuality education that equips children and young people with the knowledge and skills necessary to critically interpret messages conveyed through pornography and other online content about gender, consent, intimacy and relationships (33). Drawing on recommendations from the 2024 *National Survey of LGBTQIA+ Experiences of Sexual Violence*, consent and sexuality education across Australian schools should embed LGBTQIA+ specific content to ensure all young people see themselves reflected in primary prevention messaging (54). These efforts should also support parents, carers and educators to discuss and navigate these issues confidently, both with their children and in their own lives.

Pornography has become an increasingly influential source of information about sex and relationships for many children and young people – often being viewed (on purpose or by mistake) before formal sex education begins (55). Emerging evidence suggests exposure to violent and degrading pornography can shape attitudes, expectations and behaviours relating to consent, gender and sexual relationships – for children and adults alike (56). Yet policy responses remain fragmented, with ongoing uncertainty about the most appropriate combination of regulation, education and primary prevention required to mitigate the risk of children and young people developing harmful sexual attitudes and behaviours (57). The Second Action Plan provides an opportunity to strengthen evidence-informed prevention work in this area, alongside other work addressing technology-facilitated gender-based violence and online misogyny.

Sexual violence occurs across all ages and demographics, but some population groups experience disproportionately higher rates, including First Nations women, people with disability, women and children from culturally diverse, migrant and refugee backgrounds and LGBTQIA+ people (58). These communities require sexual violence prevention approaches that respond to their experiences and the intersecting forms of discrimination that increase their level of risk. The Second Action Plan should strengthen universal sexual violence prevention alongside population-specific approaches, including community-led initiatives such as *Transfemme* which promotes healthier relationships between trans-women and cisgender men and *U Right, Sis?*, a culturally-safe prevention program, empowering First Nations communities in Central Australia to identify and respond to technology-facilitated sexual violence and abuse (59).

Flexible and sustained investment is also required to build the capacity of the specialist sexual violence sector to undertake early intervention approaches, including the provision of services to respond to early warning signs of harmful sexual behaviours in children and young people. Appropriately resourcing the sector to build this capability will complement implementation of the Australian Law Reform Commission Inquiry's recommendations and ensure Australia is investing not only in responding to sexual violence, but also in preventing it.

Recommendation 12

Strengthen national leadership and investment in the prevention of sexual violence by:

- a) Sustained and adequate investment in evidence-informed prevention across the life course, including comprehensive respectful relationships and sexuality education that reflects the diversity of Australian communities and addresses affirmative consent, healthy sexuality, pornography and harmful online behaviours in developmentally appropriate ways
- b) Strengthening the confidence and capability of parents and caregivers, educators and youth workers with tools and resources to support young people's healthy sexual development and improve critical media literacy

- c) Investing in research, evidence generation and evaluation to improve our understanding of the specific drivers of sexual violence and the effectiveness of targeted prevention approaches for different population groups.
- d) Providing sustained investment to build the capacity of the specialist sexual violence sector to deliver primary prevention and early intervention, including interventions that address harmful sexual behaviours in children and young people.

PART 3: CREATING THE CONDITIONS FOR EFFECTIVE NATIONAL PRIMARY PREVENTION IMPACT

Primary prevention requires a holistic approach involving programs that engage individuals and communities; whole-of-setting approaches in organisations and institutions and bold policy and law reform. It works across communities, organisations and society in settings where people live, learn, work, socialise and play to change the social conditions that produce, drive, excuse, justify or even promote gendered violence.

For primary prevention work to succeed, Australian governments need to do more than fund individual primary prevention programs. They also need to establish and sustain the supporting infrastructure that helps prevention activities work together in a way that reaches more people, avoids duplication, and allows adaptation and learning around what works to achieve lasting change. Individual projects and activities become much greater than the sum of their parts when they operate as part of a coordinated system (27).

This section focuses on the different mechanisms that make up this 'primary prevention infrastructure'. Strong prevention infrastructure includes sustained political leadership that prioritises ending gendered violence, workforce and sector development and mechanisms for monitoring, evaluation, evidence-building and coordination. As Australia's only state-based agency dedicated to the prevention of family violence and all forms of violence against women, Respect Victoria plays a critical role in strengthening the prevention infrastructure in Victoria and beyond. Drawing on this expertise, we outline key areas for action to help ensure primary prevention activities are well supported, connected and able to achieve lasting impact.

3.1 Design funding models to support prevention impact

Effective primary prevention depends on sustained investment. Beyond the quantum of funding, governments should also consider how prevention is funded. The majority of current primary prevention funding is too short-term and insecure to achieve lasting, population-level change. Short-term funding arrangements are fundamentally misaligned with the long-term nature of primary prevention and undermine the ability of funded organisations to collaborate, evaluate, translate evidence, build capability and achieve long-term impact (16, 22).

Respect Victoria's forthcoming policy brief on effective primary prevention funding models highlights core principles to be included in future primary prevention funding. It notes that independent of project or quantum, all primary prevention funding should be long-term, sustainable and collaborative.

PRINCIPLES FOR EFFECTIVE PRIMARY PREVENTION FUNDING

Long term

Minimum five-year funding arrangements reflect the evidence on the time required to achieve population-level prevention outcomes and support planning, implementation and evaluation.

Sustainable

Certainty through dedicated prevention funding will reduce the reliance on transient funding sources and enable prevention initiatives to evolve beyond trials and pilot projects.

Collaborative

Pooled or braided funding across governments, the private sector, philanthropy and other partners enable scaled initiatives, foster innovation and maximise reach, impact and return on investment.

Long-term investment reflects the evidence that preventing gendered violence takes time. Research indicates it takes 5-10 years of sustained action across the social ecology before population-level primary prevention outcomes and changes in the gendered drivers of violence are realised (60). Investment therefore must provide organisations with the required time to plan, implement and evaluate primary prevention interventions. The Second Action Plan should support longer-term investment through minimum five-year funding cycles for both the organisations that enable effective primary prevention and the initiatives that deliver it. This includes specialist prevention agencies, peak bodies, organisations providing implementation support and system leadership and primary prevention initiatives, including place-based and community-led approaches.

Sustainable investment provides the certainty needed for primary prevention work across Australia to move beyond repeated grant rounds, short-term trials and pilot projects. A national dedicated primary prevention investment fund could reduce the significant time organisations delivering primary prevention interventions spend preparing grant applications, tenders and funding bids, allowing greater focus on delivery, continuous improvement and evaluation (61).

Collaborative funding approaches, including pooled or braided funding models, enable governments, the private sector, philanthropy and other partners to invest together in shared primary prevention priorities (22). By bringing together multiple funding partners, these models can better reflect the shared benefits of primary prevention, foster innovative approaches, support initiatives at the scale required – particularly in constrained fiscal environments – and maximise impact and return on investment.

3.2 Strengthen governance, oversight and accountability

We note that despite significant investment by Australian governments and a breadth of activity across jurisdictions, successive reports from oversight bodies and inquiries, including the Domestic Family and Sexual Violence Commission's Yearly Report 2025, repeatedly call for stronger coordination and implementation architecture to ensure investment and activity result in meaningful change (17,7).

Strong and representative governance arrangements are important to the effective design, implementation and oversight of National Plan actions. Prevention expertise across these arrangements is essential to ensure implementation is informed by the established primary prevention evidence-base along with prevention system design, implementation and practice knowledge. Without this, we risk fragmented or ineffective implementation and a failure to show demonstrable change as a result of the Second Action Plan.

Importantly, Respect Victoria recommends a review of the composition of current governance and advisory bodies including the National Evidence Technical Working Group and relevant stakeholder groups to ensure they include appropriate levels of primary prevention and monitoring and evaluation

expertise. This expertise is crucial to ensure we can track and articulate progress towards ending gendered violence and show real and demonstrable impact at the end of the National Plan.

3.3 Improve nationwide coordination and quality assurance

As noted throughout this submission, to stop violence before it starts, prevention must be embedded across the systems, settings and institutions where people live, work, access services and socialise. Achieving this across a country as large and diverse as Australia requires strong national and state coordination. Prevention initiatives should be aligned across jurisdictions and mutually reinforcing to achieve population-level change.

While significant reform has occurred over the past five years, the Second Action Plan presents an opportunity to better align and coordinate efforts across Commonwealth, state and local governments. Stronger national coordination will help connect place-based and community-led initiatives with broader state and nation-wide reform efforts, while supporting the adaptation of evidence-based approaches to local contexts. Respect Victoria welcomes the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission's recommendation to establish an Implementation and Delivery Oversight Mechanism to strengthen alignment across government reform processes (17). As noted above, ensuring any such mechanism includes primary prevention expertise will be crucial for success.

National coordination should also include formal mechanisms for implementation support, quality assurance and cross-jurisdictional knowledge sharing. Current opportunities to exchange implementation lessons, evidence and good practice are largely ad-hoc, resulting in duplication and placing the burden of translating evidence and maintaining implementation quality on individual organisations. A coordinated national approach should support jurisdictions to learn from one another, accelerate implementation and build national capability.

BUILDING NATIONAL PREVENTION CAPABILITY THROUGH INFORMATION SHARING

As Australia's only statutory primary prevention agency, Respect Victoria is regularly invited to advise governments, organisations and peak bodies on prevention policy, implementation and system reform. This demonstrates the value jurisdictions place on structured opportunities to learn from one another.

In 2024, Respect Victoria met directly with South Australia's Royal Commission into Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence to share lessons from implementation of the Respect Ballarat saturation model and Victoria's prevention reform agenda. Respect Victoria has also presented on the model to the NSW Collaboration Meeting and to the Women and Women's Safety Senior Officials.

The South Australian Royal Commission subsequently recommended the establishment of a primary prevention saturation model in South Australia, reflecting lessons from Respect Ballarat (62). The South Australian Government is now engaging directly with Respect Victoria as it considers implementation, highlighting the value of formal mechanisms to share implementation experience, accelerate reform and strengthen prevention capability across Australian states and territories.

3.4 Foster partnerships and collaboration

The Second Action Plan should also strengthen partnerships and collaboration across key prevention settings and sectors, including workplaces, education, sport and media. In Victoria, regional women's health services coordinate place-based primary prevention through nine prevention partnerships that support local collaboration, embed gender equality across communities and organisations, and connect local action with statewide priorities.

Preventing violence requires stronger partnerships and collaboration beyond the prevention sector. Harmful influences such as gambling, alcohol, violent pornography and online misogyny operate through large and powerful global industries and cannot be addressed through community-based prevention alone. Most Australians will never engage directly in a primary prevention program, making partnerships with adjacent sectors and coordinated, system-level action and collaboration essential to achieving population-level change.

3.4 Strengthen data and evidence

A strong prevention system relies on robust research, data collection and evaluation to ensure policy and practice remain evidence-informed, responsive to emerging trends and capable of continuous improvement. Australia's prevention evidence base has been built over decades through academic inquiry and practice knowledge (11, 30). In a rapidly changing world, well-resourced data and evidence systems must continue to inform our approach to preventing violence across Australian communities (27).

The Second Action Plan should prioritise sustained investment in research, monitoring, evaluation and national data infrastructure, with a more comprehensive focus on increasing resources to build evidence about effective primary prevention approaches. Evidence gaps and research priorities identified through the *Australian National Research Agenda 2023-2028*, *Respect Victoria's 2025 Three Year Report to Parliament*, *Maintain the Momentum*, and other recent reviews provide a strong foundation for future prioritisation and investment. These include strengthening the evidence on how primary prevention can be more effectively integrated across early intervention, response and healing, and continuing to improve our understanding of the most effective ways to engage diverse communities in primary prevention initiatives (63).

Addressing Australia's current data gaps should be a national priority. The Domestic Family and Sexual Violence Commission identified that 89 of the 131 measures in the National Plan's Performance Measurement Plan currently lack a data source, limiting the ability to measure progress and drive accountability (17). National data also remains limited in key areas, including people who use violence, pathways into and out of violence and the experience of violence across different population groups.

Improving data quality requires more inclusive and disaggregated data collection that reflects the diversity of Australian communities (22,7). Better data on the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, children and young people, people with disability, LGBTIQ+ communities, and people from migrant and refugee communities, older people and culturally and linguistically diverse communities is essential to inform tailored prevention approaches (22, 27). Research, evaluation and data collection should also continue to embed lived experience and community expertise to ensure prevention policy and practice remains relevant, culturally safe and responsive to the communities it seeks to assist.

3.5 Grow and sustain the primary prevention workforce

A larger, more diverse and well-resourced prevention workforce is essential to mobilising a national response to the national crisis of gendered violence. Preventing violence will require investment to grow and sustain Australia's specialist prevention workforce, while building prevention capability across the broader systems and settings that shape everyday life.

Australia's specialist prevention workforce remains relatively small and fragmented despite growing demand for prevention action (64). Significant investment is needed to expand this workforce, strengthen coordination and ensure specialist prevention expertise is available across every jurisdiction (13,16)

Preventing violence cannot be the responsibility of primary prevention specialist organisations alone. Prevention capability should also be embedded across the institutions and sectors that shape people's lives including health, education, workplaces, justice, family law and community services. This broader capability will be critical to responding to rising backlash against gender equality, increasingly complex digital environments and growing demand for targeted work with particular cohorts, particularly children and young people.

Growing the prevention workforce requires more than training. Primary prevention is specialised work requiring expertise across a range of fields including community engagement, research, systems change, partnership brokering and knowledge translation across diverse settings and communities (64). Without secure, long-term funding, clear career pathways and coordinated workforce planning, Australia risks losing prevention specialist expertise at a time when it is needed most.

The Second Action Plan should support the development and implementation of a national workforce strategy, as recommended by Our Watch (13). Building on existing Commonwealth workforce initiatives, including the national domestic, family and sexual violence workforce survey and recent investment to strengthen the domestic, family and sexual violence workforce, the strategy should:

- identify current and future workforce needs;
- strengthen national workforce planning;
- support professional development and career pathways;
- improve knowledge exchange within and across jurisdictions; and
- coordinate investment across Commonwealth, state and territory governments.

This would help attract, retain and grow a skilled primary prevention workforce while ensuring expertise is available to support implementation of the National Plan across Australia.

3.6 Drive continuous improvement through monitoring, evaluation and learning

Sustained investment in monitoring and evaluation systems is essential to demonstrate the impact of prevention investment, strengthen accountability and support continuous improvement. Robust evaluation enables governments to understand not only whether prevention activities are being delivered well, but how they are impacting on the gendered drivers of violence and contributing to long-term reductions in the prevalence of gendered violence (60).

While the National Plan's Outcomes Framework represents a positive step, key implementation elements, including the Evaluation Strategy and Information Development Plan, remain undeveloped. As noted by the Commission for Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence, current reporting through the National Plan Activities Addendum provides valuable information about the *implementation* progress of activity but is less able to demonstrate progress toward long-term prevention *outcomes* or support adaptive implementation (17). While process evaluation can demonstrate that activities have been delivered as intended, impact evaluation is required to assess whether prevention efforts are shifting attitudes, norms, behaviours, systems and structures that underpin violence. Despite its importance, impact evaluation is rarely funded at the scale or over timeframes needed to measure these outcomes.

The Second Action Plan should prioritise and strengthen investment in impact evaluation, alongside monitoring and process evaluation, to strengthen the evidence base and improve accountability. National evaluation approaches should measure progress towards changes in the gendered drivers of violence

and be complemented by place-based evidence, practitioner expertise, lived and living experience, and continuous learning.

Respect Victoria's Statewide Theory of Change and ongoing development of Victoria's state-wide monitoring and evaluation system provides one example of how jurisdictions can articulate pathways from prevention activities to intermediate outcomes and, ultimately, long-term reductions in the prevalence of gendered violence.

A SHARED THEORY OF CHANGE FOR PREVENTING VIOLENCE IN VICTORIA

Respect Victoria has developed Victoria's first [Statewide Theory of Change](#) for the primary prevention of violence against women to provide a shared framework for planning, implementation and evaluation across the state.

Co-designed with researchers, practitioners, evaluators, policymakers and specialist prevention organisations, the Theory of Change establishes a common understanding of how primary prevention is expected to contribute to reducing violence against women over time. It identifies the short, medium and long-term outcomes needed to achieve lasting population-level change and demonstrates how the efforts of government, community organisation, researchers and practitioners contribute to shared primary prevention outcomes.

The Statewide Theory of Change also provides a practical framework for monitoring progress, testing assumptions and continuously improving prevention efforts as new evidence emerges. By creating a shared language, common outcomes and a collective approach to evaluation, it strengthens coordination across Victoria's primary prevention sector while supporting consistent implementation and accountability.

This model could inform work currently in train to further develop shared outcomes under the Second Action Plan and support more coordinated implementation, monitoring and evaluation across jurisdictions.

Recommendation 13

Strengthen Australia's national, state and territory primary prevention infrastructure to support coordinated, high-quality implementation of the National Plan. This should include:

- a) Sustained and longer-term investment in the leadership, organisations and implementation support needed to deliver primary prevention at scale, including specialist prevention agencies at the national, state and territory and local government level, place-based initiatives and community-led organisations, with mechanisms to support long term, sustainable and collaborative funding models that align with the evidence on what is required to achieve population-level change
- b) Stronger national governance, coordination and accountability mechanisms that provide clear oversight of implementation, draw on specialist primary prevention expertise, improve alignment across Commonwealth, state and territory and local governments, and monitor progress towards shared national primary prevention outcomes
- c) Formal mechanisms for cross-jurisdictional knowledge exchange and implementation support enabling governments, researchers, specialist prevention organisations and community-led organisations to share evidence, implementation lessons and innovative approaches
- d) Investment in national and state and territory-based data, evidence and knowledge infrastructure, including improved data collection, funding transparency, evidence generation, evaluation and knowledge translation

- e) Developing and implementing a National Primary Prevention Workforce Strategy that strengthens workforce planning, capability, career pathways and professional development, while recognising connected workforce needs across early intervention, response and recovery and healing
- f) A coordinated approach to monitoring, evaluation, and learning that ensures prevention initiatives are rigorously evaluated, that population-wide medium and long term progress measures are appropriately tracked and that successful approaches are embedded, sustained and expanded.

PART 4: A WHOLE-OF-GOVERNMENT APPROACH TO PRIMARY PREVENTION

The Commonwealth Government has a unique opportunity to lead Australia's efforts to prevent gendered violence. Through the reform it leads, the laws it passes, the systems it funds and regulates and the issues it chooses to prioritise, The Commonwealth Government has a powerful role in creating the conditions for primary prevention to succeed (27).

Gendered violence is driven by unequal power, harmful gender stereotypes and social norms that excuse or reinforce violence. These underlying drivers of gendered violence are shaped and influenced by the national direction the Commonwealth Government sets through its policies, legislation, funding, regulation and investment across areas such as gender equality, employment, taxation, housing, health, education, digital environments and family law.

This section outlines key opportunities for Commonwealth Government leadership. It explores how the Second Action Plan can better harness broader Commonwealth Government reforms to prevent gendered violence. It also examines where and how the Commonwealth can use its policy, funding and regulatory levers to embed primary prevention across the systems and settings that shape Australians' everyday lives.

4.1 Embed primary prevention across Commonwealth reform

A life course perspective and the primary prevention evidence base provide a practical framework for identifying where Commonwealth reform can make the greatest contribution to preventing gendered violence. Progress under the National Plan depends on coordinated action across Australian Government portfolios that advance gender equality, reduce discrimination and strengthen social inclusion.

The Second Action Plan should establish a mechanism to identify, coordinate and monitor the prevention contribution of broader Commonwealth reforms. Applying a prevention lens would help ensure Commonwealth reforms reinforce, rather than inadvertently undermine the objectives of the National Plan while maximising the return on existing investment.

Many Commonwealth reforms already contribute to violence prevention, even where this is not their primary objective. Policies that improve women's economic security, strengthen workplace gender equality and employment, support equitable caregiving, improve housing security, expand access to early years education, strengthen digital regulation or improve social inclusion all influence one or more of the gendered drivers of violence. Recent Paid Parental Leave reforms, for example, are primarily designed to improve women's workforce participation and family wellbeing. Through a prevention lens, they contribute to gendered violence prevention by supporting more equitable caregiving, strengthening women's economic participation and challenging traditional gender roles, all of which are recognised within Australia's primary prevention evidence base as important influences on the gendered drivers of violence.

The Commonwealth Government's strong focus on women's health and mental health presents a further opportunity to embed prevention. Family, domestic and sexual violence is a leading contributor to injury, disability, trauma and mental ill health among women (6). Framing violence prevention as a core health reform, not solely a justice or social policy issue, would create new opportunities to leverage health reform and funding to address one of the most significant determinants of women's health.

Similarly, the *National Men's Health Strategy 2020-2030* presents an opportunity to strengthen primary prevention. Improving men's health and wellbeing, promoting healthy masculinities and supporting help-seeking are complementary to primary prevention of gendered violence. Better alignment between the Commonwealth Government's efforts to improve men's health across different portfolios would ensure these agendas reinforce one another while maintaining clear focus on their discrete objectives.

While the Rapid Review of Prevention Approaches and reform under the Working for Women Strategy have begun to demonstrate the value of this approach, the Second Action Plan should adopt a more systematic approach for identifying, coordinating and monitoring the prevention contribution of broader Commonwealth reforms. This would enable the National Plan to better leverage existing Commonwealth investment and strengthen alignment between primary prevention and adjacent reform agenda.

Recommendation 14

Systematically map, coordinate and strengthen the primary prevention contribution of broader Commonwealth reforms across gender equality, health, inclusion, housing, employment, education and digital policy, including *Working for Women: A Strategy for Gender Equality* and the *National Men's Health Strategy 2020-2030*, to ensure these reforms actively support the prevention of gendered violence and the objectives of the *National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022-2032*

4.2 Activate Commonwealth levers to prevent gendered violence

The Commonwealth Government's greatest contribution is not only what it funds, but the conditions it creates through the way Australia's major systems are designed regulated, governed and incentivised.

The Commonwealth Government has significant opportunities to embed prevention through Federation Funding Agreements, national legislation, regulatory frameworks, professional accreditation, national standards and major reform agendas. These levers shape the systems Australians engage with throughout their lives, including early childhood education and care, schools, workplaces, healthcare, family law, housing, disability support, digital environments and aged care. Embedding primary prevention within these mechanisms would help to ensure that mainstream systems consistently promote gender equality, challenge the gendered drivers of violence and reduce the structural conditions that drive and enable gendered violence.

The Rapid Review of Prevention Approaches has already demonstrated the value of activating these broader policy levers through recommendations relating to health, alcohol policy, online safety and gambling (9). The Second Action Plan should build on this foundation by systematically identifying opportunities to embed prevention across other Commonwealth systems, supported by coordinated implementation across portfolios.

One important area where Commonwealth leadership is particularly significant is the regulation of commercial contributors to gendered violence. While regulation of commercial industries is not traditionally viewed as violence prevention, they influence the broader social conditions in which violence occurs. As noted in Respect Victoria's 2025 Three Year Report to Parliament, *Maintain the Momentum*

further action on alcohol pricing, availability and advertising, gambling regulation, violent pornography and other emerging issues should complement community-based prevention initiatives by creating an enabling environment that reinforces gender equality and reduces the influence of the gendered drivers of violence (16).

Recommendation 15

Position prevention as a shared responsibility across Federal government portfolios and identify Federal levers and opportunities to address the drivers and reinforcers of violence through systems and settings across the life course. This should include examining opportunities to address systems abuse, building on the work the Commonwealth Government has already done as part of the Rapid Review.

CONCLUSION

Despite decades of reform, gendered violence remains pervasive in Australia. It continues to claim lives, devastate families and harm communities. Every woman murdered is a reminder that primary prevention cannot remain an aspiration – it must become a national priority. Australia has a strong and growing evidence base on what works to prevent gendered violence. The challenge is no longer understanding what drives gendered violence or what prevents it, but ensuring this evidence is translated into coordinated, sustained action at the scale required to achieve population-level change.

Throughout this submission, Respect Victoria has identified practical opportunities to ensure the Second Action Plan is robust, impactful and aligned to the primary prevention evidence base. We underscore that the next phase of national leadership to end violence against women and children must remain firmly grounded in the evidence base and orient action toward addressing the gendered drivers of violence. Primary prevention must remain a distinct and dedicated pillar of the Second Action Plan, and our submission identifies a number of recommendations to strengthen the systems, leadership, partnerships and long-term investment that will enable it to be implemented consistently and effectively across the family violence continuum. At the same time, the Second Action Plan presents an opportunity to better harness the full breadth of the Commonwealth Government's role in ending gendered violence by embedding primary prevention across broader policy, legislative, regulatory and funding reforms, ensuring it becomes a shared responsibility across all portfolios.

As we approach the final five years under the current *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032*, the decisions we make now will determine whether Australia has the foundations, coordination and sustained commitment needed to achieve its vision of ending violence against women and children. We cannot afford to lose momentum or overlook the significant opportunity to build on the evidence, infrastructure, partnerships and reform already established.

Realising this ambition will require Commonwealth, state and territory, and local government to work in genuine partnership with researchers, specialist prevention organisations, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations, practitioners, victim-survivors, people with lived and living experiences, philanthropy, the private sector and communities across Australia. It will require a shared commitment to learning from the evidence, investing for the long term and continuously strengthening our collective efforts.

The opportunity before us is significant. By acting now to strengthen Australia's primary prevention system, embed primary prevention across every setting and maintain a clear focus on the evidence, the Second Action Plan can help deliver the lasting social change needed to stop violence before it starts and move Australia closer to its shared ambition of ending violence against women and children within a generation.

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