RESPECT VICTORIA

MAINTAIN THE MOMENTUM

THREE YEARLY REPORT TO PARLIAMENT ON THE PROGRESS OF PREVENTION 2022-2024

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY AND ABORIGINAL PEOPLE

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 the Aboriginal communities throughout Victoria and their ongoing strength in being the world's oldest living cultures. We acknowledge the significant and ongoing impacts of colonisation and commit to working alongside First Nations communities to effect change. We recognise the ongoing leadership role of these communities in addressing and preventing family violence and violence against women, and will continue to work in collaboration with First Peoples to eliminate these forms of violence from all communities.

VICTIM SURVIVOR ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Respect Victoria acknowledges the significant impact of family violence and violence against women on individuals, families and communities, and the strength, trauma 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 family members and friends. We keep at the forefront in our minds all those who have experienced family violence or other forms of abuse, and for whom we undertake this work.

CONTRIBUTORS

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We also thank the many experts, individuals and organisations that have generously contributed to this report through interviews, consultations and responding to our survey and other requests for information and advice. Further details of these contributions are contained within this report and in Appendix 1.

To receive this document in another format, email contact@respectvictoria.vic.gov.au.

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FOREWORD

Respect Victoria delivered its first Three Yearly Report to the Victorian Parliament on the progress of preventing family violence and violence against women in Victoria in 2022. This was the first time Victoria had a picture of primary prevention efforts across the state. It provided a valuable benchmark of Victoria's prevention system, a means of tracking how we are progressing and where the challenges lie.

We are now pleased to present the second Three Yearly Report to the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence and to all members of the Victorian Parliament on progress from January 2022 to December 2024. Reporting is a requirement of the *Prevention of Family Violence Act 2018* (Vic) that governs Respect Victoria. The enshrinement of the reporting function in legislation showed intent and foresight from the 2018 Victorian Parliament, in keeping prevention on the political agenda and providing transparency and accountability on how Victoria is tracking towards the transformational goal of a state free from violence.

Building on the first Three Yearly Report to Parliament, this report gives us a richer picture of Victoria's prevention system. It is a bird's eye view of prevention activity across Victoria, identifying progress and highlighting key achievements. It also considers new trends and emerging issues, and sets the agenda for future impactful work.

However, we know that prevention is a long-term strategy, and its outcomes are not immediate, but there are indicators in the short to medium term that give us hope. This report shows where the hope and challenges lie. And increasingly in today's society, these challenges are significant.

The last three years have seen the rise of online misogyny leading to radicalising of boys and men; weaponisation of new technologies such as generative artificial intelligence (AI); shifting social norms about gender, sex and relationships; economic instability; rising inequality; and the aftermath of the profound societal and economic upheaval caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Tragically, during this period, we have continued to witness many deaths and disappearances of women and children and increasing levels of gendered violence nationally. In response, Victorian people have come out in their thousands to demand change, calling for the rejection and eradication of all forms of gendered violence. The rallies across towns, cities and suburbs here and around the country in 2024 are an example of communities mobilising to end violence.

Despite the challenges, there has been progress. Ever resourceful, the Victorian prevention system and its workforce have risen to these challenges by deepening partnerships, leveraging research and using innovative approaches from across the public health field to address problems and evolve to meet changed social conditions. Victoria has seen positive shifts in community attitudes and a prioritisation of prevention across the state, consistent with a deepening understanding of the individual and broader social, economic and community benefits of prevention in driving down the high rates of family violence, violence against women and all forms of gendered violence.

Victoria's prevention efforts have been nation leading, and there is a long legacy of leadership from the Victorian Government across the political spectrum. There have been significant advances made in prevention over the past three years, and this report shows there is much to be celebrated. However, the impact of this good work

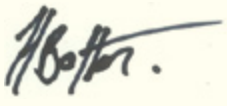
will dissipate if we do not sustain and safeguard these gains. Over this reporting period, violence against women and children has continued to increase across Victoria, indicating a greater need to boost efforts to change the societal conditions underpinning this national crisis. In addition, we have continued to see alarmingly high rates of violence and intensifying backlash, discrimination and violence towards lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans or gender diverse, intersex, queer or questioning, and asexual (LGBTIQA+) communities, in particular trans and gender diverse people. Addressing this must be an explicit priority within our efforts to prevent family and gendered violence in this state.

Primary prevention in Victoria has not yet had its full potential realised because it has never been funded at the scale required to achieve its intended population-level outcomes. Victoria's prevention system is relatively small and young in the goliath effort of changing entrenched social norms and behaviours that drive violence and permeate every part of our society, institutions and systems. Our state requires long-term, sustained and coordinated investment. Preventing violence is a wicked problem that requires bold and unwavering political leadership, bipartisan commitment and resourcing to scale for desired impact and generational change.

The crisis of family violence, violence against women and gendered violence is still real and urgent. As evidence shows, many lives depend on a well-resourced and coordinated system of prevention, early intervention, response and recovery. In our efforts to respond to this crisis, we must not lose sight of the need to stop violence before it starts. Tackling the underlying drivers and causes of this violence is the important work that prevention plays in this system.

We commend this report to the Victorian Parliament and call upon all members to show their leadership and commitment, as essential components to progressing the prevention of family and sexual violence, violence against women and all forms of gendered violence in our state.

PROFESSOR KATE FITZ-GIBBON
CHAIR



HELEN BOLTON
CEO

EXECUTIVE

INTRODUCTION

Respect Victoria is required to report to the Victorian Parliament every three years on the trends, progress and outcomes of activity across Victoria to prevent family violence and violence against women under the *Prevention of Family Violence Act 2018* (Vic).

This report shows that primary prevention is leading to change, and we are making positive progress towards a safe, equal and violence-free Victoria. This report captures the extensive efforts of government, the prevention sector and the community to prevent all forms of gendered violence. This includes Victoria's collective leadership in prevention policy, research, system and workforce development, and the design and delivery of innovative and tailored approaches to drive transformational social change across our diverse communities to stop violence before it starts.

This report covers activity from January 2022 to December 2024. It examines work being done in Victoria to prevent family violence, gendered violence and violence against women, analysing:

- positive progress and change
- enablers of and barriers to prevention work
- emerging trends and evolving practices
- opportunities and recommendations for further action and investment.

There is much to be celebrated from the past three years, including significant government investment in prevention and the commencement of Respect Ballarat, Victoria's first at-scale place-based community saturation model. However, due to the increasing prevalence and complexity of gendered violence across society, there is more that must be done to address the underlying drivers of violence we face in our communities, workplaces and homes. While promising progress is being made, greater, more creative investment and targeted action is urgently required to scale up and supplement efforts to achieve population-level outcomes and drive down rates of violence. Communities are demanding this action, and we must listen and respond.

This report identifies a range of challenges and emerging trends that — without action — risk progress in prevention and lessen the chance of reducing violence. These include the rise of online misogyny and radicalisation of young men and boys, the weaponisation of new technologies such as generative AI, intensifying global backlash against gender equality, the cost of living and rising economic inequality. With bipartisan leadership and commitment, we can face these local and global forces to save lives and prevent untold harms. We can only afford to increase our resolve and our efforts in the face of such challenges.

Now is the time to stay the course on prevention to safeguard the positive progress we have made, to drive forward the change we need to see, and to create a future where all Victorians are safe, equal and respected.

SUMMARY

KEY FINDINGS

In the past three years, the Victorian Government has built on its ambitious agenda, providing nation-leading investment and working to reform laws, change culture and stop violence before it starts. Significant advances have been made despite systemic challenges and emerging trends. The state's resilient prevention sector has adapted by deepening partnerships, leveraging research and innovation, and evolving to meet growing demand and complexity.

Findings presented in this report show that in the past three years there has been:

- greater community interest, awareness and demands for change to end violence
- continued political leadership and investment
- significant policy and legislative developments
- maturing of prevention system infrastructure
- ongoing workforce growth and development
- groundbreaking research and evidence
- promising community-led, specialist and self-determined prevention work
- increasing momentum for evolving prevention practice, including to: design and deliver innovative place-based approaches; deepen partnerships; foster collaboration across primary prevention, early intervention, response and recovery; and enable collaboration between the prevention sector and other sectors working on aligned issues, such as preventing harmful use of alcohol and other drugs, violent pornography, problem gambling and online harms.

This work requires long-term and transformational change, and there is still much to do.

This report explores eight key themes, analysing progress to date and identifying opportunities and recommendations for future attention.

PREVENTION INVESTMENT

Preventing gendered violence, family violence and all forms of violence against women requires long-term investment to address social norms, attitudes, behaviours and systems that drive and reinforce violence in all the places where Victorians live, learn, work and play.

Key progress across the reporting period includes the Victorian Government investing $130 million in prevention, establishing a number of longer-term funding agreements, and supporting prevention infrastructure and activity across a range of settings and communities. Ongoing political leadership has been significant in achieving landmark investment in Respect Ballarat (formerly the Ballarat Community Saturation Model), as well as ongoing investment in Respect Victoria and the Respectful Relationships initiative.

However, primary prevention in Victoria has still not been funded at a level commensurate with the scale and complexity of the problem.

While significant progress has been made, further investment is needed to sustain and enhance impact, promote coordination and sustainability, and scale up promising practice. There are also opportunities to increase impact by offering more flexible, long-term and fit-for-

purpose funding models. Without dedicated and enduring investment, we will continue to see unacceptable rates of gendered violence, with some types of violence likely to increase as a result of rising online misogyny and continued gender inequality, homophobia and transphobia.

The report identifies opportunities to sustain and grow investment to support a true whole-of-community approach to prevention. This includes: exploring opportunities for hypothecated funding drawing on established examples in Victoria and beyond; harnessing cross-portfolio funding sources where there are shared benefits and outcomes (such as through the Medicare levy and/or Mental Health and Wellbeing Surcharge fund); and leveraging opportunities for complementary investment from non-government sources.

ENABLING POLICY AND LEGISLATION

Legislative reform and policy are integral to prevention. They create the enabling environment for prevention activity and play a transformative role in systems and social change.

Key progress across the reporting period includes the delivery of a dedicated statewide prevention strategy in the *Free from Violence Second Action Plan (2022–2025),* the release of the second *Dhelk Dja 3 Year Action Plan* and the launch of *Strong Foundations* (a precursor to *Until every Victorian is safe: Third rolling action plan to end family and sexual violence 2025 to 2027*). Pivotal legislative and regulatory reform also took place during this period, including the introduction of affirmative consent legislation, criminalisation of non-fatal strangulation, and ongoing implementation of the *Gender Equality Act 2020* (Vic).

However, opportunities remain for stronger policy coordination across portfolios and departments, including between the Victorian and Australian governments and related agencies.

There is also an urgent need for increased policy attention on preventing sexual violence, engaging children and young people, and addressing homophobia and violence toward the trans community, as well as on emerging and escalating forms of gendered harm in the digital space.

Throughout the consultations to inform this report, early intervention was also identified as an important component in preventing violence and a policy gap still requiring attention. Primary prevention and early intervention are distinct but complementary fields. A collaborative approach to statewide coordination of early intervention approaches, in partnership with the prevention and response sectors, will allow us to identify effective approaches, address gaps and ensure Victoria is taking every opportunity to prevent violence, minimise harm and keep our community safe from violence.

STRENGTHENING THE PREVENTION SYSTEM

An effective prevention landscape requires a sustainable and mature prevention system, including political and public sector leadership, policy and legislative reform, governance and coordination mechanisms, longitudinal evidence and a skilled workforce.

Victoria's prevention system has grown and matured over the past three years, building

on a foundation of grassroots activism, public health, local government, and community sector leadership and expertise, alongside the reforms related to the Royal Commission into Family Violence, including the continued work of Respect Victoria.

Progress has occurred through enduring state government portfolios and governance structures, Respect Victoria strengthening its leadership and coordination role as Victoria's dedicated agency for prevention, (the only entity of its kind in any state or territory across Australia), stronger partnerships across the sector, and statewide workforce strengthening. This has been enabled across the state by stakeholders such as Our Watch, Safe and Equal, the Women's Health Services Network, family violence services, men's services organisations, and the Municipal Association of Victoria, together with local government, Rainbow Health Australia, Sexual Assault Services Victoria and others.

Aboriginal self-determination continues to be a crucial foundation for Aboriginal-led prevention, with key progress achieved in strengthening Aboriginal-led infrastructure through the Dhelk Dja Partnership Forum, Koori Caucus and the expertise and leadership of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations.

Staying the course is essential to ensure Victoria's prevention system infrastructure continues to mature, build evidence and create further impact in preventing gendered violence.

GROWING AND SUPPORTING THE WORKFORCE

Victoria has made progress defining, growing and developing a skilled and experienced prevention workforce, with more organisations and practitioners delivering prevention activities and actively joining the prevention effort.

The strategic foundations for ongoing workforce development are now in place, with government commitments set out in *Building from strength: 10-Year Industry Plan for Family Violence Prevention and Response* and useful evidence, insights and guidance outlined in Safe and Equal's *Foundations for Action* report and Our Watch's *Growing with change*. Practitioner networks, communities of practice, conferences and capability building work led by the peak bodies and other organisations have also been pivotal.

Frequent staff turnover and the loss of experienced and skilled practitioners continue to present ongoing challenges, often driven by job insecurity (including funding uncertainty and short-term contracts), workload pressures and burnout.

Sustained leadership and commitment are required to continue to support workforce development and retention, including building greater diversity across the prevention workforce and supporting practitioner wellbeing and capability building in the face of backlash, resistance and emerging challenges.

BUILDING EVIDENCE AND DATA

Research, monitoring and evaluation are essential to understanding the prevalence, trends and drivers of different forms of violence and what works to prevent them. Evidence is required to demonstrate the magnitude of problems, identify opportunities for intervention, and measure the effectiveness and impact of interventions.

Important progress has been made over the reporting period, with nation-leading research and evidence produced on the dynamics and drivers of different forms of violence, Aboriginal-led prevention, men and masculinities, and place-based prevention approaches.

Robust data must underpin this work, and there is continued opportunity to build the evidence base on what works to prevent different forms of violence, address data gaps and better evaluate Victoria's progress. It is also crucial to embed Indigenous Data Sovereignty and build the evidence base for Aboriginal-led prevention.

Respect Victoria is developing a statewide monitoring, evaluation and learning system to complement the Victorian Government's broader *Family Violence Outcomes Framework*. This includes a Statewide Theory of Change and impact framework to chart collective progress in Victoria. Investing in outcome evaluations, strengthening data collection systems and capacity, and building monitoring and evaluation capability across government and the sector are crucial to support implementation and ensure Victoria can demonstrate results.

RECOGNISING AND ENABLING COMMUNITY-LED, SPECIALIST AND SELF-DETERMINED PREVENTION

Community-led and specialist organisations are integral to the prevention system.

Over the reporting period, there has been strong leadership by community-led and specialist organisations and increasing government support for community-led and self-determined prevention work, including through *Dhelk Dja: Safe Our Way — Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families*, the Gender and Disability Workforce Development Program and the Elder Abuse Prevention Networks. Intersectional prevention practice has been strengthened through a number of strategic partnerships, such as the LGBTIQ Family Violence Prevention Project and the Connecting Communities partnership.

However, further support is needed to bolster the important work of community-led and specialist prevention organisations and ensure they have the funding certainty to meaningfully and equitably participate in prevention governance and partnerships and to sustainably meet the needs of their communities.

Long-term investment in Aboriginal-led prevention is also critical to self-determination and ensuring Victoria is Treaty ready.

COMMUNITY AWARENESS, UNDERSTANDING AND BEHAVIOUR CHANGE

Community education and engagement are critical to a whole-of-population approach to prevention, reaching broad audiences to increase understanding of gendered violence and challenge the attitudes, behaviours and social norms that drive violence.

Contributors to this report, *National Community Attitudes to Violence Against Women Survey* (NCAS) data and key campaign and event metrics indicate that over the past three years there has been greater public interest in and awareness of gendered violence, family violence and violence against women, alongside greater community readiness to mobilise for change.

Media attention on family violence, and

violence against women specifically, increased considerably over the reporting period. Marches and community activism across the state drew record crowds, particularly in the aftermath of alleged killings and violent attacks on women — indicating growing community demand and mobilisation for change.

Respect Victoria's campaign evaluations show Victorians value both role modelling and articulation of how individuals can act to prevent violence. This report outlines how important it is to elevate approaches to engaging and communicating with various audiences through values-based messaging.

By continuing to invest in well-designed, responsive campaigns and social change initiatives aligned with evidence-based and mutually reinforcing prevention programs, we can strengthen public understanding of violence and its drivers, and build community literacy and reflection, thus contributing to changes in cultural and social norms.

EVOLVING PREVENTION PRACTICE AND APPROACHES

The evidence base for prevention is continuously evolving to inform a deeper understanding of effective approaches to prevent the many forms of family violence, violence against women and gendered violence. This was particularly evident over this reporting period.

Key practice frameworks and tools were updated and expanded to centre and enhance evidence-based prevention of violence against Aboriginal, LGBTIQA+ and older Victorians as well as people with disability.

There was also key progress in promoting and resourcing place-based approaches. Building on initiatives such as Respect Ballarat — as well as regional coordination of women's health services, local government, Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and others — will drive tailored prevention, community readiness and effective intersectional practice.

Alongside continued whole-of-population activity, those who participated in report consultations reflected on the need for more tailored and targeted prevention programs and approaches, including those that are culturally and age-appropriate, and those tailored to specific contexts and settings.

There is increasing interest in integrating prevention across the family violence continuum, including through greater collaboration between the prevention, early intervention, response and recovery sectors.

There is also an opportunity for increased collaboration between the prevention sector and sectors focused on aligned social harms and market-based contributors that reinforce the drivers of violence, such as harmful use of alcohol and other drugs, problem gambling, pornography and online harms.

THE WAY FORWARD

Preventing family violence, violence against women and gendered violence requires a transformational, long-term approach. It requires unwavering commitment from governments, communities and businesses. While a whole-of-community approach to prevention is crucial, government has unique levers that can further primary prevention efforts.

By building on what works, strengthening and safeguarding essential prevention infrastructure and courageously addressing persistent and emerging challenges, Victoria can continue to set the standard on violence prevention.

Respect Victoria presents these recommendations to encourage renewed focus and sustained investment — a necessary and urgent commitment to move us closer to a state where everyone is safe, equal and respected.

In this report, Respect Victoria makes 15 recommendations to the Victorian Government. These recommendations also provide useful guidance for all organisations working in prevention. At Respect Victoria, we stand ready to support, and where appropriate lead, the realisation of these recommendations.

RESPECT VICTORIA RECOMMENDS THAT THE VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT:

1. **Publish updated and comprehensive modelling on the cost of family violence and violence against women to the Victorian economy and community as well as economic modelling on the return on investment for prevention every five years.**

2. **Provide dedicated and enduring funding for primary prevention. This includes:**
   - **a.** identifying and leveraging funding sources and approaches to prevention that promote coordination and sustainability
   - **b.** supporting long-term (i.e. five years minimum) and/or recurrent, secure, flexible and fit-for-purpose funding models that enable sustained impact
   - **c.** implementing funding for scaling up promising practice, particularly place-based approaches to prevention, and investment in tried and tested successful models
   - **d.** ensuring grant guidelines and eligibility for funding streams across government for health promotion and preventing social issues are inclusive of approaches towards primary prevention of family and gendered violence
   - **e.** identifying and leveraging opportunities for cross-portfolio funding sources for primary prevention where there are shared benefits and outcomes (such as the Medicare levy and/or Mental Health and Wellbeing Surcharge fund and/or through tailored application or adaptation of the Early Intervention Investment Framework), and exploring hypothecated funding approach for sustainability
   - **f.** continuing to facilitate funding arrangements that support community-led and targeted prevention with priority communities (including work led by and for First Nations communities, LGBTIQA+ communities, culturally and racially marginalised people, people with disability, children and young people, and older Victorians) including through resourced partnerships with mainstream organisations
   - **g.** exploring and leveraging opportunities for complementary funding from non-government sources, as part of a mutually reinforcing whole-of-community approach to primary prevention.

3. **Develop and implement a statewide strategy for preventing and addressing sexual violence, or at least ensure there is dedicated focus, action and investment on preventing sexual violence throughout implementation of *Until every Victorian is safe: Third rolling action plan to end family and sexual violence 2025 to 2027* and other relevant strategies.[i]**

4. **Work with and advocate to the federal government and other jurisdictions for effective strategies to safeguard against new and/or escalating gendered harms in the digital space.**

5. **Work in partnership with the prevention and response sector to agree on an approach for statewide monitoring and coordination of early intervention approaches across government departments and agencies, and the Victorian community.**

6. **Continue to strengthen prevention system infrastructure and coordination through dedicated and enduring funding for:**

- **a.** Respect Victoria — the statutory agency for prevention of family violence and violence against women
- **b.** the peak bodies for Victorian organisations specialising in the prevention of family violence, violence against women and gendered violence, including sexual violence
- **c.** the prevention workforce and sector, including women's health services, local government and specialist community-led organisations — particularly organisations led by and for Aboriginal, LGBTIQA+, and culturally and racially diverse communities, older people, and people with disability
- **d.** regional and statewide coordination and governance mechanisms, including self-determined infrastructure led for and by Aboriginal communities, and whole-of-government responsibility
- **e.** funded partnerships and programs focused on prevention of gendered violence, including those across the family violence continuum.

i The Victorian Government released *Until every Victorian is safe: Third rolling action plan to end family and sexual violence 2025 to 2027* in September 2025, outside of the reporting period. Sexual violence is clearly signposted within the title and framing of this action plan. Ensuring this translates into meaningful and targeted action to prevent sexual violence will be important throughout the implementation period.

7. Actively work to grow and strengthen the primary prevention workforce in Victoria by:

- **a.** implementing *Framing the Future, the second rolling action plan* under the *Building from Strength 10-Year Industry Plan for Family Violence Prevention and Response*
- **b.** progressing the actions put forward in Safe and Equal's *Foundations for Action* report on further building workforce knowledge, skills, confidence and connection
- **c.** enabling sector-led implementation support of the forthcoming *Victorian Prevention Capability Framework*
- **d.** conducting an equal pay review of the family violence sector to ensure remuneration is fairly awarded to skills and activities
- **e.** enabling the sector to continue to embed intersectional and inclusive practice, including through resourcing community-led and specialist organisations to deliver capability building initiatives and to engage in partnerships with mainstream organisations.

8. Strengthen prevention data quality and evaluation through:

- **a.** adequately resourcing the evaluation of short-, medium- and long-term outcomes of government-funded initiatives to increase evidence on the effectiveness of current approaches and their impacts
- **b.** increasing the opportunities for sharing evaluative evidence, including through publishing government-funded evaluations wherever possible
- **c.** continuing to develop, refine, disseminate and implement evaluation frameworks, standards and tools to support consistent evaluation practice for initiatives related to the prevention of family violence, violence against women and gendered violence
- **d.** strengthening data collection capability, data linkage and use of existing evaluative data for prevention activity
- **e.** embedding Indigenous Data Sovereignty principles into data development and evidence building
- **f.** supporting sector capability and capacity to complete outcome evaluations and undertake effective monitoring.

9. Continue to work in partnership with organisations undertaking prevention work, to harness, build and disseminate research and practice evidence about:

a. perpetration of family violence, violence against women and gendered violence in Victoria

b. effective intersectional and community-led approaches to address the many drivers of family violence, violence against women and gendered violence against marginalised communities

c. evolving approaches to prevent family violence, violence against women and gendered violence across digital platforms, tools and communities, including strategies to safeguard against the gendered harms of social media algorithms, generative artificial intelligence and gendered dis/misinformation online

d. newly prevalent forms of violence, including technology-facilitated abuse

e. what works to drive enduring behavioural, attitudinal and social norms change at scale.

10. Require, remunerate and resource inclusion of the perspectives and priorities of marginalised communities and under-represented voices in relevant government-funded prevention policy and program design. This includes, but is not limited to the following communities and the specialist organisations that represent them:

a. children and young people

b. LGBTIQA+ communities, in particular trans and gender diverse people

c. culturally and racially marginalised people

d. people with disability

e. First Nations communities

f. older Victorians.

11. Guarantee long-term funding for First Nations led prevention work to address disproportionate rates of family violence and support self-determined prevention activity. This should include resourcing to enable specialist Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to realise Indigenous Data Sovereignty and participate in sector governance and leadership.

12. Continue to support the design and delivery of sustained and responsive social change campaigns that are anchored to evidence-based mutually reinforcing programs focused on:

- **a.** promoting healthy masculinities and challenging rigid gender stereotypes that support a culture where violence can occur, particularly through programs targeting men and boys
- **b.** sexual violence, particularly the risks of violent pornography and what healthy sexual relationships look like.

13. Continue to invest in and build 'saturation' and place-based prevention and early intervention initiatives to prevent family violence, violence against women and gendered violence across Victoria, including through:

- **a.** building on lessons from Respect Ballarat (formerly the Ballarat Community Saturation Model) to guide longer-term (up to 10 years) investment in Ballarat and other sites across Victoria to enable impacts on gendered violence rates to be demonstrated
- **b.** advocating to other jurisdictions to learn from the development and implementation of the Respect Ballarat project and to build the workforce and system readiness required to pilot similar initiatives across Australian states and territories.

14. Work with prevention-focused organisations and agencies to better connect and integrate prevention work through:

a. expanding efforts to design and deliver integrated prevention approaches, particularly those that combine primary prevention and early intervention approaches

b. collaborating with other sectors to develop and deliver nuanced and effective prevention messaging, including through amplifying community voices and diversifying the prevention workforce

c. identifying strategic opportunities to embed prevention lessons across early intervention, crisis response and recovery efforts, particularly in the justice system, housing, health and other social service systems.

15. Work with and advocate to the Australian Government and other Australian state and territory governments and agencies to address the commercial and systemic contributors to family violence, violence against women and gendered violence, including by regulating and/or supporting increased cross-sector collaboration on:

a. alcohol pricing, availability and advertising

b. gambling access and advertising

c. production, dissemination and access to violent pornography, particularly for children and young people

d. misogynistic radicalisation and gendered disinformation

e. interlinking social norms of masculinity, sport, drinking, gambling and pornography that normalise and drive family violence, violence against women and gendered violence.

CHAPTER 1:

INTRODUCTION

THIS CHAPTER OUTLINES:

- WHAT THIS REPORT IS ABOUT
- HOW THIS REPORT WAS DEVELOPED AND TERMINOLOGY USED
- RESPECT VICTORIA'S ROLE.

CHAPTER 1

ABOUT THIS REPORT

PURPOSE AND SCOPE

Respect Victoria was established as a statutory authority on 1 August 2018, fulfilling Recommendation 188 of the Royal Commission into Family Violence. Under the *Prevention of Family Violence Act* 2018 (Vic), every three years Respect Victoria must conduct a review that examines trends and outcomes in Victorian efforts to prevent family violence and violence against women (1).

Respect Victoria released its inaugural Three Yearly Report in September 2022, covering the period between 2018 and 2021 (2). This report covers three years from January 2022 to December 2024.

This report showcases the crucial role and contribution of primary prevention in the transformational change required by government and the community to stop family violence, gendered violence and all forms of violence against women. It is an important public accountability tool, making prevention efforts and their impacts visible to members of the Victorian Parliament and Victorian people (3).

This report also details the challenges and opportunities ahead for primary prevention and priorities for action and investment. It provides clear recommendations to safeguard current progress and to guide future efforts to prevent family violence, gendered violence and violence against women.

While comprehensive, this report is not exhaustive and is not able to cover all prevention efforts. It relies on the perspectives of leaders working in prevention, and the available evaluation evidence on the impact of programs and strategies, to provide an understanding of the landscape in which prevention efforts are taking place, including across a broad range of settings and cohorts.

HOW THIS REPORT WAS DEVELOPED

This report is drawn from consultation with individuals and organisations and reviews of strategies, policies, reports and program evaluations (where available), including:

- 38 informant interviews with stakeholders including relevant Commissioners and representatives of local, state and federal government; family violence, violence against women prevention and gendered violence prevention agencies, Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs), peak bodies, and community sector organisations
- 10 consultations with established networks and governance groups that focus on primary prevention
- a survey of more than 150 prevention practitioners and representatives from government and non-government entities[iii]
- a high-level review of published and unpublished documents, including policies, plans, regional strategies, evaluation reports, research reports, evidence frameworks and practice guides from the prevention sector

ii A list of all organisations that participated in informant interviews and consultations is provided at Appendix 1.

iii See Appendix 2 for a copy of this survey. The response rate varies from question to question, as survey respondents were given the option to skip questions. Throughout this report, survey data is presented alongside the corresponding response rate for individual questions.

- the findings from a 2024 regional systems-mapping project by Respect Victoria and Victorian women's health services
- analysis of data from Respect Victoria's Prevention of Family Violence Data Platform and other data sources including the Statewide Theory of Change, which informed the review methodology.

Together with the expertise of Respect Victoria, these sources have informed the analysis and recommendations in the report.

INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH

Primary prevention requires an intersectional foundation to be effective. Intersectionality is a framework for understanding how experiences of discrimination and inequality (e.g. on the basis of gender, race, sexuality, disability, age) can intersect and interact. As explained by Our Watch, applying an intersectional approach to the primary prevention of family violence and violence against women means 'not only tak[ing] account of the diversity of people's experiences and identities, but … explicitly seek[ing] to address the multiple intersecting systems of oppression and discrimination, power and privilege that shape the social context in which this violence occurs' (4).

In developing this report, Respect Victoria embedded an intersectional approach in a number of ways, including the following:

- We centred the voices and perspectives of a diverse range of practitioners, policymakers, organisations, and people who have experienced violence. This includes practitioners and specialist community-led organisations that represent the richness and unique voices and experiences of Aboriginal women and communities, LGBTIQA+ people, culturally and racially marginalised communities, older Australians, young people, people with disability, faith communities and organisations working across different regions throughout Victoria. Our approach was grounded in principles of practice and evidence, informed consent and research ethics.
- We recognised and drew attention to the intersecting drivers of different forms of family violence and violence against women, and drew connections with other aspects of systemic and social inequality and oppression that impact people's experience of violence, including racism, colonisation, homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, ableism and ageism.
- We highlighted intersectional prevention practices and approaches from across Victoria that are nation leading.
- We promoted the importance of Indigenous Data Sovereignty and the importance of Victoria's primary prevention sector being ready for and part of Treaty with the First Nations peoples of Victoria.

CHAPTER 1

LANGUAGE AND TERMINOLOGY

To be consistent with the Prevention of Family Violence Act 2018 (Vic) and Respect Victoria's legislative remit, this report generally uses the terms **family violence and all forms of violence against women** (1, 5). However, the report also charts prevention work that covers many forms of **gendered violence** including gendered violence against LGBTIQA+ people. The report also reflects the terminology used by participants to accurately describe their work.

Family violence, as defined in Victorian law and policy, covers a wide range of contexts and manifestations of violence, including intimate partner violence and violence between other family members. This includes physical, sexual, psychological and financial violence and abuse, including coercive control. Family violence also covers 'family-like' relationships (such as carers) and Aboriginal understandings of family violence including kinship relationships and lateral violence within Aboriginal communities (1, 6). People from marginalised communities may face distinct forms of violence. For example, LGBTIQA+ people may experience threats to 'out' their sexuality or HIV status, or denial of access to gender affirming care.

All forms of violence against women refers to the different but interrelated forms of violence against women underpinned by gender inequality, by any perpetrator, regardless of whether they are known to the victim. The Prevention of Family Violence Act 2018 (Vic) defines violence against women as 'physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life' (1).

In the development of this report, Respect Victoria took a deliberately broad and inclusive approach using the language of **gendered violence** where appropriate. This is in recognition of the disproportionate impacts on the LGBTIQA+ community, particularly non-binary, trans and gender diverse people who experience harm from shared and distinct gendered drivers of violence, including entrenched gendered or power inequalities, rigid gender norms, heteronormativity and cisnormativity (7-9).

The report also includes consideration of **elder abuse,** which is understood to include any act occurring within a relationship where there is an implication of trust that results in harm to an older person (10).

Throughout this report, **'community-led work'** refers to tailored prevention activities designed for and by particular communities who experience marginalisation, discrimination or oppression. For further illustration, see page 38 for a spotlight on Aboriginal-led prevention and pages 146 - 159 for a dedicated section on progress, challenges and opportunities in community-led prevention work.

Within this report, we refer to people who participated in key informant interviews or group consultations as **'report participants'**. People who completed the survey that informed this report are referred to as **'survey respondents'**. **'Prevention practitioners'** refers to people who work within the prevention workforce as described in Safe and Equal's *Foundations for Action* report (11). This includes people working in a multiplicity of roles across the public, private and community sector in both specialist organisations and in key settings, related sectors and communities.

It includes: people delivering and leading prevention programs, initiatives and campaigns; undertaking prevention-focused research, policy development or advocacy; and leading prevention-focused workforce development, capability building, system strengthening and coordination, monitoring, evaluation and learning.

CHAPTER 1

ABOUT RESPECT VICTORIA

BACKGROUND

Respect Victoria's origin stems from the 2015 Royal Commission into Family Violence, under Recommendation 188, which outlined the need for the Victorian Government to establish a dedicated family violence prevention agency to oversee and drive prevention of family violence activities in Victoria. This was to include provision of policy and technical advice on primary prevention, technical advice and expertise on building primary prevention within communities, coordination of research that builds evidence of primary prevention and to ensure that accredited workforce development training in primary prevention is available through registered training organisations (12).

The organisation was formally established under the Prevention of Family Violence Act 2018 (Vic), to serve as an independent voice with functions, powers and duties protected by law (1).

Respect Victoria is guided by a set of principles that:

- everyone should live in a safe and equal society free from violence
- equality and respect should be promoted across the community
- gender equality and respectful relationships should be promoted
- the prevention of violence contributes to a more equal society.

ABOUT RESPECT VICTORIA'S WORK

Respect Victoria's work is grounded in evidence and includes:

- driving quality, sustained uptake of prevention work across the state
- building knowledge and evidence about what works to prevent violence
- keeping prevention on the policy and public agenda
- supporting social change and educating the community that violence is preventable.

Respect Victoria focuses on achieving outcomes towards a violence-free Victoria through collective effort at all levels of society.

This report is a demonstration of Respect Victoria's unique and leading role in working with government, sector and community to provide evidence informed and objective advice on the state of primary prevention in Victoria and how best to continue to drive the transformational, positive change needed to end family violence, violence against women and gendered violence.

FIGURE 1: RESPECT VICTORIA'S OPERATIONAL MILESTONES DURING THIS REPORTING PERIOD

2022

- Publication by Our Watch of report commissioned by Respect Victoria *Understanding, monitoring and responding to resistance and backlash*
- Launch of report commissioned by Respect Victoria *'No More Excuses' — Primary Prevention of Violence Against Women with Disability* by the University of Melbourne
- Launch of 'Respect Is', a campaign aimed at supporting men to encourage each other to break down gender stereotypes
- Relaunch of the Respect Older People: 'Call It Out' campaign
- Tabling of the inaugural Three Yearly Report to Parliament on the state of prevention
- Convening of the Prevention Alliance (first iteration) to bring together statewide peaks to strengthen prevention system coordination
- Delivery of the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Toolkit

2023

- Launch of 'Respect starts with a conversation': a new campaign that showcases Victorians challenging outdated gender stereotypes
- Hosting of Walk Against Family Violence with a record 5,000 attendees
- Coverage of the entire state with prevention activies for the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence
- Launch of new strategic plan for 2023–2028
- Release of joint statement on misogyny in the Australian media
- Release of the *Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention Mapping Project* and *Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention Evidence Review,* developed by Urbis in partnership with Karen Milward for the Dhelk Dja Partnership Forum
- Release of *Summarising the evidence: Exploring what we know about drivers of violence against women, family violence and other forms of gendered violence,* conducted by Australian Institute of Family Studies
- Convening of the Primary Prevention Research Symposium

2024

- Awarding of $9.8 million to deliver a nation-leading, community saturation initiative in Ballarat
- Release of Evidence review: *Reducing and preventing violence against women*, developed by Dr Lara Fergus, setting out the evidence in support of a Victorian saturation model
- Hosting of Walk Against Family Violence with a record 8,500 attendees
- Growth in coverage of 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence
- Partnership with Jesuit Social Services to support design and publication of the national 2024 Man Box study
- Launch of *Willing capable and confident,* a report that examines how men in Australia are challenging harmful masculine norms, in partnership with Jesuit Social Services
- Completion of Systems Mapping project with women's health services across the state.
- Launch of Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan
- Submission to the inquiry into capturing data on family violence perpetrators in Victoria and appearance before the Committee in a public hearing
- Submission to the Australian Law Reform Commission's Inquiry into justice responses to sexual violence.
- Convening of the Monitoring and Evaluation Advisory Group
- Delivery of the Statewide Theory of Change
- Formal establishment of the Prevention Alliance and expansion of membership

CHAPTER 2:

PREVENTION IN CONTEXT

THIS CHAPTER PROVIDES CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND FOR THIS REPORT INCLUDING:

- THE MEANING OF PREVENTION
- VICTORIA'S PREVENTION LANDSCAPE
- THE IMPORTANCE AND BENEFITS OF PREVENTION
- THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CONTEXT IMPACTING PREVENTION DURING THE REPORTING PERIOD.

CHAPTER 2

WHAT IS PREVENTION?

Creating communities free from family violence, violence against women and gendered violence relies on a connected, resourced and well-supported system across a continuum comprising primary prevention, early intervention, response, and healing and recovery initiatives (13). Each part of this continuum must be adequately resourced and designed to effectively respond and work together to prevent violence, intervene to decrease the risk of further or escalating violence, and to ultimately stop it from occurring in the first place.

In this report, 'prevention' is used in reference to primary prevention unless otherwise specified.

FIGURE 2: FAMILY VIOLENCE PREVENTION CONTINUUM

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.

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.

Preventing family violence, violence against women and all forms of gendered violence requires taking action to address multiple, intersecting drivers of violence. This includes the gendered drivers set out in Our Watch's *Change the story,* as well as inequality, stigma, discrimination and marginalisation experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, people from migrant and refugee communities, people of colour, LGBTIQA+ communities, people with disability, older people, and children and young people.

EXAMPLES

- Whole-of-institution strategies and organisational policies to prevent and address sexual harassment
- Programs that promote equality and respect in settings such as sport and recreation clubs, workplaces and higher education
- Legislative reform (e.g. positive duty and the Gender Equality Act 2020 (Vic))
- Respectful Relationships in schools and early childhood education
- Consent education campaigns

EARLY INTERVENTION
(SOMETIMES CALLED 'SECONDARY PREVENTION')

Early intervention involves working with people at higher-than-average risk of using or experiencing violence to prevent it starting, escalating or recurring. It focuses on helping people, families, communities and organisations identify and respond to early signs of or risk factors for violence.

People or communities might be considered at risk if they have attitudes that support or excuse family or gendered violence, or agree with rigid or harmful ideas, or have used or experienced (including witnessed) violence previously.

Primary prevention and early intervention work together by unwinding the harmful attitudes held by people who have a potential to use violence, by supporting them to learn new behaviours, take responsibility for their choices, and implement healthier ways of being and relating to others.

EXAMPLES

- Programs to support at-risk young men and boys
- Therapeutic child and adolescent programs
- Health justice partnerships that enable early identification and referral to support people who have experienced violence
- Housing programs that support people at risk of family violence
- Victoria's Family Violence *Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework* (MARAM) is a key system enabler, ensuring services and practitioners across a range of sectors have a shared understanding of family violence and effectively identify, assess and manage family violence risk with the aim to increase the safety and wellbeing of Victorians

RESPONSE
(SOMETIMES CALLED 'TERTIARY PREVENTION')

Response refers to services for people who have experienced or used violence. It aims to intervene, including provision of immediate safety, coordinated support, case management, health services, justice responses, and accountability for people using violence.

Primary prevention and early intervention frameworks underpin response by providing a structural analysis of family and sexual violence.

When violence is prevented from happening in the first place or happening again, it lessens the load on the system responding to violence and supports our community to live violence-free futures.

EXAMPLES

- Crisis and emergency housing
- Specialist family and sexual violence services
- Men's behaviour change programs
- Legal services
- Victims of crime support
- Police, child protection and criminal justice services
- Intervention orders and legal advice on family law, child protection and other matters
- Medical treatment and forensic assessments

HEALING AND RECOVERY

Healing and recovery is about supporting people to find a sense of safety, health and wellbeing following the trauma of violence. Recovery can be a long process and can be particularly difficult when the person who used (or is using) violence is still in someone's life. It is supported through long-term services that focus on psychological and physical healing, integrating and managing the deep impacts of trauma.

Primary prevention reinforces this by offering an analysis of power and control, explaining that people who have experienced violence are not responsible for the abuse that occurred to them, or for the choice of the person who used violence.

EXAMPLES

- Trauma-focused counselling
- Therapeutic support groups
- Peer support
- Lived experience advocacy
- Culturally safe camps and yarning or healing circles
- Housing security
- Social support
- Restorative justice

AN OVERVIEW OF ABORIGINAL-LED AND SELF-DETERMINED PREVENTION

Aboriginal self-determination is fundamental to effective and just family violence prevention. Self-determination recognises the rights of Aboriginal communities to lead, design, be resourced for, and deliver responses grounded in cultural knowledge, priorities and strengths (16-18).

ACCOs and Aboriginal community leaders have been pioneers of violence prevention work in Australia. Aboriginal-led family violence prevention efforts in Victoria typically differ from whole-of-population (or 'mainstream') approaches in three ways:

- they focus on the ongoing impacts of colonisation as a key driver of family violence
- they are often delivered as part of a holistic approach to wellbeing
- they often form part of an integrated approach to family violence primary prevention, early intervention, response and recovery.

Aboriginal-led prevention programs work with people within the context of their families, communities, Country and culture, recognising that all play an important role in wellbeing and safety across interconnected physical, social, emotional, cultural and spiritual dimensions (19). They focus on strengthening and supporting connection to culture and identity as protective factors for preventing, identifying, escaping and healing from violence. Aboriginal prevention efforts also include programs and partnerships that seek to promote cultural safety in the service system, recognising that access to community services where people are treated with respect and without racial prejudice are foundational to Aboriginal self-determination and supporting strong families and strong communities.

Dhelk Dja Regional Action Groups continuously highlight the importance and efficacy of community-led programs and initiatives with respect to addressing family violence within Aboriginal communities. Such approaches are placed-based and centre on prevention, moving beyond crisis response, recognising the importance of culturally grounded, person-centred support for those affected by violence, those using violence and broader family and community impacted by violence.

Aboriginal Gathering Places are also central to the prevention of family violence. These important community hubs provide culturally safe spaces for community to connect, share knowledge, belong and celebrate their culture. Aboriginal Gathering Places offer a range of services, programs and cultural activities, such as children's camps, men's behaviour change on Country and women's groups. They also serve as educational resources for the broader community. Gathering Places located in regional settings hold a significant role in community, as there may not be many other services available for community in such areas.

Aboriginal people — particularly women and children — face disproportionately high rates of violence; however, it is important to recognise that this is a whole-of-community problem and not specific to Aboriginal communities and families. Family violence is not a part of Aboriginal culture, and the high rates of violence impacting on Aboriginal communities today can be traced back to the impacts of colonisation and ongoing systemic racism. Notably, Aboriginal women and children experience violence at the

hands of people (predominantly men) from all different cultural backgrounds, and in many parts of Victoria, the vast majority of Aboriginal women have non-Aboriginal partners (16). Mainstream or 'whole of population' prevention agencies have an important role to play in addressing the intersecting drivers of violence against Aboriginal women, children and families — particularly addressing the legacy of colonisation and racist misogyny among non-Aboriginal people. However, it is crucial that Aboriginal communities and ACCOs lead the way, ensuring efforts to prevent family and gendered violence against Aboriginal peoples are holistic, culturally safe, centred on healing and rooted in Aboriginal self-determination.

To do this work, Aboriginal-led organisations need to be resourced at the scale required, and over the long term. Inadequate and lapsing funding for ACCOs and Aboriginal community-led prevention work compromises effective implementation and meaningful outcomes, creating vulnerability for successful programs, staff, community trust and momentum for change (19).

Recognising Aboriginal leadership and the importance of self-determination in family violence prevention align closely with Victoria's pathway to truth-telling and Treaty, including the work of the Yoorrook Justice Commission, the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria and the Dhelk Dja Partnership Forum.

Yoorrook's hearings have highlighted the enduring impacts of colonisation including dispossession, child removal, racism and intergenerational trauma, and the link between these injustices and family violence. The Dhelk Dja Partnership Forum brings together Aboriginal people and organisations leading family violence work in their communities across the state with Victorian Government representatives (20). As a core part of this forum, the Dhelk Dja Koori Caucus elevates community voice, pays respect to lived experience, advocates for systemic change and ensures stronger government accountability across the family violence system — from prevention to early intervention, crisis response and healing (21).

The Dhelk Dja Family Violence Prevention Framework is currently in development to refresh the existing *Indigenous Family Violence Primary Prevention Framework.* The refresh will establish an overarching framework for promoting, celebrating and guiding community-led efforts to prevent family violence against Aboriginal people. It will also offer guidance on effective and sustainable community-led prevention activities that promote the safety, wellbeing and healing of Aboriginal people and communities in Victoria. This will be key to supporting ongoing investment, leading practice, and monitoring, evaluation and learning of shared outcomes for preventing family violence and violence against Aboriginal people, in support of the vision for a future where all Aboriginal people are culturally strong, safe and self-determining, with families and communities living free from violence.

The broader prevention sector has an obligation to learn from and support Aboriginal-led and self-determined prevention, to be ready for upcoming Treaty in Victoria.

HOW CAN VIOLENCE BE PREVENTED?

Violence against women and family violence — like any health or social issue — is driven by factors at each level of the social ecology (4, 16, 22).

FIGURE3: DRIVERS AND REINFORCING FACTORS IN THE SOCIOECOLOGICAL MODEL

Society level and cultural drivers, e.g. broad social pressures, norms and associated expected behaviours

System and institutional drivers, e.g. policies, laws and services

Organisation and community drivers, e.g. local community norms and workplace practices

Individual and relationship level drivers, e.g. expectations around gender or relationship roles

Source: (14)

Our Watch conducted a rigorous review and identified four gendered drivers of violence against women at a population level:

- condoning of violence against women
- men's control of decision-making and limits to women's independence in public and private life
- rigid gender stereotyping and dominant forms of masculinity
- male peer relations and cultures of masculinity that emphasise aggression, dominance and control (4).

Beyond the gendered drivers, there are other important factors that can affect violence, increasing the risk, likelihood, frequency and severity. These include:

- condoning of violence in general that frames men's violence as a normal part of life
- experience of, and exposure to, violence; for example, having grown up with family violence or in a community where people regularly use other forms of violence
- weakening of prosocial behaviour, including events or circumstances that reduce empathy, respect and concern for women (e.g. heavy alcohol consumption, climate disaster and financial stress)
- resistance and backlash to prevention and gender equality.

In addition, there are other forms of family violence that have distinct drivers that intersect with the established gendered drivers of violence against women. Evidence shows continued effort to address the gendered drivers of men's violence against women is likely to also help prevent particular forms of family and gendered violence, including elder abuse, child maltreatment and women's intimate partner violence against men (23).

AN INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH TO PREVENTION

Prevention efforts in Victoria are largely 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 (24)
- *Changing the landscape*, which sets out drivers and reinforcing factors of violence against women with disability (22)
- *Pride in Prevention,* which highlights drivers of violence against LGBTIQA+ people (9).

These frameworks are crucial to an 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.

> *An intersectional approach doesn't ask us to stop using a gendered lens. It asks us to see gender as always interacting and intersecting with other forms of discrimination, institutional policies and political forces (25).*

Efforts to prevent violence are only effective when society, systems, organisations, communities, families and individual relationships are aligned in promoting safety, respect and equality for all.

CHAPTER 2

PREVENTION IN VICTORIA

Victoria has a rich history of leadership and expertise in the prevention of gendered violence, family and sexual violence and violence against women — built upon decades of feminist, human rights and public health advocacy and leadership, including by victim survivors, frontline workers, global agencies such as the United Nations and health promotion agencies such as VicHealth that supported the development of foundational frameworks to address gendered violence.

The Minister for the Prevention of Family Violence and newly created role of the Parliamentary Secretary for Men's Behaviour Change are instrumental in unifying government primary prevention efforts.

Victoria's prevention infrastructure is also unique as Victoria is the only state or territory to have a statutory body dedicated to the prevention of family violence and violence against women. Respect Victoria, as this dedicated expert body, works with the sector, community and government to drive state-wide primary prevention activity and outcomes. In particular, Respect Victoria holds an important partnership with Family Safety Victoria to deliver primary prevention activity and, together, keep a strong focus on primary prevention in Victoria.

A Women's Health Services Network report showed that the Victorian rate of violence against women experienced over the previous two years has fallen from 8.1% in 2016, when it was well above the national average of 7.7%, to an estimated 5.3% in 2022, compared to a national average of 6.6% (26, 27).[iv] While the only acceptable rate should be zero, we can be cautiously hopeful to see the fall in Victoria's rates of violence against women.

Victoria has a well-developed primary prevention infrastructure, which can best be defined as the essential foundations that enable prevention work to happen in an effective and impactful way, as outlined in Figure 4 opposite (28).

iv These are the most updated Personal Safety Survey data available within the reporting period.

FIGURE 4: PREVENTION INFRASTRUCTURE

Source: (28)

FIGURE 5: PREVENTION SYSTEM INFRASTRUCTURE

A SNAPSHOT OF KEY ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES IN VICTORIA'S PREVENTION SYSTEM[v]

FEDERAL AGENCIES, ALLIANCES AND ORGANISATIONS WITH PREVENTION RESPONSIBILITIES

- **Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission**
- **Workplace Gender Equality Agency**
- **Our Watch**
- **eSafety Commissioner (eSafety)**
- **Department of Social Services**
- **Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS)**
- **National Women's Safety Alliance**
- **National women's alliances[vi]**

VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS WITH PREVENTION RESPONSIBILITIES

Family Safety Victoria
Whole-of-government coordination and system governance, statewide prevention programs and workforce development, and the Dhelk Dja partnership with Aboriginal communities

Department of Families, Fairness and Housing
Office for Women, child and family services, equality, housing and ageing well

Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions
Local government portfolio, Sports and Recreation Victoria, Office for Women in Sport and Recreation

Department of Health
Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan, support for municipal planning and the Victorian Women's Health Program, Integrated Health Promotion funding

Department of Education
Respectful Relationships

Department of Justice and Community Safety
Legislative amendments, justice policy, alcohol and gambling policy, and crime prevention portfolio

v. This diagram includes organisations with responsibilities for prevention oversight or delivery or otherwise brought to our attention through this review. It does not capture all organisations with a role in primary prevention, nor does it capture governance arrangements and partnerships.

vi. These include the Working with Women Alliance, National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Alliance, National Rural Women's Coalition, Women with Disabilities Australia, and Australian Multicultural Women's Alliance. Further information can be found at: www.pmc.gov.au/office-women/working-for-women-program/national-womens-alliances.

STATE AGENCIES WITH PREVENTION RESPONSIBILITIES

Respect Victoria

Research and monitoring and evaluation, social change and community mobilisation efforts, policy and funding advice, family violence prevention practice

Commission for Gender Equality in the Public Sector

Oversees implementation of the Gender Equality Act

Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor

Oversaw whole of government accountability for family violence reform arising from the 2015 Royal Commission into Family Violence[vii]

Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission

Oversees compliance with key state-based human rights legislation, including the positive duty to prevent sexual harassment and discrimination on the basis of sex, gender and other protected attributes, and new prohibitions on gendered hate speech and conduct

WorkSafe Victoria

Oversees compliance with the Occupational Health and Safety Act, including delivering campaigns, education and guidance to support workplaces to prevent gendered violence at work

vii The Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor delivered its final report in January 2023. It subsequently ceased operations in line with the Victorian Government announcing on 28 January 2023 that it had acquitted all 227 recommendations from the Royal Commission into Family Violence.

KEY NON-GOVERNMENT ORGANISATIONS OR GROUPS THAT PROVIDE PREVENTION TRAINING, EVIDENCE AND/OR EXPERTISE

Mainstream

- Safe and Equal
- Women's Health Services Network
- Gender Equity Victoria
- Sexual Assault Services Victoria
- Victorian Women's Trust
- Jesuit Social Services

Community-led or specialist

- Women with Disabilities Victoria
- Multicultural Centre for Women's Health
- Djirra
- VACCA
- Zoe Belle Gender Collective
- Rainbow Health Australia

Setting specific

- Municipal Association of Victoria
- Australian Women's Health Alliance
- Community Legal Centres
- Celebrate Ageing
- Seniors Rights Victoria

LOCAL LEADERS OF PREVENTION ACTIVITY IN PARTICULAR SETTINGS AND COMMUNITIES

- Specialist family violence services and sexual assault services
- Women's Health Services and community health services
- Elder Abuse Prevention Networks
- Community organisations
- ACCOs
- Dhelk Dja Regional Action Groups
- Local governments
- TAFEs and universities

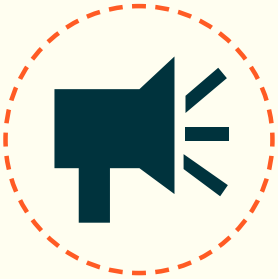
WHERE PREVENTION TAKES PLACE

Settings are important sites for prevention work. Essentially, they are places where people live, work, learn and socialise. Prevention work in settings, or settings-based approaches, engages large cross-sections of the community and can directly impact on social norms, organisational practices and institutional structures (4).

Education
(schools and early childhood)

Workplaces

Sporting clubs and institutions



Media and advertising

Health services

Community and women's legal services

Faith-based entities

Local government

Social, community and family support services

Universities and TAFEs

Digital spaces

OUR GOAL IS TO END THIS VIOLENCE. THIS REQUIRES UNWAVERING WORK TOWARDS GENERATIONAL CHANGE. WE CANNOT STEP BACK FROM THIS CHALLENGE. IT IS OUR UNFINISHED BUSINESS.

Then Minister for Prevention of Family Violence – Vicki Ward MP

CHAPTER 2

WHY PREVENTING VIOLENCE IS IMPORTANT

THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACTS OF VIOLENCE

Gendered violence, family violence and all forms of violence against women, children and gender diverse people are profound violations of human rights that cause widespread and preventable grief, harm and loss.

FIGURE 7: INDIVIDUAL IMPACTS OF GENDERED VIOLENCE

1 IN 4 WOMEN IN VICTORIA

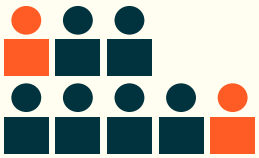
have experienced intimate partner violence from a male partner since the age of 15, and 1 in 5 have experienced sexual violence

1 IN 14 MEN IN AUSTRALIA

have experienced intimate partner violence since the age of 15, and 1 in 16 have experienced sexual violence

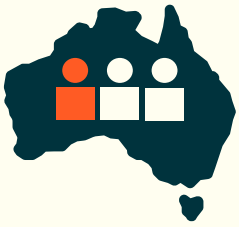
MEN ARE MORE LIKELY

to be physically assaulted by a man they don't know (1 in 5) than by a man they know (1 in 7) or a woman they know (1 in 11)



AROUND 1 IN 3 WOMEN AND 1 IN 5 MEN

report experiencing sexual abuse during childhood

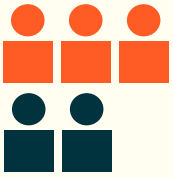


1 IN 3 AUSTRALIAN ADULTS

report experiencing physical abuse during childhood

Source: (27, 29)

FIGURE 8: DISPROPORTIONATE IMPACTS OF VIOLENCE ON PEOPLE WHO EXPERIENCE OVERLAPPING AND COMPOUNDING FORMS OF OPPRESSION AND INEQUALITY



AN ESTIMATED 3 IN 5 FIRST NATIONS WOMEN
have experienced intimate partner violence

1 IN 6 OLDER AUSTRALIANS
have experienced elder abuse in the last 12 months

2 IN 3 LGBTQ VICTORIANS
have experienced family violence

ALMOST HALF OF MIGRANT WOMEN IN AUSTRALIA
have experienced workplace sexual harassment in the past five years

2X

PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES ARE TWICE AS LIKELY
as people without disabilities to have experienced violence since the age of 15

Source: (7, 30-34)

Beyond the immediate physical and psychological harm, people who have experienced violence often face long-term effects such as trauma, housing insecurity, disruptions to work and study, and significant financial cost (35, 36). These impacts ripple across families, communities, workplaces and the broader economy.

> *In 2015–16, family violence in Victoria cost an estimated $5.3 billion, of which $2.6 billion was borne by victim-survivors and their families, $1.8 billion by the State Government and $918 million by the community and broader economy (37).*

The cost of family violence includes lives lost, crisis response (police, ambulances, hospitals, courts, and frontline family violence and child protection services), healthcare, economic impact, property damage, lost work and disability. While updated economic modelling is set to be released shortly, it can be assumed that the current cost of family violence remains high.

THE BENEFITS OF PREVENTING VIOLENCE

The avoidable personal, community and statewide costs of gendered violence, family violence and all forms of violence against women are significant. Decades of evidence from Victorian, Australian and international efforts shows that it is possible to successfully prevent violence if such efforts are concerted, coordinated and sustained across the social ecology (4).

HEALTH AND SAFETY

Preventing violence reduces rates of trauma-related chronic illness and disability, including PTSD/C-PTSD, psychological distress (including depression and anxiety), pelvic pain, chronic pain, autoimmune disease, heart disease, addiction and brain injury (38-47).

It also eases pressure over time on frontline family violence services and avoids costs to already struggling health, emergency services, police, justice, child protection and housing services, and systems seeking to address poverty, homelessness and mental illness (26).

THE ECONOMY

In addition to saving and improving lives, preventing gendered violence has significant long-term benefits for the economy.

In 2025, the Victorian Government estimated that their investment of $82.8 million in family and sexual violence systems will save $120–130 million over 10 years in avoidable costs, and will produce up to $140 million through economic benefits over the same period (48).

Economic modelling by Deloitte estimates that shifting harmful gender norms (one of the goals of prevention work and a precursor to seeing rates of perpetration fall) will grow the national economy by $128 billion per annum on average (49). On a household level, the economic gains associated with more flexible gender norms would translate to an additional $12,200 per year for every household across Australia. Even early shifts in gender norms will improve labour market engagement and productivity (49).

Prevention is about transformational change and, as outlined in the Deloitte modelling, efforts require sustained investment to yield strong future economic returns. While Victoria has demonstrated commitment to addressing family violence and all forms of violence against women, investment needs to be sustained at higher than existing levels across the spectrum of primary prevention, early intervention, response, recovery and healing. Combined with leadership, policy reform and collaboration, investment will create the safe and prosperous state that Victorians are seeking (50).

VICTORIAN SOCIETY

Primary prevention is about social change that will ultimately eradicate violence at the root causes. By doing so, it contributes to a healthier, fairer future where everyone can flourish. Addressing the drivers and reinforcing factors of gendered violence will remove the constraints that rigid gender stereotypes, gender inequality and harmful forms of masculinity place on people of all genders. It will support community safety, mental and physical health, economic participation and community inclusion.

POLICY AND SOCIAL CONTEXT

Over the reporting period, there have been significant social, economic and political shifts that have impacted on the prevention landscape in Victoria.

ONGOING EFFECTS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Victoria has continued to feel the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and its corresponding public health measures. As reported in Respect Victoria's 2022 report to Parliament on the progress of prevention, the pandemic 'caused major disruptions to the prevention system and program implementation'. Primary prevention was made less of a priority as significant additional resources and attention was understandably focused on crisis response work and service delivery amid a completely new and immensely challenging service delivery environment (2).

From 2022 onwards, with lockdowns over, the Victorian community attempted to adjust, with increased economic debt and cost of living pressures, ongoing mental and physical health impacts, and an arguably more fractured and polarised society (51, 52). The impacts on young people and schools continued to be felt with widespread teacher shortages due — at least in part — to burnout and a reported rise in misogyny towards female teachers, a significant increase in school non-attendance and anxiety among students, and a cohort of children and young people whose formative social and emotional development (including through participating in the Respectful Relationships initiative in school and early years settings) had been significantly disrupted (51, 53, 54).

BACKLASH AND RESISTANCE

These changed social conditions — together with rising influence of the 'manosphere' and misogynistic extremists radicalising young men through online platforms, the media and social commentary surrounding developments in global politics and high-profile family violence and sexual assault cases locally and internationally — have created fertile ground for intensifying backlash to gender equality, spurred by a quickly evolving technology landscape (55, 56). This influence has been compounded by the large amount of time Victorians, especially young people and children, have spent online since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, with other avenues for socialisation and education not available for long periods. Resistance and backlash to gender equality efforts have always been present and are an expected part of progressive social change; however, report participants highlighted the unique and complex ways that backlash has manifested and intensified over the past three years due to these factors (55, 56).

Report participants also highlighted the ongoing and intensifying anti-LGBTIQA+ backlash internationally and across Australia, which has caused, and continues to cause, profound harms to LGBTIQA+ communities, particularly trans and gender diverse people, who have been targeted through hateful social and political discourse and direct violence at a community level (57). Participants reflected on the intrinsic links between these forms of violence and discrimination, and the crucial need to address them through the broader prevention effort.

There has been a marked increase in the development and uptake of generative AI tools and apps during the reporting period. Participants

observed that such technology has been increasingly weaponised to perpetrate violence against women, including through the creation and distribution of non-consensual 'deepfake' pornography (58).

Significant backlash and resistance have also been targeted towards First Nations people during and following the federal referendum on a First Nations Voice to Parliament. Aboriginal leaders and organisations have since spoken about the impacts that the majority 'No' vote and divisive national debate and subsequent racist rhetoric had, and continues to have, on Aboriginal peoples' physical, psychological and spiritual wellbeing, as well as on their trust and willingness to engage with mainstream services and organisations, and in Australia's commitment to reconciliation, truth and justice (59).

RATES OF VIOLENCE

Between January 2022 and December 2024, there were 245 Australian women killed or allegedly killed through acts of gendered violence, the majority by a current or former partner (60).[viii] There were 98,816 police recorded incidents of family violence in 2023–24 — the highest number in five years, likely reflecting — at least in large part — increased community awareness of what behaviours constitute family violence and a growing trust and willingness to report (62, 63). A number of deaths sparked considerable media reporting, community anguish and increased the national conversation about gendered violence. In Victoria, there was significant community mobilisation calling for a stop to violence against women (64).

Mobilising efforts have, in large part, been spurred by the powerful, ongoing advocacy of groups such as Counting Dead Women and Sherele Moody's Australian Femicide Watch, and the media reporting on a number of deaths of women, including Samantha Murphy, Rebecca Young and Hannah McGuire in Ballarat in 2024, and far too many women since, allegedly at the hands of men, in tragedies that could have been avoided (60, 64).

This increased attention on the importance of addressing gendered violence, family violence and all forms of violence against women created a catalyst for renewed investment and commitment to strengthening primary prevention efforts and the need to continue to resource and support innovation, community-led initiatives and evidence-building.

The voices of Aboriginal leaders and ACCOs also culminated in the announcement of a federal inquiry into missing and murdered First Nations women and children, with a report released in 2024 (65, 66). Sadly, this report did not receive the volume of media coverage it deserved, but it garnered an important commitment from the Australian Government in September 2024, to explicitly consider the needs and experiences of First Nations people, including in the release of the upcoming National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Safety Plan.

viii It is worth noting that these figures do not include deaths by suicide related to family violence or gendered violence. A recent Coronial finding noted that the link between family violence and suicide is under-researched and that increased resourcing for the Coroners Court of Victoria would yield better quality data and analysis of this relationship (61).

OVERVIEW OF VICTORIAN POLICY CONTEXT 2022–24

VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT FAMILY VIOLENCE REFORM SNAPSHOT

The Victorian Government's prevention efforts are informed by a range of strategies and governance frameworks intended to drive whole-of-government reform. This includes the following:

- ***Free from violence: Victoria's strategy to prevent family violence and all forms of violence against women — Second rolling action plan 2022–2025*** (2021) — this was the Victorian Government's guiding policy document for primary prevention over the reporting period. Ongoing implementation has been consolidated into *Until every Victorian is safe: Third rolling action plan to end family and sexual violence 2025 to 2027*, released in September 2025 outside of the reporting period (5, 67, 68).
- ***Ending family violence: Victoria's plan for change (2016)*** — this is the overarching 10-year strategy guiding Victoria's family violence reforms (from prevention through to response), which has been implemented through a series of rolling action plans. The current rolling action plan ended in 2023, and the next one was published outside the reporting timeframe in 2025 (69).
- ***Building from strength: 10-Year Industry Plan for Family Violence Prevention and Response (2017)*** — this industry plan outlines the long-term vision for the workforces that prevent and respond to family violence (70).
- ***Dhelk Dja: Safe Our Way — Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families (2018)*** — this strategy was developed in partnership with Aboriginal communities across Victoria to guide self-determined, Aboriginal-led family violence prevention and response. Implementation is achieved through a series of three-year action plans (71).
- ***Everybody matters: Inclusion and equity statement (2018)*** — this statement was operationalised through an inaugural three-year blueprint (2019–2022). Ongoing implementation has been consolidated into the Ending Family Violence third rolling action plan (72).
- ***Our equal state: Victoria's gender equality strategy and action plan 2023–2027*** (2023) — this is Victoria's roadmap for action on gender equality (73).
- ***Roadmap for Reform: Strong families, safe children (2016)*** — this is Victoria's strategy focusing on reform of the Victorian children, youth and families system, shifting the focus from crisis response to prevention and early intervention (74).

Oversight and implementation of these various strategies are guided by a series of governance structures intended to drive whole-of-government reform. These include the Family Violence Reform Advisory Group, Victim Survivors' Advisory Council, Dhelk Dja Partnership Forum and Primary Prevention Sector Reference Group.

ROYAL COMMISSION INTO FAMILY VIOLENCE RECOMMENDATIONS ACQUITTAL

On 28 January 2023, the Victorian Government announced the acquittal of the 227 recommendations from the 2015 Royal Commission into Family Violence. With this, the mandate for the Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor, set up to oversee and monitor progress of the recommendations' implementation, was fulfilled, and this important accountability structure was ended.

Of course, implementation of the royal commission recommendations did not mean the problem of family violence and violence against women was solved. Recognising this, the Victorian Government released *Strong Foundations*, which set the direction for the next stage of family violence reform in Victoria and signalled the Victorian Government's commitment to the ongoing, unfinished work of preventing and addressing family violence and violence against women. As then Minister for Prevention of Family Violence Vicki Ward MP stated:

> *Our goal is to end this violence. This requires unwavering work towards generational change. We cannot step back from this challenge. It is our unfinished business (75).*

See **Chapter 4: Enabling policy and legislation** from page 96 for a discussion of key progress and developments during the reporting period.

FREE FROM VIOLENCE STRATEGY

Free from violence: Second action plan 2022–2025, co-designed and delivered by Family Safety Victoria and Respect Victoria, was the guiding policy document for primary prevention in Victoria during the reporting period. As the second phase of delivering the *10-year Free from Violence strategy,* its focus was on 'strengthening whole-of-community efforts and actions'. It included 10 priority areas:

- testing new and innovative approaches
- tailored approaches for diverse community groups
- Aboriginal-led prevention
- key settings
- community engagement and awareness
- partnerships and advocacy
- governance, coordination and system development
- workforce and sector development
- build knowledge
- monitor and share outcomes.

Almost all actions aligned with these priority areas were acquitted over the reporting period. Specific progress and achievements are outlined in **Chapter 4: Prevention investment** and **Enabling policy and legislation** from page 75. Importantly, this crucial work was intended to lead into the final, forthcoming phase of the *Free from Violence* strategy. The pathway of intended change can be seen in the diagram opposite.[ix]

ix The next stage of this work has been consolidated into *Until every Victorian is safe: Third rolling action plan to end family and sexual violence 2025 to 2027*, which was released in September 2025, after the reporting period.

FIGURE 9: THE THREE PHASES OF FREE FROM VIOLENCE ACTIVITY

Source: (67)

YOORROOK JUSTICE COMMISSION

The work of the Yoorrook Justice Commission has also influenced the political and social context of prevention in Victoria, especially the support required for Aboriginal-led prevention. Three of the 100 recommendations made by the commission relate specifically to family violence. These are:

- the establishment of a Victorian First Peoples' prevention of family violence peak body
- sustainable, long-term funding to ACCOs to expand and deliver new initiatives to respond to family violence, including centres for First Peoples women affected by family violence
- investment in primary prevention initiatives that also address racism.

The Yoorrook Justice Commission was established in May 2021, becoming Australia's first formal truth-telling process into historical and ongoing injustices experienced by First Peoples in Victoria. The commission held six blocks of public hearings within the reporting period, with a focus on injustices against First Peoples in the child protection and criminal justice systems, including a thematic focus on family violence, as well as public hearings about land, sky and waters, and health, housing, education and economic justice. The commission delivered three interim reports and made 146 recommendations for reform — three of which related to family violence, as noted earlier. The commission's final report was tabled in Parliament on 1 July 2025.

Changing the picture and the work of Dhelk Dja highlight the legacy of colonisation and ongoing systemic racism as key drivers of the unacceptably high rates of violence against Aboriginal women. The work of the Yoorrook Justice Commission has highlighted how redressing the wrongs of the past, supporting First Peoples' self-determination and Aboriginal-led prevention efforts are — and must continue to be — central to Victoria's efforts to prevent family violence and all forms of violence against women (24).

OVERVIEW OF FEDERAL POLICY CONTEXT 2022–24

AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT FAMILY VIOLENCE REFORM SNAPSHOT

- The ***National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032*** — released in October 2022 — it outlines a vision to end gendered violence in one generation. While focused on violence against women, children are recognised as experiencing violence in their own right, and updated terminology includes gendered violence against LGBTIQA+ people (76).
- ***Working for Women: A strategy for gender equality*** — released in March 2024, it prioritises the prevention of gendered violence through addressing both gendered drivers and risk factors such as financial inequality and insecurity, unpaid caring roles, and health and disability (77).
- The ***Action Plan Addressing Gender-based Violence in Higher Education*** — released in February 2024 — it aims to create higher education communities free from gendered violence (78).
- The ***National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse 2021–2030*** — it is a nationally coordinated, strategic framework for preventing and responding to child sexual abuse (79).
- ***Safe and Supported: The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021–2031*** — it is a framework for governments, community organisations and First Nations leaders to reduce the rate of child abuse and neglect and its impacts across generations (80).
- ***Australia's Disability Strategy 2021–2031*** — it outlines a vision for a more inclusive and accessible Australian society where all people with disability can fulfil their potential as equal members of the community (81).
- The ***National Women's Health Strategy 2020–2030*** — it is Australia's national approach to improving the health of women and girls — particularly those at greatest risk of poor health — and to reducing inequities between different groups (82).
- The ***National Health and Climate Strategy*** — released in December 2023 — it outlines an intersectional, cross-portfolio approach to supporting healthy, climate-resilient communities, including recognition of the disproportionate impacts of climate disaster on women and girls (83).
- The ***National Plan to Respond to the Abuse of Older Australians (Elder Abuse) 2019–2023*** — it sets out the Australia's cross-government framework for preventing and responding to the abuse of older people (84).

Throughout the reporting period, there have been several federal policy and legislative developments at the national level with implications for prevention work in Victoria. These include:

- the establishment of the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission
- the ongoing work and national leadership of Our Watch
- the Rapid Review of evidence-based approaches to prevent gender-based violence (discussed further below)
- the first standalone *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan* (2023–2025) under the *National Plan to Prevent Violence Against Women and Children*
- the continuation of funding through the Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence Responses 2021–30 schedule under the Federation Funding Agreement — Affordable Housing, Community Services and Other and the Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence National Partnership Agreement
- the inquiry into missing and murdered First Nations women and children
- the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability
- the *Online Safety Act 2021* (Cth) coming into force in January 2022, giving the eSafety Commissioner substantial new powers to protect adults and children from harm across most online platforms and forums where people can experience harm (85)
- the enacting of federal reforms to the *Sex Discrimination Act 1984* (Cth), which made it clear that it is unlawful to subject another person to a workplace environment that is hostile on the grounds of sex (86)
- National Cabinet commitments including strengthening accountability of high-risk perpetrators and focusing on efforts to prevent impacts of violent pornography and online misogyny (87)
- national higher education reforms to address gendered violence including an action plan, National Student Ombudsman and National Higher Education Code to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence (78).

Over the reporting period, the Australian Government has continued to progress the development of several prevention-related frameworks and strategies. This includes adapting the *National Plan to Prevent Violence Against Women and Children* for disability-specific contexts, consultation on the development of the *National Plan to End the Abuse and Mistreatment of Older People 2025–2035*, and consultation on the forthcoming *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Safety Plan* (88, 89).

RAPID REVIEW OF EVIDENCE-BASED APPROACHES TO PREVENT GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

In conjunction with the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commissioner co-convened an expert panel to undertake a rapid review of evidence-based approaches to prevent gender-based violence. The final report from the Rapid Review of Prevention Approaches was delivered on 23 August 2024 (90). It made recommendations across six areas, including that Commonwealth and state and territory governments agree that 'ending gender-based violence, including violence against children and young people' becomes an ongoing priority of National Cabinet.

Other recommendations included:

- establishing a co-funded Prevention Innovation Fund
- undertaking an independent review of *Change the story*
- prioritising the needs and experiences of First Nations people
- focusing on children and young people, men and masculinities, and strengthening women's economic inequality
- embedding prevention through response services, systems and industries.

While report participants had diverse views about the rapid review's process and a number of its recommendations, many felt it brought renewed attention to the strengths of Victoria's current prevention efforts and underscored the importance of addressing all determinants of violence outlined in *Change the story* — gendered drivers, reinforcing factors and overlapping forms of oppression and inequality — as well as distinct drivers of specific types of gendered, family and sexual violence, and their impacts on particular cohorts. It also highlighted opportunities to leverage cross-sector, government and industry ownership and collaboration to target commercial or market-based contributors to violence — such as pornography, alcohol, gambling and the incentivisation of harmful content across digital platforms and settings.

CHAPTER 3:

MEASURING PROGRESS

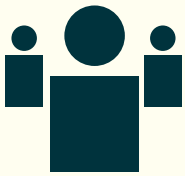
THIS CHAPTER PROVIDES:

- **A SNAPSHOT OF PROGRESS IN THE REPORTING PERIOD AND SINCE THE 2022 THREE YEARLY REPORT**
- **AN OUTLINE OF THE STATEWIDE THEORY OF CHANGE**
- **AN OVERVIEW OF HOW PREVENTION PRACTITIONERS PERCEIVED PROGRESS.**

Detailed analysis of progress, challenges and opportunities is captured in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 3

SNAPSHOT OF POSITIVE PROGRESS AND CHANGE: 2022–24



GREATER COMMUNITY INTEREST, AWARENESS AND DEMANDS FOR CHANGE

- Report participants highlighted increased community interest in, conversations about, and willingness to take action on prevention, with 69% of survey recipients feeling awareness of the Victorian community about gendered violence is better than it was three years ago.
- The annual Walk Against Family Violence drew increasing numbers each year, with an estimated 8,500 Victorians joining the walk in 2024 (up from 5,000 in 2023).
- Respect Victoria engaged an average of 1.65 million Victorians through social change campaigns.
- *The National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey* (NCAS) results released in 2023 show over two-thirds (68%) of Victorians reject violence-supportive attitudes.
- Community-based prevention activities were initiated in every local council area across the state through the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence Campaign in 2023 and 2024, with 90% of grassroots funding recipients agreeing that the initiative contributed to increased awareness and knowledge of the issues and/or transforming harmful attitudes.

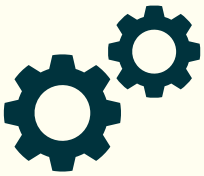
CONTINUED POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND INVESTMENT

- All 227 Royal Commission into Family Violence recommendations were acquitted.
- Victoria appointed Australia's first Parliamentary Secretary for Men's Behaviour Change (2024) and created a dedicated ministerial portfolio for children (2023).
- The Victorian Government invested an estimated $130 million in prevention across state budgets over the reporting period — more than any other state or territory.[x]
- The Victorian Government invested $9.8 million in 2024 for Respect Victoria to design and deliver the world-leading 'Respect Ballarat: A community model to prevent gendered violence'.[xi]
- The Victorian Government invested a further $46.9 million in the Respectful Relationships initiative.

x See **Chapter 4: Prevention investment** for further details.
xi Formerly the 'Ballarat Community Saturation Model' and hereafter referred to in this report as 'Respect Ballarat'.

SIGNIFICANT POLICY AND LEGISLATIVE DEVELOPMENTS

- Victoria's second *Free from Violence* action plan was released in 2022, with all actions delivered or on track to be delivered at the time of writing.
- *Strong foundations: Building on Victoria's work to end family violence,* released in 2023, set the direction for the next phase of family violence reform.
- *Our equal state: Victoria's gender equality strategy and action plan 2023-2027* was launched in 2023.
- The Victorian Government actioned the Fair Access Policy Roadmap to ensure fairer access to community sports facilities for women and girls (2022).
- The Victorian Parliament made affirmative sexual consent the law and created offences for non-fatal strangulation in 2022.
- WorkSafe Victoria and the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission partnered in 2023 to strengthen Victoria's regulatory approach to preventing and addressing work-related sexual harassment.



MATURING OF PREVENTION SYSTEM INFRASTRUCTURE

- Respect Victoria developed a Statewide Theory of Change, enabling a shared understanding of collective progress in Victoria.
- Report participants highlighted more and stronger collaboration across prevention efforts.[xii]
- Respect Victoria's leadership and system coordination role strengthened, including through Respect Victoria establishing and growing the Prevention Alliance from 2022 onwards.
- Local government engagement in gender equality and prevention continued to grow and strengthen through centralised support and infrastructure under the Municipal Association of Victoria.
- Regional violence prevention partnerships, led by women's health services, continued to enable place-based coordination and impact across the state.

xii Specific examples are outlined in Chapter 4 in the section on **Strengthening the prevention system and Recognising and enabling community-led and specialist prevention work.**

CHAPTER 3

SNAPSHOT OF POSITIVE PROGRESS AND CHANGE: 2022–24

ONGOING WORKFORCE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

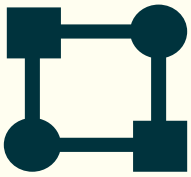
- Over 4,000 people participated in the Partners in Prevention Network (convened by Safe and Equal), which grew by more than 800 people in this period.
- *Framing the Future*, the second rolling action plan under Victoria's *Building from Strength: 10-Year Industry Plan for Family Violence Prevention and Response*, was released in 2024 (91).
- Safe and Equal's *Foundations for Action* report, released in 2024, mapped the prevention workforce and outlined priorities for action.
- Work commenced to deliver a dedicated *Prevention Capability Framework.*

NEW RESEARCH AND EVIDENCE

- NCAS results were published by ANROWS and a Victorian boosted sample analysed by Respect Victoria to better understand state-level change (2021) (92).
- The *Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention Mapping Project (2022)* and the *Aboriginal Family Violence Primary Prevention Evidence Review (2023)* were released (19, 93).
- The *2024 National Man Box study* report was released by Jesuit Social Services in partnership with Respect Victoria, together with Respect Victoria's companion report, *Willing, confident and capable: Engaging men in the prevention of violence against women* (94, 95).
- The evidence base continues to build with key literature reviews published by Respect Victoria including a synthesis of global and Australian evidence on prevention interventions to support Respect Ballarat and a suite of papers through the Summarising the Evidence project (23, 96-102).

PROMISING COMMUNITY-LED WORK AND SELF-DETERMINED PREVENTION

- The Yoorrook Justice Commission delivered its *Yoorrook for Transformation* recommendations, including three with a focus on family violence prevention (2024).
- Victoria's *Indigenous Family Violence Primary Prevention Framework* (2022) was refreshed, along with the ongoing leadership and program delivery by ACCOs (e.g. Djirra's Koori Women's Place delivered 435 workshops to almost 2,200 participants).
- Culturally tailored community initiatives delivered by 33 organisations under the Supporting Multicultural and Faith Communities to Prevent Family Violence Program reached over 35,000 people and 80 multicultural and faith communities across Victoria.
- Rainbow Health Australia and Zoe Belle Gender Collective upskilled prevention organisations in addressing queerphobia and transmisogyny through their work.
- *Changing the landscape* practice resources were developed in partnership between Our Watch and Women with Disabilities Victoria.



EVOLVING PREVENTION PRACTICE AND APPROACHES

- Integration and expansion continued for prevention frameworks and practice guidance, for example, the *Safe and Inclusive Sport: Preventing Gender-based Violence Guide*.
- Place-based approaches gained support, including through the announcement of Respect Ballarat on 31 May 2024.
- Increased focus, strategies and partnerships sought to engage men and boys as active contributors and allies in prevention, including through the work of Jesuit Social Services and the development of Respect Victoria's What Kind of Man Do You Want to Be? campaign.
- Support and opportunity increased for collaboration across primary prevention, early intervention, response and recovery, as well as between the prevention sector and organisations working on aligned causes such as reducing the harmful use of alcohol and other drugs, problem gambling and online harms.[xiii]

xiii This is a finding of this report drawn from informant interviews, consultations and desktop data review. See **Chapter 4: Evolving prevention practice and approaches** for further details.

CHAPTER 3

PROGRESS SINCE THE INAUGURAL THREE YEARLY REPORT

The first Three Yearly Report to Parliament captured the foundational elements of Victoria's prevention system that had been built following the state's Royal Commission into Family Violence. It was delivered in September 2022 and marked the three-year anniversary of Respect Victoria. It acknowledged that Victoria's prevention efforts, borne out of decades of advocacy, were also due in large part to the state's sexual assault services and network of women's health services. The report provided the opportunity to showcase the spread of prevention work across the state and highlight the early coordinated understanding of the level of investment, system infrastructure and workforce capability required to end violence.

Three years on, there have been promising developments and achievements towards this goal, albeit with much more work to do and emerging challenges to address.

With a Statewide Theory of Change now in place, coordinated by Respect Victoria with prevention sector partners, tracking progress in prevention is more transparent, accessible and coordinated. Available data shows that most of Victoria's progress has been focused on the enabling layers of change, with some progress towards indicators that suggest shifting social norms, behaviours and structures (discussed in more detail in Chapter 4: Community Awareness, understanding and behaviour change). Progress includes embedding the Gender Equality Act 2020 (Vic) across the Victorian public sector, statewide workforce strengthening activities, and campaigns and initiatives that build community understanding of gendered violence and support leaders to speak out.

This sequencing of progress against the different layers of change outlined in the Statewide Theory of Change broadly reflects the Victorian Government's phased approach to primary prevention, as outlined in the 10-year *Free from Violence* strategy (5). As noted earlier, the *Free from Violence Second Action Plan 2022–2025* focused on 'strengthening whole-of-community efforts and actions' in preparation for an anticipated third phase from 2025–2027 of 'maintaining efforts and getting results' which was the anticipated goal for 2025–2028 and will now be consolidated into the government's implementation of the recently released *Until every Victorian is safe: Third rolling action plan to end family and sexual violence 2025 to 2027* (67, 68).

With the benefit of a Statewide Theory of Change, ongoing leadership and commitment to prevention and robust data collection and evaluation, tracking progress in future will be more streamlined and targeted, and provide a clearer picture of prevention progress and outcomes.

STATEWIDE THEORY OF CHANGE

During the reporting period, Respect Victoria developed a Statewide Theory of Change for the primary prevention of gendered violence, and this outlined the anticipated change pathway by describing short-, medium- and long-term expected outcomes.

Developed with many prevention specialist individuals and organisations, it draws on the input of researchers, practitioners, evaluators and policymakers with the purpose of:

- creating a common language across the primary prevention sector and community of shared outcomes
- showing the logic and sequence of expected outcomes arising out of the prevention system
- tracking pathways to preventing violence
- illustrating where the efforts of diverse stakeholders fit within the bigger picture of prevention work
- monitoring and evaluating outcomes against the evidence to allow for adjustment.

The Statewide Theory of Change contains five layers, with long-term outcomes (or ultimate goals) captured in the top layer. Change is not linear, so each layer should be interpreted as a set of conditions that enable the layer above to occur. Together, these five layers tell a story about the predicted change over time. Measuring collective statewide progress against this Theory of Change allows Victoria to have a shared understanding of collective progress.

FIGURE 10: RESPECT VICTORIA'S STATEWIDE THEORY OF CHANGE

VISION: A VICTORIA IN WHICH EVERYONE IS

5. CHANGE IS ENDURING

5.1 Victorian institutions, organisations, and communities reflect gender equality in decision making, opportunities, and benefits.

5.2 Victorians live free from rigid gender stereotypes and harmful expressions of masculinity.

4. NORMS, INSTITUTIONS AND INDIVIDUALS SHIFT

4.1 Institutions and organisations have embedded cultures and practices that uphold equality and safety.

4.2 There are accountability mechanisms that hold institutions and organisations responsible for maintaining equal and safe cultures and practices.

SYSTEMS AND STRUCTURES

3. CHANGE LEVERS ARE ACTIVATED

3.1 EMBEDDED ORGANISATIONAL POLICIES AND INITIATIVES
Equality and safety policies and primary prevention initiatives are embedded in institutions and organisations across sectors and settings.

3.2 SKILLED AND SUFFICIENT WORKFORCE
There is a stable, skilled, and experienced prevention workforce of sufficient size to create the change required.

2. PREVENTION SYSTEMS ARE IN PLACE

2.1 KNOWLEDGE AND EVIDENCE
There is a growing and accessible body of research and evidence that underpins systems and practice work in prevention.

2.2 FUNDING AND RESOURCES
Public and private resourcing for the prevention of gender-based violence is recurrent, sufficient for building and maintaining long-term prevention systems and practice, and responsive to place based needs.

1. PREVENTION SYSTEMS ARE FORMING

1.1 GOVERNMENT LEGISLATION, REGULATION, POLICY
Legislation, regulatory instruments, and government policies are in place to support the prevention of gender-based violence and gender inequality, and Victorians are aware of this.

1.2 RESEARCH AND EVALUATION SYSTEMS
Mechanisms to develop, generate, and share prevention research and evidence are in place.

1.3 CO-ORDINATION AND LEADERSHIP BODIES
Mechanisms to lead and co-ordinate core elements of the prevention system, such as programs and practice quality, research, monitoring and evaluation, and workforce recruitment and development, are in place and function effectively.

PRINCIPLES UNDERPINNING DESIGN

- Socio-ecological model for prevention
- Change theory
- Gender transformative approach
- Aboriginal self-determination
- Human rights
- Intersectionality
- Ages and stages lens

Respect Victoria — 1 January 2025

EQUAL, RESPECTED, SAFE, AND THRIVING.

5.3 Victorian women and gender diverse people are safe where they live, learn, work, and play.

5.4 Private relationships are characterised by safety, equality, consent, and respect.

4.3 Public portrayals of gender norms exclude harmful stereotypes and are affirming, inclusive, and non-discriminatory.

4.4 Individuals have the knowledge, confidence, and skills to practice positive, respectful, and equal relationship behaviours in private and in public.

4.5 Individuals are confident, skilled, and willing to call out behaviours, practices, and structures that are disrespectful, violent, or enable violence.

INDIVIDUALS AND COMMUNITIES

3.3 ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY
Institutions and organisations have accountability measures that are just and transparent so individuals see norms and standards reflected in institutional practice.

3.4 COMMUNITY UNDERSTANDING OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE
Communities know what family and gender-based violence is and agree it is a gendered problem.

3.5 LEADERS SPEAK OUT
Community, business, and government leaders use their profiles and platforms to deliver prevention messaging, champion and drive prevention action, and model positive behavioural norms.

2.3 WORKFORCE SYSTEMS
System level mechanisms are in place to attract, develop, and retain diverse and skilled professionals and leaders working towards prevention.

2.4 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT WITH AND EXPOSURE TO PREVENTION
Communities and organisations across sectors and settings know about and access, or are exposed to, prevention initiatives and campaigns.

2.5 COMMUNITY DEMANDS ACTION ON PREVENTION
Public desire for further institutional and organisational action on prevention and individual change increases.

1.4 THEORETICAL AND PRACTICE FRAMEWORKS
Evidence informed theoretical, practice, and evaluation frameworks guide collective action toward agreed prevention outcomes.

1.5 QUALITY PROGRAMS
Theory informed, gender transformative primary prevention initiatives are effectively designed and implemented across sectors and settings.

1.6 PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATIONS
Organisations collaborate formally or informally to design and deliver prevention systems and public facing initiatives.

1.7 PROGRAMS ARE INCLUSIVE Prevention initiatives are designed and delivered in a way that is inclusive, non-discriminatory, and tailored for diverse audiences and contexts.

PRECONDITIONS/ ASSUMPTIONS FOR SUCCESS

- Stakeholder buy-in to a collective agenda
- Research and evidence
- Monitoring, evaluation and learning
- Inclusive design and action
- Collaboration, partnering and mutually reinforcing action in prevention
- Collaboration on safety and equality across communities experiencing injustice

CHAPTER 3

HOW VICTORIA'S PREVENTION PRACTITIONERS VIEW PROGRESS

As part of this review, Respect Victoria surveyed people who work in prevention organisations and prevention practitioners about their perceptions of progress over the last three years. We used a snowball sampling technique to ensure the survey reached a wide range of stakeholders involved in prevention work across different settings and sectors, and to ensure a broad range of perspectives were captured.[xiv]

Overall, the results (see Figure 11) indicated that practitioners perceive the Victorian community is more aware of gendered violence than it was three years ago and that the quality of Victorian community-led action to prevent gendered violence, the inclusion of trans and gender diverse people, and the extent of media outlets reporting on gendered violence are all better than they were three years ago. These are indications of positive progress.

Other results indicate where we have more work to do. For example, only one-third of practitioners perceive that the political will of Victorian MPs to address gendered violence is better than it was three years ago, and only one-third believe that men's willingness to discuss their role in preventing gendered violence and to actively participate in initiatives is better than it was three years ago.

xiv See Appendix 2 for a copy of the full survey. Survey respondents were invited to skip questions, so the response rate for individual questions varied.

FIGURE 11: RESPONDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF PROGRESS MADE IN PREVENTION ACTIVITIES

69% of respondents perceived that awareness of the Victorian community about gendered violence is better than it was three years ago

65% of respondents perceived that efforts to ensure that prevention of gendered violence initiatives in Victoria are more inclusive of trans and gender diverse people than three years ago

59% of respondents perceived that the extent of media outlets reporting on gendered violence is better than it was three years ago

56% of respondents perceived that the quality of Victorian community-led action to prevent gendered violence is better than it was three years ago

56% of respondents perceived that the amount of media coverage about gendered violence is better than it was three years ago

50% of respondents perceived that Victorian community readiness to take action to prevent gendered violence is better than it was three years ago

35% of respondents perceived that the political will of Victorian state MPs to address gendered violence is better than it was three years ago

32% of respondents perceived that men's willingness to discuss and learn more about their role in preventing gendered violence is either much better or somewhat better than it was three years ago

28% of respondents perceived that men's and boys' active participation in initiatives to prevent gendered violence is either much better or somewhat better than it was three years ago

(N = 150)

CHAPTER 4:

KEY THEMES: PROGRESS CHALLENGES, RECOMM

This chapter outlines where progress has been made, where there are challenges and opportunities for action, and recommendations to increase progress and impact. The themes outlined in this chapter have been identified and verified through interviews with report participants, consultations, reports and evaluations, and sensemaking workshops with stakeholders.

S,
ENDATIONS

THE THEMES ARE:

- PREVENTION INVESTMENT
- ENABLING POLICY AND LEGISLATION
- STRENGTHENING THE PREVENTION SYSTEM
- GROWING AND SUPPORTING THE WORKFORCE
- BUILDING EVIDENCE AND DATA
- RECOGNISING AND ENABLING COMMUNITY-LED AND SPECIALIST PREVENTION
- COMMUNITY AWARENESS, UNDERSTANDING AND BEHAVIOUR CHANGE
- EVOLVING PREVENTION PRACTICE AND APPROACHES.

CHAPTER 4

PROGRESS, CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Preventing family violence, gendered violence and all forms of violence against women requires a transformational, long-term approach. Change requires unwavering commitment from governments, communities and businesses. While a whole-of-community approach to prevention is crucial, government has unique levers that can further primary prevention efforts.

In this chapter, the progress and challenges outlined will speak to several areas of the Statewide Theory of Change. The findings presented in this chapter have been drawn from interviews with report participants, sector consultations, analysis of reports and evaluations, and sensemaking workshops with stakeholders. Case studies are included to provide more details of established and promising prevention efforts.

Recommendations in this chapter flow from what we know about progress to date, and opportunities for action, and are aimed at safeguarding progress so that the momentum for change is not lost. By building on what works, strengthening and safeguarding essential prevention infrastructure, and courageously addressing persistent and emerging challenges, Victoria can continue to set the standard for what a whole-of-society approach to preventing violence looks like. Centring the people experiencing violence in this work and ensuring accountability to them demands renewed focus and sustained investment. It is a necessary and urgent commitment to move us closer to a Victoria where everyone is safe, equal and respected.

While Respect Victoria makes these recommendations to the Victorian Government, we hope they also provide useful guidance for all organisations working in prevention, and we stand ready to support, and where appropriate lead, their implementation.

PREVENTION INVESTMENT

This section aligns with the following domain of the Theory of Change:

2.2 Funding and resources

Preventing family violence, gendered violence and all forms of violence against women requires sustained, adequate investment and action to address entrenched social norms, attitudes, behaviours and systems that drive and reinforce violence in all the places that Victorians live, work, learn and socialise. The Victorian Government has continued to provide investment for prevention system infrastructure and activity over the last three years, investing more than any other state or territory.

WHERE PROGRESS HAS BEEN MADE

Free from violence: Second action plan 2022–2025 outlined the Victorian Government's key focus for primary prevention investment and leadership over the reporting period — specifically, to scale up work in key settings and strengthen whole-of-community efforts, while continuing to trial, test and build the evidence base for emerging work (67).

The Victorian Government invested an estimated $130 million toward prevention between 2022–23 and 2024–25 (see table below).[xv] Most of the prevention programs were funded under *Free from Violence* through the Prevention of Family Violence portfolio together with the 2024 Strengthening Women's Safety Package, with significant additional investment in the Education portfolio for Respectful Relationships and support for Elder Abuse Prevention Networks through the Ageing portfolio. Under the Dhelk Dja Partnership Agreement, the Aboriginal Community Initiatives Fund supported and addressed priorities of the Dhelk Dja Action Groups, including but not limited to community-led prevention efforts.

Longer-term (i.e. three- or four-year) funding agreements were also established with certain programs and organisations leading workforce development and prevention in key settings,[xvi] alongside investment in emerging priorities such as affirmative consent and prevention and early intervention with men and boys.

xv It is not possible to calculate a precise amount due to funding periods not overlapping precisely with the reporting period for this report and some integration of prevention funding with broader family violence funding. This estimate has been drawn from publicly available information (predominantly state budget papers) and verified with Family Safety Victoria.

xvi For example, a number of organisations that had previously been on one- or two-year funding cycles moved to three- or four-year funding agreements under the Statewide Prevention Workforce Development Program (2022–2026), the Women's Health Services Capacity Building Project (2022–2026), the Free from Violence Local Government Program (2022–2025), and the Gender and Disability Workforce Development Program (2023–2027).

VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT–FUNDED PRIMARY PREVENTION PROGRAMS AND INITIATIVES 2022 - 2024

Programs and organisations	Responsible area of government	Activity	Funding
All Come Out to Play!	Family Safety Victoria	Engages children, parents and early years educators in fun and interactive workshops that explore concepts of gender equality and challenge gender stereotypes.	Playgroup Victoria funded $360,000 over 2023–25 for prevention work in early childhood settings, building on previous funding to Drummond Street Services over 2018–22.
Baby Makes 3	Family Safety Victoria	Challenges gendered drivers and supports equitable relationships with first-time parents. The program engages parents through perinatal health services and is tailored to meet community need.	healthAbility funded $1.2 million over 2023–26, building on previous 2020–22 funding.
Victorian Aboriginal Community Initiatives Fund	Family Safety Victoria	The annual Community Initiatives Fund supports Aboriginal community organisations and community groups to implement community-led projects that educate, prevent, reduce and respond to family violence in Aboriginal communities across Victoria.	The Aboriginal Community Initiatives Fund had a cumulative investment of $5.5 million over the reporting period but this investment is not limited to primary prevention.
Early intervention with at-risk young men and boys	Family Safety Victoria	An early intervention initiative that focuses on at-risk young men aged 12–25; delivered by Jesuit Social Services.	Funded $4.2 million through the National Partnership Agreement on Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence Responses to deliver the Change Makers program until 2026.

Programs and organisations	Responsible area of government	Activity	Funding
Elder Abuse Prevention Networks	Department of Families, Fairness and Housing	Eight elder abuse prevention networks deliver local action to raise awareness of elder abuse and prevent it from happening, using a primary prevention approach.	The 2023–24 State Budget provided $6 million over four years to continue initiatives to address elder abuse, including the delivery of Elder Abuse Prevention Networks.
Free from Violence Local Government Program	Family Safety Victoria & Local Government Victoria	Supports 27 councils to embed gender equality and family violence prevention practices into their work.	Funded with $3.5 million to 15 councils from 2022–25 and $3 million to 12 councils from 2024–27.
LGBTIQ Family Violence Prevention Project	Family Safety Victoria	Based on evidence developed by Rainbow Health Australia and published in the 2020 *Pride in Prevention* guide.	Rainbow Health Australia received $750,000 over 2022–24, building on previous funding over 2019–21.[xvii]
Municipal Association of Victoria	Family Safety Victoria	Supports the councils funded through the Free from Violence Local Government Program and more broadly all 79 Victorian councils to implement the Local government guide for preventing family violence and all forms of violence against women and deliver effective primary prevention activities and initiatives.	The Municipal Association of Victoria received $950,764 from 2023–26.
Gender and Disability Workforce Development Program	Family Safety Victoria	The program equips workers in the prevention and disability sectors with tailored prevention knowledge and skills.	Women with Disabilities Victoria received $1.8 million over 2024–27 to deliver the Gender and Disability Workforce Development Program.

xvii Additional funding was provided in 2025 to continue this project after the reporting period.

Programs and organisations	Responsible area of government	Activity	Funding
Our Watch	Family Safety Victoria	Founded in 2015 to guide prevention efforts under the *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children*.	Victoria was a founding member of Our Watch and continued to contribute towards its base funding along with other states and territories.
Preventing Violence Through Sport Grants Program	Family Safety Victoria & Sport and Recreation Victoria	Supports partnerships between community sport and recreation and prevention organisations, to prevent violence through sport.	Funded $2.3 million for 12 projects from 2022–24 and an additional $1.2 million in 2024–25 for a further year of programming.
Prevention in Teaching and Learning project	Family Safety Victoria	Supports partnership between Our Watch and Victorian universities to embed prevention of family violence content in relevant degrees, including public health and early childhood education courses.	Funded $400,000 over 2023–25 to embed prevention content in university courses.
Respect Victoria	Family Safety Victoria	Respect Victoria is the dedicated, statutory agency for prevention in Victoria. (See page 28 for details on role, remit and key milestones.)	$3.1 million per year to deliver core legislative functions, and additional lapsing funding of $19.2 million over three years provided in 2022-23 to deliver statewide behaviour change campaigns and evidence based primary prevention activities, supporting the delivery of Free From Violence.
Respect Ballarat	Department of Families, Fairness and Housing	The Respect Ballarat model is a new approach that uses place-based, community-led approaches to prevent gendered violence.	Funded $9.8 million through the Strengthening Women's Safety Package.

Programs and organisations	Responsible area of government	Activity	Funding
Statewide Prevention Workforce Development Program	Family Safety Victoria & Department of Education	Supports Safe and Equal to build capability and connection of primary prevention practitioners across Victoria.	Safe and Equal is being funded $4 million to deliver the Statewide Prevention Workforce Development Program. This includes $2.8 million funding through the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing from 2022–26 to deliver sector development, specialised training, the Partners in Prevention network for practitioners, and a biannual conference. The Department of Education is providing $1.2 million over the period 2021–25 to support workforce development relating to respectful relationships education.
Supporting Multicultural and Faith Communities to Prevent Family Violence Grant Program	Family Safety Victoria	Grants program for organisations to build the capacity of multicultural and faith communities to prevent family violence and all forms of violence against women.	Funded $9.7 million via a grants program for 33 organisations over 2021–24, with a further year of funding allocated in 2024–25.
Supporting Young People to Understand Affirmative Consent Program	Family Safety Victoria	A community-based education program that engages with young people aged 12–25, and their key influencers, across diverse communities, to build their understanding of affirmative consent and sexual violence.	Funded $3.5 million for 12 projects over 2022–24, with a further year of funding allocated for 2024–25. This also includes funding to Sexual Assault Services Victoria, Safe and Equal, and the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, to provide capacity building and support to funded organisations.

Programs and organisations	Responsible area of government	Activity	Funding
Women's Health Services Workforce Capacity Building Program	Family Safety Victoria & Department of Health	Supports 12 women's health services to build the knowledge and skills of people working in local councils, sports clubs and health services, and a range of other local organisations, to prevent family violence in their communities. The program also supports women's health services to deliver innovative prevention activities in their communities.	Funded $4.8 million over four years (2022–26) to support nine regional and three statewide women's health services. The 2022–23 State Budget also provided $19.3 million and the 2024–25 State Budget provided $18.3 million to women's health services. Part of this funding was administered through the Capacity Building Program to support gendered violence prevention activities.
Respect and Equality in TAFE Program	Family Safety Victoria & Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions	Funding provided to Melbourne Polytechnic to lead the implementation of the *Respect and Equality in TAFE (RET) Framework* across 16 Victorian TAFE and dual-sector universities. The RET Framework outlines a whole-of-TAFE approach to promoting a culture of equality and respect and to address the drivers of gendered violence.	Funded $450,000 over two years (2022–24).
Starts With Us	Family Safety Victoria	Women's Legal Service Victoria's Starts With Us supported Victorian legal and justice professionals and organisations to implement actions to prevent gendered violence within their workplaces.	Funded $400,000 over three years (2020–23).

THE GOAL NEEDS TO BE THAT THE FUNDING'S ALWAYS THERE AND THAT WE DON'T JUST GET A BIG PUSH WHEN THERE IS EITHER COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT OR THERE HAS BEEN A TRAGIC EVENT OR AN INCIDENT TO BE ABLE TO PROPEL THIS WORK FORWARD.

Prevention organisation executive

CASE STUDY

PREVENTING VIOLENCE THROUGH SPORT GRANTS PROGRAM — SPORTS AND RECREATION VICTORIA

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Since its inception in 2022, the Preventing Violence Through Sport Grants Program supported sport and prevention organisations across Victoria to design and deliver primary prevention programs for local sporting clubs promoting a culture that prevents gender-based violence.

This program acknowledged the enormous capacity that community sport has to influence positive behaviours and attitudes and to prevent all forms of violence against women.

This program provided funding of up to $300,000 over three years for partnership projects that could:

- build the capacity of community sport and recreation to address the gendered drivers of family violence, sexual violence and all forms of violence against women in their communities
- implement the *Safe and Inclusive Sport: Preventing gender-based violence guide*
- build networks and partnerships between community sport and recreation and primary prevention experts.

The program funded projects in the reporting period, including:

- *Champions of the West:* Levelling the Playing Field for Women, Girls, and Gender Diverse Footy Players in Melbourne's West– led by GenWest in partnership with the Western Bulldogs Football Club, the Western Bulldogs Community Foundation, the Western Football Netball League and Women's Health Grampians — has worked with local communities to develop gender equity action plans and provide club education.
- Supporting the readiness of regional sports to prevent and respond to family violence and violence against women — led by La Trobe University in partnership with Sports Focus, Leisure Networks, No to Violence, Centre Against Sexual Assault Central Victoria and Safe and Equal — has created practical and relevant videos and posters to upskill clubs in how to undertake primary prevention of and respond to gender-based violence.

INSIGHTS

As of December 2024, the program had reached 167 clubs (including 2 professional clubs) and 13,543 people including 5,709 young people. It had created 54 gender equity action plans, and 120 gender equity and active bystander trainings had been completed.

The program has been evaluated by Monash University. Key findings include that:

- it is essential to embed partnership within the funding model, as neither the prevention nor sport sector have the expertise alone
- sport is a key setting to engage men and boys, but it is essential that women and gender diverse people's experiences inform the work.

Post-workshop surveys were also completed. After one workshop, participants noted increased confidence and understanding of gender equality with:

- 91% of respondents feeling more aware of sexist comments or language with gender bias, and trying to change this
- 86% feeling their knowledge had increased about gender equality.

KEY TAKEAWAY

The program highlights the significant reach and impact of community sport as a setting for the primary prevention of family violence and gendered violence. It outlines the importance of cross-sector partnerships, with community sport and primary prevention/gender equity organisations able to leverage different expertise

The projects are all unique, delivering different activities, yet all create environments where gender stereotypes are challenged, gendered violence is unacceptable, and gender equality is actively promoted and modelled.[xviii]

xviii Despite positive outcomes and outputs being achieved, funding for this program was not renewed at the conclusion of this reporting period.

STRENGTHENING WOMEN'S SAFETY PACKAGE

The Victorian Government announced the Strengthening Women's Safety Package in May 2024 — a suite of reforms to strengthen Victoria's prevention efforts, provide better support to people experiencing violence when violence occurs, and deliver a stronger justice response to hold perpetrators to account (103). The Strengthening Women's Safety Package was a response to a series of tragic deaths of women allegedly killed by men across Victoria, including the deaths of two women and the disappearance of another in Ballarat. The package included $9.8 million over four years for Respect Victoria to deliver the place-based 'Respect Ballarat: A community model to prevent gendered violence' (see page 176) and $7.8 million over four years for the Respectful Relationships initiative. The package also included an announcement that Respect Victoria would develop a campaign to engage men — particularly young men — in prevention, and this was funded through Respect Victoria's existing budget.

DHELK DJA INVESTMENT

The Victorian Aboriginal Community Initiatives Fund has been in operation for over 20 years and is managed through Family Safety Victoria. It is led by the 11 Dhelk Dja Action Groups and provides annual one-off funding to Aboriginal community organisations and groups to implement community-led projects that educate, prevent, reduce and respond to family violence in Aboriginal communities across Victoria. It has funded more than 400 projects in the past 10 years. Aboriginal-led organisations have consistently called for more sustainable investment through longer-term funding for prevention initiatives, rather than annual grants rounds. This would embed sustainable approaches to preventing and ending family violence in Aboriginal communities.

The 2021–22 round of the Community Initiatives Fund funded 25 culturally appropriate, place-based community-led projects delivered by Aboriginal organisations and community groups across Victoria. Funding was increased by $1 million for the 2022–23 and 2023–24 funding rounds (to a total pool of $2.2 million) to address a lack of prevention funding at the local level.

The 2022–23 Community Initiatives Fund round delivered 42 community-led projects dedicated to preventing and responding to family violence in Victorian Aboriginal communities, and the 2023–24 funding round delivered 44 projects. Successful projects included:

- a prevention program that engages young people at risk of family violence and focuses on cultural connection
- women's groups supporting Aboriginal women in refuges or in prison through yarning circles
- an awareness-raising project to address violence against Aboriginal LGBTIQA+ individuals in community
- a program designed to help heal, empower and culturally connect elders affected by family violence
- a therapeutic retreat for fathers and carers of young Aboriginal children affected by family violence.

RESPECTFUL RELATIONSHIPS

The Strengthening Women's Safety Package included funding of $7.8 million to provide more intensive training and support for teachers in schools delivering Respectful Relationships and to invite more non-government schools to participate in the program. This funding builds on a 2024–25 State Budget investment of $39.1 million over four years to continue to help schools implement and embed a whole-school approach to Respectful Relationships. This brings the total investment in the Respectful Relationships initiative to $129 million since 2016.

The final stage of Victoria's phased introduction of Respectful Relationships into Victorian government schools was completed during the reporting period, with all government schools and a growing number of non-government schools now implementing the Respectful Relationships initiative. Going forward, it will be important to focus on supporting consistent, quality implementation, including through ongoing strategies to ensure school leaders, staff and teachers have the knowledge, skills and confidence to deliver all modules within the curriculum and all elements of the whole-school approach effectively and to respond to complex and emerging challenges facing students, families and school communities. This requires a well-supported workforce within the Department of Education to provide support to school staff.

In addition, it has been a positive development to see this education continue to be supported in early years settings. Respectful Relationships is offered as a voluntary professional learning program to early childhood professionals, to build educators' capacity to promote respect and equality, and support children to build healthy relationships. This aligns with the Practice Principles in the *Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework*, which guides early childhood educator practice and includes 'respectful relationships and responsive engagement' and 'equity and diversity'.

CASE STUDY

RESPECTFUL RELATIONSHIP INITIATIVE — DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The Royal Commission into Family Violence identified the critical role that schools and early childhood education can play in creating a culture of respect to change the story of family violence for future generations. The royal commission recommended the introduction of respectful relationships education in every government school from prep to year 12, delivered through a whole-school approach.

Victoria's Respectful Relationships initiative is about building a culture of respect and gender equality across schools, and tackling the attitudes and behaviours that can lead to family violence and gendered violence. The initiative supports schools and early childhood settings to promote and model respect, positive attitudes and behaviours, and it teaches children how to build healthy relationships, resilience and confidence.

More than 1,950 schools across Victoria are currently implementing the initiative. This includes all government schools, meeting the royal commission recommendation.

Additional investment through the Strengthening Women's Safety Package has supported the following developments:

- Eight new Respectful Relationships project leads have been added to support government, Catholic and independent schools in high-demand areas. This brings the total Respectful Relationships workforce in local areas up to 25 project leads supporting schools to implement the whole-school approach and 17 liaison officers supporting schools to identify and respond to family violence.
- Further opportunity has been created for Catholic and independent schools to sign up to the Respectful Relationships initiative.
- The Modelling Respect and Equality program, delivered by Jesuit Social Services, has been expended in up to 240 primary and secondary schools to promote healthy masculinities in boys and young men.
- New Respectful Relationships teaching and learning materials have been released. These have been developed in consultation with key stakeholders — including students, teachers and parents — to further support the delivery of respectful relationships and consent education, and meet the contemporary needs of students.
- Fact sheets have been released for secondary school students, with tips on how to be safe online, what to do if they feel unsafe, and where to go for further support. Additional fact sheets released for parents and carers of primary and secondary aged students provide information about how to notice signs a child or young person might need support and where to turn if support is needed.

INSIGHTS

The Department of Education Respectful Relationships regional workforce reflected in consultation that there is greater confidence and visibility of the Respectful Relationships initiative across Victorian schools, but there are also ongoing challenges. Representatives mentioned structural barriers for schools — such as competing priorities, teacher shortages, staff confidence and capability — and inconsistent implementation and fidelity to the model across schools. Resistance from some parents and

school communities was also noted, particularly in relation to teaching content around gender norms, stereotypes, positive gender relations and content that is LGBTIQA+ inclusive. New Respectful Relationships resources, the mandate that all government schools teach consent education in an age-appropriate way from prep to year 12, the affirmative consent laws and the rollout of MARAM have helped schools to communicate the importance Respectful Relationships.

Evaluation of the Respectful Relationships initiative from 2017 shows that interactions between staff and students have become more respectful — with teachers taking more time to listen to students, respect their concerns and work with them to develop solutions — and students' social and emotional skills having improved, including improved emotional literacy, attitudes and behaviours (104).

Subsequent evaluation in 2019–21 found overall design of the Respectful Relationships initiative was working effectively, but there was significant variation in how schools across the state had engaged and there were barriers to implementation due to schools' competing priorities, staff turnover and the effort required to maintain momentum and tailor delivery to different school contexts. It was also noted that for the anticipated benefits and outcomes of the initiative to be fully realised, further work was needed to build staff confidence in teaching topics pertaining to gender equality and gendered violence. Additional resourcing, professional learning and resources have been rolled out throughout the reporting period to address these challenges. Notably, the evaluation found improvements in school capability and culture as important precursors to broader outcomes for students and the community. This included school staff reporting positive changes in student behaviour, from improved engagement in discussions regarding respect through to increased skills in recognising and addressing disrespectful behaviour (105).

Respect Victoria understands a further evaluation was conducted during the reporting period, but at the time of writing it was not publicly available.

KEY TAKEAWAY

The Respectful Relationships initiative has significant potential to support population-level changes through its statewide reach and whole-school approach. Further evaluative evidence is required to ensure this potential is achieved through comprehensive, consistent and quality implementation and fidelity to the model. The 2024–25 State Budget provided funding to continue evaluation, including a new longitudinal component, which will be rolled out over the coming years.

SIGNIFICANCE OF ONGOING POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

Report participants highlighted the significance of ongoing political leadership in Victoria to prevent gendered violence. This leadership has been evident Victorian Government's ongoing investment in primary prevention, despite a challenging fiscal environment, including four years investment in Respect Ballarat, the first place-based model of its kind in Australia, in terms of size, scale and scope. It is also evident in the in the retention of key government portfolios for family violence prevention and gender equality and women, Respect Victoria, the Public Sector Gender Equality Commissioner, and the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence in Victoria, and the establishment of a Parliamentary Secretary for Men's Behaviour Change. Report participants also suggested that leadership across Victorian Government departments and agencies has broadened and strengthened, with more senior leaders and commissioners driving change across their sphere of influence.

> *Primary prevention has definitely progressed in the last couple of years with sustained leadership commitment, political and otherwise — Prevention organisation executive*

There have also been significant developments in other states, notably New South Wales, with its newly released Pathways to Prevention strategy, and South Australia, with its Royal Commission into Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence. This provides an opportunity for the Victorian Government and organisations leading prevention work to share their knowledge and experience in ways that advance prevention across other jurisdictions and nationally, and in turn learn from

FIGURE 12: RESPONDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE POLITICAL WILL TO ADDRESS GENDERED VIOLENCE

Compared to three years ago, the political will of Victorian state MPs to address gendered violence is (n = 95):

the experiences of other jurisdictions. Ongoing bipartisan commitment and investment in the prevention system will be critical to enabling Victoria to preserve its legacy of leadership and demonstrate tangible progress towards creating a safe, equal and violence-free Victoria.

However, just over one-third of respondents surveyed as part of this review reported that the political will to address gendered violence in Victoria is better than it was three years ago.

WHERE THERE ARE CHALLENGES

FUNDING IS NOT COMMENSURATE TO THE PROBLEM

Despite welcome investment in prevention in Victoria, the quantum and style of investment have not been commensurate with the scale and complexity of the problem. If we continue along this path, we will continue to see high rates of gendered violence, with some types of violence likely to increase due to escalating online misogyny, homophobia and transphobia.

Report participants noted this and Victoria's current challenging fiscal environment over the reporting period. In fact, this report period has been marked by funding uncertainty across various government departments, sectors and settings, due to lapsing program funding and short-term funding contracts. Report participants noted this made it challenging to deliver on commitments while strategically planning for future prevention activities. As the reporting period concludes there are several key prevention organisations and programs with lapsing funding.

> *The goal needs to be that the funding's always there and that we don't just get a big push when there is either community engagement or there has been a tragic event or an incident to be able to propel this work forward. That requires so much energy and emotional and cognitive load on the sector to jump when there is this moment, to try to do all the cartwheels to get the funding that we desperately need. It takes us away from actually doing the work to prevent the violence. — Prevention organisation executive*

Currently, organisations must stretch limited resources to attempt to meet community need. When prevention initiatives are underfunded, objectives may not be met, projects may not be completed in full, evaluations are often not resourced, and data and outcomes are not able to be robustly measured (2, 106). Report participants noted that many organisations rely on significant volunteer support or unpaid overtime to deliver prevention activity. This is often the case for specialist and community-led prevention organisations, particularly ACCOs, which not only deliver important programs and activities but play a critical leadership role in prevention partnerships and networks to shape and strengthen prevention systems, policy and practice.

Dhelk Dja Koori Caucus and ACCOs have consistently raised issues with the lack of ongoing funding for community prevention projects, the competitive process by which funding is administered, and the need to reapply for funding every year, with successful projects being often pilots rather than funding for existing projects.

Funding for Gathering Places is also often limited and not fixed; this means these important places can at times be at risk of closing down. As such, ongoing investment in community-based prevention was highlighted as critical to addressing family violence in addition to focusing on crisis response and support.

> *Aboriginal women in Victoria are 45 times more likely to experience family violence than other women. This demands a response that is urgent, sustained, and commensurate with the scale of the crisis. This means ongoing investment in specialist, culturally safe, holistic services like Djirra, accessible to Aboriginal women across Victoria. — Antoinette Braybrook AM, Djirra*

Taken together, these challenges with the current funding levels limit Victoria's capacity to implement a comprehensive statewide approach to prevention across all key settings and inclusive of all communities and life stages.

NATURE OF FUNDING LIMITS PREVENTION EFFORTS

Some funding streams that have been relied upon in the past to progress violence prevention alongside other health, social and economic aims have been rescoped to reduce preventing violence as a priority. For example, the *Community Health Integrated Program guidelines* only include up to 30% of resources to be allocated to violence prevention, regardless of community priorities and the links between gendered violence and chronic disease, mental ill health, and disability. This limits the resources that community health services can access to do prevention work.

Report participants expressed a need for more flexible, long-term funding models that enable organisations to sustain effective prevention partnerships, initiatives and programs, and scale them within and across communities to achieve greater impact — a call mirrored in contemporary research and reviews (2, 11, 28, 107).

> *Flexibility in the funding model is important; it isn't a one size fits all. I get that there needs to be clear accountability around acquittals and things of that nature, but I think sometimes you've got to be able to allow for some flexibility to cater for the nuances of the communities that are here in Victoria — Vivienne Nguyen AM, Victorian Multicultural Commission*

Short-term funding models have long been an issue for prevention work and was highlighted in the first Three Yearly Report. The impact of project-based or short-term funding on sector capacity, the stability of the workforce, and the continuity and effectiveness of prevention programs and initiatives is significant (2). Since findings from the Royal Commission into Family Violence were handed down, these concerns have been consistently reported in program evaluations, reviews and other reports (3, 108-110). Report participants highlighted the consequences of unstable and uncertain funding, including:

- high staff turnover and loss of skills and expertise from organisations and programs
- disruptions to program implementation and community engagement
- lack of time to build and sustain relationships and trust with communities

- difficulty evaluating or demonstrating evidence, outcomes and impact within short timeframes
- time and resources being diverted away from the work to bid for new or renewed funding.

Family Safety Victoria has made important progress in moving a number of programs in key settings to longer-term funding arrangements (i.e. from one- or two-year timeframes to three- or four-year funding contracts), which can continue to be built upon.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ACTION

RETHINKING FUNDING MODELS FOR SUSTAINABILITY AND IMPACT

Victoria has a history of socially progressive, sustainable funding models when it comes to preventing large-scale public health issues. The Transport Accident Commission, for instance, is a state-owned enterprise that draws commercial revenue from insurance and can also sustain funding through income generated on reserves. The result has been an entity that supports statewide, coordinated efforts to prevent road traffic accidents and increase road safety. Another example is VicHealth, the world's first health promotion foundation. Established following the passing of the *Tobacco Act 1987* (Vic), the state-owned enterprise coordinates, supports and implements public health initiatives across Victoria to support a healthier state. The Transport Accident Commission and VicHealth models of hypothecated funding provide lessons and opportunities to recast the way prevention of gendered violence, family violence and all forms of violence against women is funded for sustainability and greater impact. Victoria could be world-leading by applying such a model of commercial revenue generation to the prevention of family and gendered violence.

Alternatively, Victoria could consider an analogous model to the ACT Government's Safer Families Levy, which has been in place since 2016 and is utilised to support the territory's response to domestic, family and sexual violence, in recognition that preventing violence is a whole-of-community responsibility.[xix] A secure ongoing revenue stream would create efficiencies for government and community, minimising the administrative burden of continual budget bids and associated processes and freeing up greater resources to flow directly towards community outcomes.

IDENTIFYING AND LEVERAGING CO-FUNDING AND INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Opportunities exist to leverage other co-investment opportunities and work towards a true whole-of-community approach to prevention. This includes co-investment from state and national funding schemes with aligned policy goals, such as mental health, community safety and workplace reform, as well as from philanthropy and the private sector. Victoria's health and medical research capabilities have been progressed significantly through co-investment opportunities between government, universities,

xix The ACT Government's Safer Families Levy is currently $50 per household and is estimated to generate $30 million over four years. Further information can be found at www.revenue.act.gov.au/levies/safer-families-levy.

the private sector and philanthropy, providing opportunities to explore how a similar model may work for primary prevention.[xx]

The Early Intervention Investment Framework (EIIF) demonstrates the Victorian Government's commitment to investing in preventative interventions that reduce more significant downstream costs for government. The EIIF applies an avoided costs methodology to early intervention program proposals, leveraging access to data linkage of Victorian services and population-level data to estimate and report on the return on investment. While designed for early intervention, the EIIF is embedded in annual budget processes and has unlocked considerable investment to scale up innovative social change projects that support community wellbeing, including those with longer impact horizons, this is comparable to timeframes for some primary prevention initiatives (e.g. 10–20 years). For example, under the EIIF, the 2024–25 State Budget committed $1.1 billion over five years for 28 initiatives, including supporting schools to implement respectful relationships education (111).

The EIIF's requirement to calculate and track avoided costs creates challenges for primary prevention work due to limitations in data availability and the complexities in establishing causal connections to long-term prevention outcomes. The framework is also limited in its ability to account for growing demand pressures on the family violence system, some of which are driven by global factors. This can distort the extent to which avoided costs mean that less would need to be invested in the family violence system in the long term. Noting these challenges, there is merit in considering a similar funding approach for primary prevention that builds on and expands upon the EIIF. This is because primary prevention — like early intervention — is a powerful way to avoid harm and the costs associated with that harm, delivering strong economic benefits. In 2025, the Victorian Government estimated that its investment of $82.8 million in family and sexual violence systems will save $120 million to $130 million over 10 years in avoided costs, and it will produce up to $140 million through economic benefits over the same period (112).

Recognising the devastating health and mental health impacts of gendered violence may also open up other funding opportunities. Research by Jesuit Social Services and Respect Victoria shows that attitudes and beliefs that drive gendered violence are also associated with poorer mental health in men and boys, including suicide and suicidality (95). Intimate partner violence is a leading, preventable contributor to death, injury and illness for women aged 15–44 years, including mental ill health and trauma (113, 114). Moreover, mental health and trauma informed therapeutic services are an important part of the prevention continuum — they are key to healing and recovering from violence and, in doing so, breaking intergenerational cycles of violence.

Given these recognised links, there are opportunities to draw on revenue generated through the Medicare levy and Mental Health and Wellbeing Surcharge to support prevention initiatives that address both mental ill health and the gendered drivers of violence to

xx See, for example, the Australian Institute for Infectious Disease (AIID), an initiative of the University of Melbourne, the Doherty Institute and the Burnet Institute with co-investment from the Victorian Government. Further details available at aiid.edu.au.

simultaneously reduce distress and suicide rates for men and prevent violence, trauma and associated mental ill health among women, children and gender diverse people (115). Victoria's Mental Health and Wellbeing Surcharge fund generated $1,017.60 million in revenue in 2023–24 and has been increasing year-on-year (116). Victoria also receives a considerable sum each year through the Medicare levy.

There are opportunities to move towards a true whole-of-community approach to prevention, including through leveraging funds from a more diverse range of sources in the private and philanthropic sectors. The private and philanthropic sectors are well placed to support prevention efforts through funding pilots, place-based partnerships, and initial scaling that would enable organisations and communities to trial new approaches, embed community self-determination, and test implementation models across communities and settings to define programmatic and contextual elements of success. These benefits, enabled through private and philanthropic funding, not only support communities and organisations to generate the requisite evidence to secure ongoing government funding to scale and sustain promising work, they also demonstrate proof of concept for further private and philanthropic investment.

The private sector also has a vested interest in leading and embedding prevention efforts within business, industry and key settings. Compliance with key gender equality, human rights, and workplace health and safety requirements is not only a positive duty required of employers, these efforts also result in greater productivity and reputational benefits from having safer, more equal and inclusive workplaces.

FUNDING PILOTS AND SCALING OPPORTUNITIES BASED ON IMPACT

Notwithstanding the challenging fiscal environment of the last three years, the Victorian Government has demonstrated ongoing commitment to primary prevention — most notably through its landmark investment in Respect Ballarat. This is the first time an approach of this kind has been resourced and supported at this level.

Evidence suggests it takes more than five years of sustained work across the social ecology to see population-level positive impacts for prevention work (4, 63). However, government funding cycles are typically between one and four years, limiting capacity to demonstrate long-term impact (96). There is an opportunity to rethink the prevention funding mix to support development of small-scale promising practice approaches, which can form a pipeline of opportunities to scale up. There are also approaches that already have sufficient evidence to show impact that should have longer-term, larger funding amounts to support population-level impacts. Place-based models are particularly important in this sense. Victoria has a long and successful history in place-based approaches to public health issues, such as through VicHealth's Generating Equality and Respect and Healthy Together Victoria, as well as Stronger Places, Stronger People in Mildura, and Mental Health and Wellbeing Locals across Victoria (117-120). Respect Ballarat will provide important further lessons for how such a place-based model can work to prevent gendered violence and the required funding mix and quantum.

A true whole-of-community approach to prevention requires action and commitment from governments at every level. Importantly,

this includes local government. Many local governments invest in prevention initiatives from a broad commitment to addressing gendered violence alongside Gender Equality Act compliance requirements, despite less than half of all Victorian councils receiving funding to do so. Ongoing funding and recognition is required to sustain this work, with contribution and ownership from both state and local government revenue streams. These programs, and similarly those offered by women's health services, are contributing to effective prevention efforts and adding to the knowledge base of what works in preventing violence in our communities. There is opportunity to build upon this evidence base, to disseminate learnings and reproduce effective modalities across Victoria — and now through its 4 year investment in Respect Ballarat. The coordination of the Municipal Association of Victoria and the Women's Health Services Network together with Respect Victoria is a critical enabler to do so.

BUILDING THE ECONOMIC CASE FOR PREVENTION

Report participants emphasised the importance of continuing to build the economic case for prevention, including through cost-benefit and return on investment analysis.

The Women's Health Services Network report *Return on Equity: Health and economic dividends from investing in Women's Health Services* estimated that in 2023, as 22,000 fewer women experienced physical and/or sexual violence each year than the national average, the associated economic cost savings of this equated to $600 million a year, or almost $8 billion over a lifetime (26).

There is already economic modelling[xxi] that can be built upon to develop a fulsome contemporary economic case for prevention, and in doing this, current and future Victorian governments will have a better understanding of the economic and social benefits of prevention activities across portfolios and agencies. Building this economic case will also provide an overview of where government agencies and departments can work together to leverage (and, where appropriate, combine) investment and efforts — for example, across treasury, health, justice, housing, education, workplace reform and child protection portfolios among others.

xxi For example, modelling by KPMG and Deloitte referred to earlier, at page 50 As outlined in recommendation 1, updated modelling is now required to business support the case for ongoing and scaled up, prevention investment.

RECOMMENDATIONS: PREVENTION INVESTMENT

RESPECT VICTORIA RECOMMENDS THAT THE VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT

1. **Publish updated and comprehensive modelling on the cost of family violence and gendered violence to the Victorian economy and community as well as economic modelling on the return on investment for prevention every five years.**

2. **Provide dedicated and enduring funding for primary prevention. This includes:**
   - **a.** identifying and leveraging funding sources and approaches to prevention that promote coordination and sustainability
   - **b.** supporting long-term (i.e. five years minimum) and/or recurrent, secure, flexible and fit-for-purpose funding models that enable sustained impact
   - **c.** implementing funding for scaling up promising practice and investment in tried-and-tested successful models, particularly place-based approaches to prevention
   - **d.** ensuring grant guidelines and eligibility for funding streams across government for health promotion and preventing social issues are inclusive of approaches towards primary prevention of family and gendered violence
   - **e.** identifying and leveraging opportunities for cross-portfolio funding sources for primary prevention where there are shared benefits and outcomes (such as the Medicare levy and/or Mental Health and Wellbeing Surcharge fund and/or through tailored application or adaptation of the Early Intervention Investment Framework), and exploring hypothecated funding approach for sustainability
   - **f.** continuing to facilitate funding arrangements that support community-led and targeted prevention with priority communities (including work led by and for First Nations communities, LGBTIQA+ communities, culturally and racially marginalised people, people with disability, children and young people, and older Victorians) including through resourced partnerships with mainstream organisations
   - **g.** exploring and leveraging opportunities for complementary funding from non-government sources, as part of a mutually reinforcing whole-of-community approach to primary prevention.

CHAPTER 4

ENABLING POLICY AND LEGISLATION

This section aligns with the following domain of the Theory of Change:

1.1 Government legislation, regulation, policy

Legislative reforms and policy implementation are integral to prevention work. They provide the enabling environment for prevention activity and play an important transformative role in systems and social change.

WHERE PROGRESS HAS BEEN MADE

The Royal Commission into Family Violence was a catalyst for significant legislative and policy reform in Victoria. Importantly, this included the development of *Free from Violence — Victoria's current 10-year strategy to prevent family violence* (5). This strategy — together with the overarching *Ending Family Violence plan*, *Safe and Strong gender equality strategy* and *Dhelk Dja: Safe Our Way strategy* — set the agenda for long-term change.

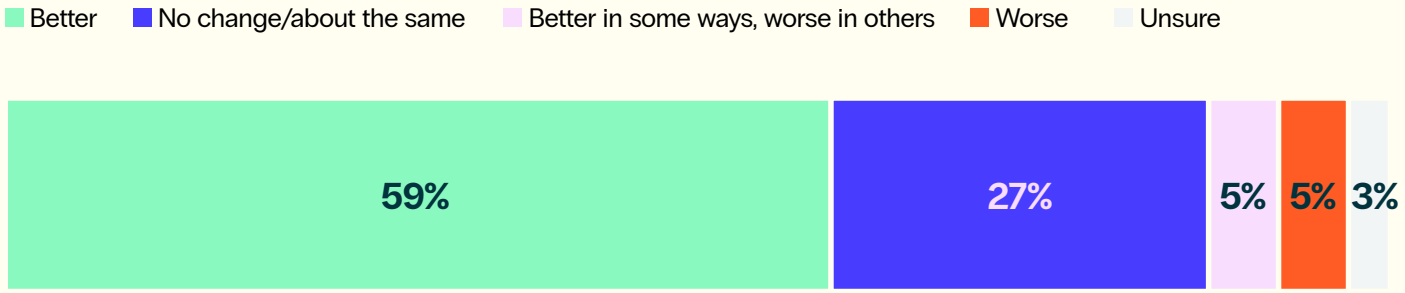
Report participants acknowledged that strong legislative reform and strategic policy implementation have been instrumental in creating the enabling environment for effective prevention work in Victoria during the reporting period. More than half (59%) of the participants surveyed for this report believed that the policy and legislative environment has improved in support of preventing gendered violence, compared to three years ago, with a further 27% indicating they believed the enabling environment had remained the same.

FREE FROM VIOLENCE SECOND ACTION PLAN

The Victorian Government released *Free from violence: Second action plan 2022–2025* under the 10-year strategy to prevent violence and all forms of violence against women (67). As previously noted, this was the guiding policy document for primary prevention in Victoria during the reporting period and, at the time of its launch, it was nation-leading in having a singular focus

FIGURE 13: RESPONDENTS' PERCEPTIONS ABOUT POLICIES AND LEGISLATION TO IMPROVE PREVENTION

Compared to three years ago, policies and legislation to improve Victoria's efforts to prevent gendered violence are (n = 95):



on primary prevention supported by wide-ranging actions across key settings and life stages backed by dedicated investment. It was co-designed and delivered by Family Safety Victoria and Respect Victoria. The plan comprises 10 priorities across five pillars: innovate and inform; scale up and build on what we know works; engage and communicate with the community; build prevention systems and structures; and research and evaluate. At the time of writing, almost all actions under the plan had been successfully acquitted, with the final remaining actions on track for delivery as part of the newly released *Until every Victorian is safe: Third rolling action plan to end family and sexual violence 2025 to 2027* (see pages 54-55). Key impacts and achievements included engaging Victorians in preventing family violence through over 250 initiatives in the places where they live, work, learn and play, and running over 332,000 sessions of MARAM or MARAM-aligned training with workers.

ENDING FAMILY VIOLENCE THIRD ROLLING ACTION PLAN

The outstanding actions from the *Free from Violence Second Action Plan* (2022–2025) and priorities outlined in *Strong Foundations* were operationalised through the next rolling action plan under Victoria's *Ending Family Violence strategy* — initially due for delivery in 2023 and ultimately released outside of the reporting period in September 2025. The Victorian Government has consolidated several family violence-related action plans into the new *Until every Victorian is safe: Third rolling action plan to end family and sexual violence 2025 to 2027,* so will no longer have a standalone plan for primary prevention. This consolidation has the potential to support greater integration and connection of primary prevention with the broader family violence system and provide a cohesive strategy across the family violence reforms. Notably, however, this consolidation runs counter to the advice of Our Watch that all states and territories in Australia should enact dedicated primary prevention strategies. In the years ahead, it will be crucial to ensure that the consolidated approach does not result in a dilution of action or investment in primary prevention.

AFFIRMATIVE CONSENT LEGISLATIVE REFORM

The Victorian Government introduced a range of reforms through the *Justice Legislation Amendment (Sexual Offences and Other Matters) Act 2022* (Vic), which came into effect on 30 July 2023. These reforms included adopting an affirmative consent model, putting the responsibility on each person involved in a sexual activity to seek explicit consent (121).

The reforms also introduced stealthing (the removal, non-use or tampering with a condom without the other person's knowledge or consent) as a sexual offence, stronger laws that target image-based sexual abuse — including an expanded definition of 'intimate image' and a higher maximum penalty — as well as new jury directions to address misconceptions in sexual offence trials.

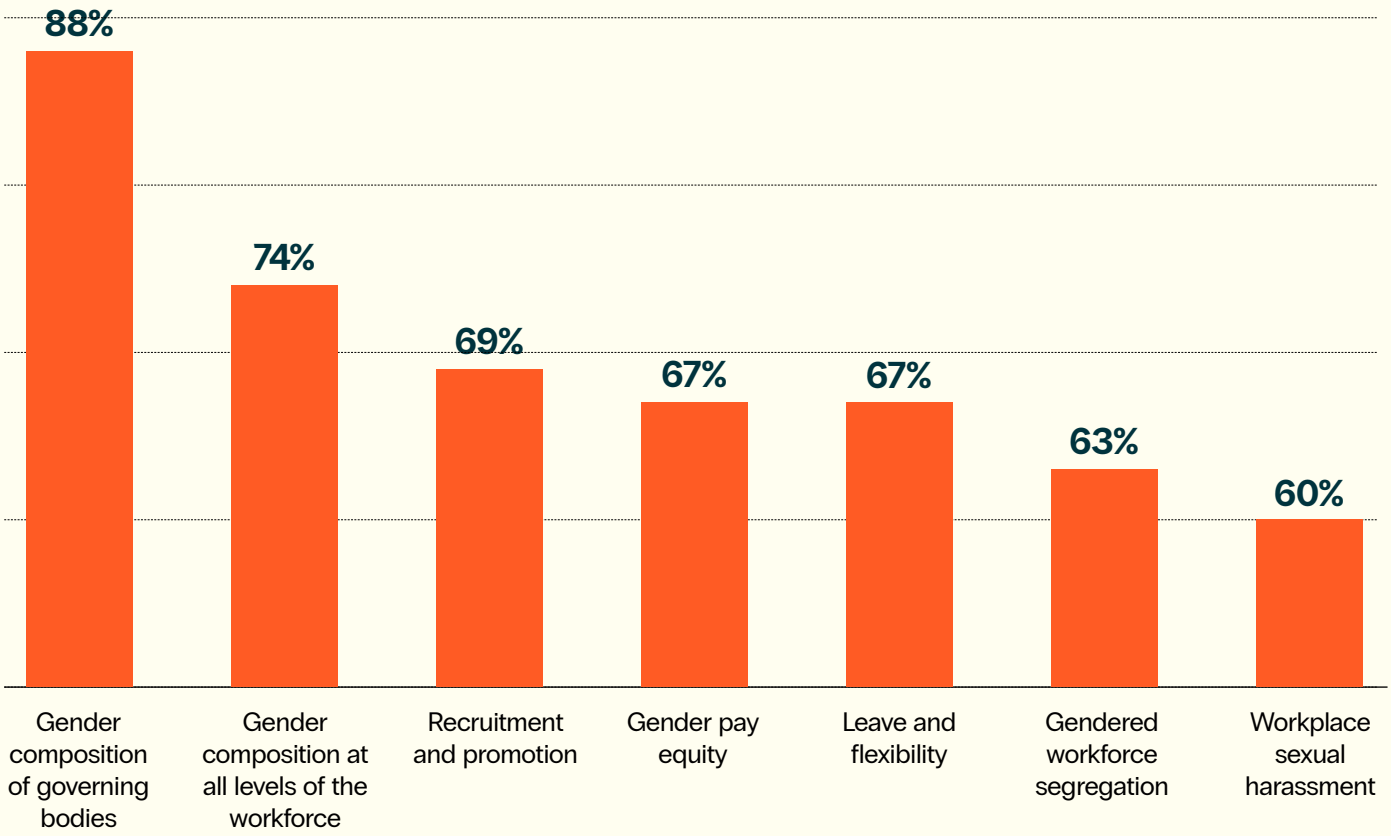
GENDER EQUALITY ACT

The Gender Equality Act 2020 (Vic) and the role of the independent Public Sector Gender Equality Commissioner were only just established at the time of the inaugural Three Yearly Report to Parliament. Considerable progress has been

made with the implementation of the Act over this reporting period, with approximately 300 duty holders meeting their obligations to do a gender audit and submit gender equality action plans and progress reports (122). The Commission for Gender Equality in the Public Sector and other stakeholders, including the Municipal Association of Victoria and some women's health services, played important roles supporting duty holders to understand and respond to their obligations under the Act, including by dedicating considerable resources to capacity building and establishing regional communities of practice and partnerships (123).

FIGURE 14: PROPORTION OF ORGANISATIONS THAT MADE PROGRESS AGAINST GENDER EQUALITY ACT WORKPLACE INDICATORS[xxii]

Proportion of organisations that demonstrated compliance (n = 281)



xxii In each biennial progress report, duty holders must demonstrate compliance by either showing they have made progress or by providing an acceptable reason for not making progress (as required under the Gender Equality Act 2020). Source: (123)

CASE STUDY

GENDER EQUALITY ACT — COMMISSION FOR GENDER EQUALITY IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

BACKGROUND

In 2020, Victoria introduced the nation's first gender equality legislation focusing on gender equality in public sector workforces and service delivery, the Gender Equality Act 2020 (Vic) (124). The legislation was introduced in response to the 2015 Royal Commission into Family Violence in recognition of the role that addressing gender inequality plays in reducing family violence and all forms of violence against women. Explicit aims of the Act include addressing violence through structural change and removing systemic causes of gender inequality in public sector workforces, and the policies, programs and services they deliver to communities (124).

The Act applies to Victorian public sector organisations with 50 or more employees (referred to as 'duty holders'). This includes approximately 300 organisations across Victoria from state government departments to public entities, health services, local councils, universities, courts, emergency services and others (124).[xxiii]

Duty holders are required to:

- take action towards achieving gender equality within their workplace through conducting regular workplace gender audits and establishing gender equality action plans
- consider and promote gender equality in their policies, programs and services through conducting gender impact assessments
- make reasonable and material progress and report on their progress every two years.

The Public Sector Gender Equality Commissioner oversees implementation of the Act, supported by the Commission for the Gender Equality in the Public Sector (CGEPS). This includes providing education, supporting implementation and enforcing compliance. The Gender Equality Act 2020 is an example of how legislation can drive cultural change. It shows how the public sector can lead by example, promoting gender equality and ensuring Victorians of all genders have equitable access to all their government provides.

INSIGHTS

CGEPS plays a crucial role in supporting duty holders as they work towards compliance with their legislative responsibilities. With limited funding and equivalent of 16.5 full-time staff, CGEPS has supported and monitored the progress of duty holders, receiving and analysing close to 300 progress reports and audits from duty holders (122).

As highlighted in a CGEPS-commissioned evaluation, duty holders are making important progress towards embedding gender equality in their workplaces, but there are opportunities for improvement in their understanding and compliance, as well as across the progress reporting and progress audit processes.

There is improvement needed across many areas including both workplace-focused activity (workplace gender audits and gender equality action plans) and community-facing aspects of the Act, namely gender impact assessments, to enliven the Act's potential to reach and support broader community change.

xxiii A full list of duty holders is available at: www.genderequalitycommission.vic.gov.au/your-organisations-gender-equality-obligations.

KEY TAKEAWAY

The Gender Equality Act 2020 (Vic) remains a powerful lever with significant reach and potential to drive widespread social and institutional change. It is important that the public sector leads the vital social change of deconstructing gender stereotypes and ensuring equality for people of all genders. This is a crucial precursor to eliminating family violence, gendered violence and all forms of violence against women.

Continued vigilance, collaboration and strategic focus from the Commissioner for Gender Equality in the Public Sector, her Office and the Victorian Government will be important to ensure future progress.

OTHER IMPORTANT DEVELOPMENTS

The Ministerial Taskforce on Workplace Sexual Harassment handed down its recommendations in 2021. This included an overarching recommendation that workplace sexual harassment be treated as an occupational health and safety issue and for WorkSafe to play a lead role in the prevention of, and response to, workplace sexual harassment. WorkSafe Victoria and the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission are now partnering to regulate work-related gendered violence, including sexual harassment through their *Parallel Enforcement Strategy* (125).

The Office for Women in Sport and Recreation, in partnership with VicHealth and Sport and Recreation Victoria, released the *Fair Access Policy Roadmap*, which aims to ensure women and girls across the state have equal access to community sports facilities — settings that are critical to preventing gendered violence, particularly violence against women (126). The roadmap requires that all local governments across Victoria develop a *Fair Access Policy* and demonstrate their progress against these policies over time, building on their existing obligations under the Gender Equality Act 2020 (Vic) (124).[xxiv]

The Victorian Government released *Our equal state: Victoria's gender equality strategy and action plan 2023–2027,*

xxiv The Office for Women in Sport and Recreation came to a close in September 2025. Implications for monitoring these obligations are therefore unclear going forward.

committing to 110 actions over four years to advance gender equality, many of which address the gendered drivers of violence and complement the priorities and activity outlined in *Free from Violence* (73). Key legislative achievements within the first year of its implementation included reforms to introduce affirmative sexual consent in the *Justice Legislation Amendment (Sexual Offences and Other Matters) Act 2022* (Vic) and non-fatal strangulation offences.

Other relevant developments over the reporting period include:

- implementation of the regulatory framework for *Child Safe Standards* in schools to supporting implementation of the Respectful Relationships initiative (127)
- expanded rollout of the Family Violence *Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management* (MARAM) Framework, including in schools (128)
- development of the *Social Procurement Framework* to support the Victorian Government to better identify and support women-led and diverse business (129)
- start of a process to refresh the 2012 *Indigenous Family Violence Primary Prevention Framework* (due for release in 2025) (130)
- consultation on proposed reforms to Victoria's anti-vilification laws expanding existing protections against hate speech and conduct on the basis of race and religion to include gender identity, sex, sex characteristics, sexual orientation and disability (131, 132)[xxv]
- a Victorian parliamentary inquiry into capturing data on people who use family violence in Victoria, which is discussed further on page 143
- release of *Ageing well in Victoria: An action plan for strengthening wellbeing for senior Victorians 2022–2026*, which outlines the Victorian Government's commitment to support Victorians to age well by continuing to participate in their community, and be safe at home, in the community or aged care (133)
- consultation in 2023 on the Australian Law Reform Commission's inquiry into justice responses to sexual violence, which prompted important recommendations on harnessing the justice system as a setting for prevention in recognition of the normative role that laws, legal proceedings and legal professionals play in shaping and reinforcing social norms related to sexual violence (134)
- consultation in 2024 for the Inquiry into Women's Pain, the final report of which, expected for release in 2025, will address medical gender bias through providing recommendations to inform improved models of care and service delivery for Victorian girls and women experiencing pain (135).

WHERE THERE ARE CHALLENGES

Report participants noted that family violence reforms to date have largely focused on intimate partner violence within family contexts, and that the use of family violence as the dominant policy framing and language both minimises the gendered nature of family violence and

xxv A bill was subsequently introduced, passed and received royal assent in April 2025, outside of the reporting period.

reinforces rigid ideas about what family relationships look like and the types of violence experienced within them. They also noted that this policy framing has rendered other forms of gendered violence largely invisible, particularly non-partner violence and sexual violence (by a partner or non-partner).

> *If we just frame it as family violence, actually there's all this other violence that people are experiencing, and if that's out of the agenda, we're undermining our efforts. — Kathleen Maltzahn, Sexual Assault Services Victoria*

Similarly, report participants highlighted the more limited policy focus to date on preventing other forms of family violence and gendered violence — including violence against children and young people, adolescent violence in the home, and elder abuse — as well as the ways that violence experienced by LGBTIQA+ people can be obscured by policy responses that are consciously or unconsciously built upon heterosexual and cisgender models. Participants highlighted the need to broaden the policy framing and agenda for family and gendered violence to better reflect the scope and nature of the issues, and to ensure policy priorities, funding, evidence and practice are developed accordingly.

FOCUS ON SEXUAL VIOLENCE SLIPPING THROUGH THE CRACKS

Sexual violence was seen as a major policy gap by several report participants, with some suggesting the need for a standalone Victorian sexual violence prevention strategy and an explicit commitment to preventing and addressing sexual violence in policies and strategies that tackle family violence and all forms of violence against women.[xxvi] Participants discussed the importance of targeted prevention of sexual violence not just in intimate partner relationships, but also non-partner sexual assault, child sexual abuse and the sexual exploitation of adolescents both online and in real-world settings. Establishing a strong policy foundation for sexual violence prevention is needed to guide adequate investment, the development of evidence and practice frameworks and support the development of the workforce.

> *The coverage and representation of sexual violence and gender-based violence that [doesn't occur] in a family violence setting. I think that's one of the biggest policy risks in Victoria that people have been grappling with since the royal commission; family violence is the major framing and other forms of violence are missed and untold and invisible in that. — Prevention organisation executive*

> *I think a big missing focus is sexual-based violence … we don't get anywhere near the significant amount of prevention work that we need to do without this as a key pillar and focus. — Anonymous report participant*

In recognition of this issue, the Victorian Government has moved to using the language of 'family and sexual violence'. This is a welcome

xxvi The Victorian Government previously committed to deliver a sexual violence and harm Strategy in 2022. See Victorian Government press release, Stronger laws for victim-survivors of sexual violence, 12 November 2021.

signal that invites explicit consideration of the additional, distinct and complex drivers of sexual violence. Ensuring that this framing translates into meaningful action will need to be an ongoing focus, including by actively addressing the gendered nature and nuances of both family and sexual violence within and outside of heteronormative and cisnormative relationships.

Respect Victoria's analysis of the NCAS data reveals that harmful attitudes towards sexual violence remain challenging to shift and this must be an ongoing priority within prevention efforts. Although the majority of Victorians and Australians reject sexual violence, Victorian men demonstrate higher agreement with attitudes that minimise, deny or shift blame in cases of sexual violence than Victorian women (136). In addition, attitudes towards sexual violence appear to be an area of increasing polarisation and backlash against gender equality and prevention efforts, indicating a need for more targeted action and concerted focus in Victorian policy and legislation. See page 160 for more details on the NCAS findings.

Report participants also highlighted the role of violent pornography and the increasing normalisation of non-fatal strangulation during sexual activity as concerning trends that lead to harm and are not yet being given the policy and legislative attention required to reduce such harm.

I THINK A BIG MISSING FOCUS IS SEXUAL-BASED VIOLENCE... WE DON'T GET ANYWHERE NEAR THE SIGNIFICANT AMOUNT OF PREVENTION WORK THAT WE NEED TO DO WITHOUT THIS AS A KEY PILLAR AND FOCUS.

Anonymous report participant

CASE STUDY

BREATHLESS — IT'S TIME WE TALKED

BACKGROUND

The Breathless campaign — developed by violence prevention initiative It's Time We Talked — aims to prevent the harms of sexual strangulation, particularly among young people, by:

- raising awareness about its risks
- supporting critical thinking about sexual norms and pornography
- providing reputable and trustworthy information
- encouraging informed conversations about strangulation, safety, respect, mutual pleasure and consent.

In recent years, there has been a significant increase in rates of sexual strangulation among young people, with many saying that the practice is now considered 'normal'. Fifty-seven per cent of Australians aged 18–35 report being strangled by a partner during sex, including 78% of trans and non-binary people, 61% of women and 43% of men (137). Many people report that strangulation wasn't discussed before it occurred, which means there was no opportunity to talk about risks or whether there was consent for it to happen. And while consent is a critical precursor for sexual activity of any kind, it does not protect from the potential harms of sexual strangulation. Nor is it clear that it is possible to give informed consent to be strangled, given the unpredictable nature of the associated risks.

The campaign makes clear there is no safe way to strangle someone, with risks including headaches, dizziness, memory gaps, miscarriage, bruising, neck pain, brain injury, stroke, PTSD and, in some instances, death.

Breathless uses first-person storytelling, including interviews with young people and experts, to break down stigma, raise awareness and improve people's understanding. Breathless also includes a social media campaign and professional learning resources.

A key driver of increasing rates of sexual strangulation is its depiction in pornography, which has become a default sexuality educator for many young people. Young people report feeling pressured to mimic the 'porn script' and to behave as if they enjoy acts that are painful or scary. Therefore, central to the Breathless campaign is the recognition that the online pornography industry is a significant commercial contributor to gendered violence.

INSIGHTS

Through the work of the Breathless campaign, the violence prevention sector and the community more broadly are becoming aware of how online pornography contributes to violence against women and children, and how it impacts young people's experiences of sex, including the increased prevalence of sexual strangulation.

The growing awareness of pornography's harms has contributed to an increasing appetite for regulation, both in Australia and internationally.

Further support is needed because many parents, educators, health professionals and other practitioners do not feel well-equipped to talk to the young people in their lives about the harms of sexual strangulation and other behaviours promoted in pornography. This could include professional resources, community education campaigns and policy measures addressing sexual strangulation, its health and disability

impacts, and the role of pornography as a driver of gendered violence.

KEY TAKEAWAY

The Breathless campaign and its founders, It's Time We Talked, make an important contribution to the urgent task of raising awareness about the prevalence and harms of sexual strangulation and pornography among children and young people. It demonstrates the importance of developing awareness campaigns that are informed by and relevant to young people. It also highlights the value of professional learning and resources that supports practitioners to engage on difficult and stigmatised topics to prevent harm.

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE NEED MORE TAILORED APPROACHES

Report participants highlighted the need for prevention policy that truly includes the voices and experiences of children and young people. Children and young people may experience family and gendered violence within their families and intimate relationships, and some use gendered violence themselves. However current policy framing often positions them as passive recipients of violence experienced by their mother. This misses the opportunity to drive targeted prevention of the unique and complex forms of violence that far too many children and young people experience by virtue of their age and corresponding vulnerability (e.g. child maltreatment, adolescent violence in the home, and gendered violence within emergent intimate partner relationships).

> *I think there's a lot more work that needs to be done to have a dedicated focus on primary prevention initiatives that work well with and for children and young people, and to actually not think of children and young people as the recipients of a product. It should be an intended consequence of these initiatives to elicit disclosures from victim-survivors. — Family violence youth advocate*

Children and young people should be viewed as more than agents of change for preventing future adult violence. Report participants highlighted that more needs

to be done to tailor programs and activities that target particular forms of violence impacting children and young people and, in particular, to support children and young people at risk of experiencing violence, or showing early signs of harmful beliefs and behaviours.

> *I received [Respectful Relationships] education in the later years of my schooling … I didn't see myself or hear myself represented in the way they were talking about family violence [at school]. It was focused on violence against women, to be frank, and missed out on other intersecting forms of violence. But still, the things and the topics and the warning signs that they were talking about, I was like, well, I've experienced that … I guess that's when I realised that primary prevention has the ability to be a mechanism to intervene and prevent family violence from continuing to occur. — Family violence youth advocate*

In *Strong Foundations*, the Victorian Government committed to prioritise engaging children and young people to create generational change and continuing to tailor prevention and early intervention projects that work with children and young people at heightened risk of experiencing or using family or sexual violence (75). Actioning this commitment should now be a key priority. (See page 147 for a discussion of opportunities and recommendations to better include the needs and experiences of children and young people in prevention policy and practice.)

EARLY INTERVENTION IS A MISSING PIECE

Report participants highlighted the limited focus on early intervention in current Victorian policies and strategies, particularly how it integrates with primary prevention efforts. Primary prevention and early intervention work together by unwinding the harmful attitudes held by people who use violence and helping them to take responsibility for their choices and learn new behaviours. The Victorian Government and Australian Government have recently invested in early intervention initiatives, and response agencies are making important contributions, but a more coherent and strategic approach is needed to guide future priorities, actions and practice in this area (138, 139). This will allow prevention activities and the workforce to better support those at risk of experiencing and perpetrating violence, alongside delivering crucial whole-of-population initiatives.

> *There's a lack of early intervention and by early intervention, I mean early-early intervention. We're talking about children in primary school who have harmful beliefs and behaviours, but they have not broken any law or even broken a school rule, but there's a pattern of behaviour, there's a lack of support for those children, and I think that's a huge impediment. — Deanne Carson, Body Safety Australia*

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ACTION

STRONGER POLICY COORDINATION

Report participants raised the importance of stronger policy coordination across portfolios and departments. This includes between Victorian, federal and local governments, noting their respective legislative and regulatory roles, commitments under the National Partnership Agreement on Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence Responses, and shared priorities under the *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children*.

The national Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission — together with Our Watch — create a strong coordinating opportunity to pull together areas of work across the nation and support connection with federal policy, programming and evidence building.

There are also opportunities, particularly through the national Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission and Our Watch, for jurisdictions across Australia (including Victoria) to continue to share successful policy and strategy initiatives, with a view to harmonising and tailoring approaches where appropriate, learning about best and emerging practice, and tailoring where needed. For example, actions under the *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children* — such as developing, implementing and evaluating prevention tailored to specific communities — have seen greater progress in some states or territories. This is a good opportunity for Victoria to both share what it has learnt and adopt successful work already trialled elsewhere. While the National Commission has sought to enable such conversations through convening national consultations and roundtables, it is unclear how they are being translated into decision making in formal intergovernmental structures. Ongoing collaboration between the National Commission and Respect Victoria could support national coordination and propel Victoria and Australia's progress forwards.

ADDRESS EMERGING TECHNOLOGY-FACILITATED HARMS

To remain effective and responsive, Victoria's prevention system must address emerging and escalating forms of gendered harm. The digital sphere presents a rapidly evolving landscape where violence and abuse — including technology- and AI-facilitated abuse, the proliferation of violent pornography, and prominence of misogynistic extremists — are increasingly normalised and difficult to regulate. Developing coordinated strategies in partnership with local, state, territory and federal governments, and public entities (particularly eSafety) is not just an important opportunity, but essential to preventing harm, protecting the right to engage safely with online spaces and technology, and ensuring that policy and regulatory responses keep pace with technological change. In *Strong Foundations*, the Victorian Government explicitly acknowledged and committed to address these issues. Actioning this commitment should now be a key priority (75).

PRIORITISE, COLLABORATE AND COORDINATE EARLY INTERVENTION

Victoria's introduction of MARAM has been a key innovation and enabler of early intervention. Yet,

the work of early intervention itself has received more limited emphasis in Victorian family violence policy, despite being a crucial component of a comprehensive approach to ending family violence, gendered violence and all forms of violence against women (140). Introducing a greater focus on early intervention would allow policymakers to identify gaps and opportunities in Victoria's approach and strengthen collaboration and coordination across the prevention and response systems and across government for greater impact.

Primary prevention and early intervention are distinct but complementary approaches: working together, they reduce the prevalence, severity and recurrence of violence over time. While early intervention work is being progressed across the state — supported by a range of government departments, specialist family violence services and child, youth and family services — no one team has oversight of the entire system, nor is there an agreed or sophisticated understanding of the early intervention landscape in Victoria. Without this, key policy gaps and opportunities will remain obscured.

For example, much of the existing early intervention work in relation to family and sexual violence takes place within specialist family and sexual violence services, and there is an opportunity to coordinate efforts to enable mutual reinforcement of such efforts with primary prevention work for greater impact (140). This approach is envisaged for Respect Ballarat (see case study on page 176). This is also particularly important to the prevention of family violence in First Nations communities, where there is greater harmony across primary prevention and early intervention settings and efforts. Like many specialist family and sexual violence services, they aim to strengthen protective factors, support early identification of risk factors and ensure people at risk of experiencing or using violence receive support as early as possible to change the trajectory of violence.

Increased policy attention on early intervention will also support strengthened efforts to prevent violence against children and young people. For example, it is important to highlight and connect initiatives such as adolescent family violence programs, responses to harmful sexual behaviour in children and young people and Caring Dads programs — these are critical to intervene early and change behaviour, and interrupt the intergenerational effects and the longer-term trajectory of violence.

RECOMMENDATIONS: ENABLING POLICY AND LEGISLATION

RESPECT VICTORIA RECOMMENDS THAT THE VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT:

3. Develop and implement a statewide strategy for preventing and addressing sexual violence, or at least ensure there is dedicated focus, action and investment on preventing sexual violence throughout implementation of the *Until every Victorian is safe: Third rolling action plan to end family and sexual violence 2025 to 2027* and other relevant strategies.

4. Work with and advocate to the federal government and other jurisdictions for effective strategies to safeguard against new and/or escalating gendered harms in the digital space.

5. Work in partnership with the prevention and response sector to agree on an approach for statewide monitoring and coordination of early intervention approaches across government departments and agencies, and the Victorian community.

CHAPTER 4

STRENGTHENING THE PREVENTION SYSTEM

This section aligns with the following domain of the Theory of Change:

1.3 Co-ordination and leadership bodies

The prevention system in Victoria is best defined as the combination of all parts of Victoria's effort to prevent violence. This includes:

- government policies, legislation and strategies
- governance mechanisms that guide implementation
- the agencies and organisations delivering prevention work, including community-led or settings- based organisations
- the research, monitoring, evaluation and learning that underpins prevention efforts
- the places and spaces — often referred to as settings — where prevention work takes place.

(See pages 42-43 for further details on prevention system infrastructure.)

Effective prevention work requires a strong and mature prevention system that includes political and public sector leadership, policy and legislative reform, governance and coordination mechanisms, longitudinal evidence and a skilled workforce (4). As Victoria moves into the final phase of its 10-year plan, it is essential that the prevention system continues to strengthen and mature.

WHERE PROGRESS HAS BEEN MADE

The prevention system has continued to evolve over the reporting period. Its growth and maturation builds on a foundation of grassroots activism, public health, local government and community sector leadership and expertise, alongside the pivotal Royal Commission into Family Violence and the subsequent implementation of nation-leading family violence reforms including the establishment of Respect Victoria.

STATE GOVERNMENT PORTFOLIO AND GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES

Over the last three years, the Victorian Government has continued to steward and lead the governance of Victoria's prevention efforts. Through the Office for Prevention of Family Violence and Coordination and subsequently Family Safety Victoria, it has funded and supported implementation of prevention work across settings (as outlined at pages 76-80) and led the Victorian Government's response to the royal commission, developing nation-leading prevention policy and reform, working in partnership across the Victorian Government and with the Australian Government on national policy monitoring and evaluation through the *Family Violence Outcomes Framework*. Importantly, Family Safety Victoria has worked alongside Respect Victoria and the prevention sector to lead and support system coordination and governance.

Report participants reflected on the importance of strong governance as a foundational part of the prevention system, enabling and increasing collaboration, knowledge sharing and accountability. Family Safety Victoria, together with Respect Victoria, co-chaired the Primary Prevention Sector Reference Group — the key governance and coordination mechanism between government and sector for prevention policy and initiatives (141).[xxvii] Membership of the

xxvii Family Safety Victoria also facilitates the Family Violence Reform Advisory Group, the Family Violence Reform Advisory Board, the Family Violence Policy Steering Committee and the Dhelk Dja Partnership Forum.

Primary Prevention Sector Reference Group has expanded over the reporting period, reflecting increased reach, inclusion and engagement in primary prevention work across both government and community.

There were a number of machinery of government changes during the reporting period, with the Office for Prevention of Family Violence and Coordination moving from a standalone office in the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing into Family Safety Victoria and being subsequently consolidated into a branch with a combined family and sexual violence prevention and response focus. This reflected an effort to integrate family violence work across the continuum, from primary prevention through to response and recovery. However, a risk of this move is the loss of a dedicated focus on prevention, by being overwhelmed by the need to continually increase focus and effort on response systems.

RESPECT VICTORIA STRENGTHENS LEADERSHIP AND COORDINATION

Respect Victoria has continued its essential and unique role as the independent statutory authority dedicated to the prevention of family violence and violence against women. *Respect Victoria's 2023–28 strategic plan* includes a commitment to strengthen the state's prevention system infrastructure and establish the Prevention Alliance, which brings together key organisations leading prevention work in Victoria to support greater system-level coordination and collaboration (142).

> *We have come a long way over the past three years. Respect Victoria had only just established the Prevention Alliance three years ago and the Primary Prevention Sector Reference Group has really matured over that time as well... I feel like we're now building a much clearer sense of the prevention sector in Victoria and that's really helpful. — Jo Pride, Family Safety Victoria*

Respect Victoria continued to play a pivotal role during the reporting period, providing legislative and policy advice to state and federal MPs, contributing to primary prevention evidence, developing the first stages of a statewide monitoring and evaluation system, and delivering campaigns and efforts that drive change and support community mobilisation to prevent violence. Respect Victoria's unique partnership with Family Safety Victoria has facilitated an aligned and strategic approach to our respective roles and enabled regular and beneficial exchange of information between the two organisations.

Respect Victoria's leadership and coordination has also brought greater maturity, expertise and collaboration to the state's prevention landscape, particularly in shaping a more coordinated and strategic approach to primary prevention. This leading expertise in primary prevention has not been replicated in any other state government or Victorian not-for-profit entity.

> *There's a space for Respect Victoria to be a champion for itself. You are a really important service, and if we need a champion, then we need that champion to be strong ... Respect Victoria in the last year and a half has really come out more to community, services and sectors. And I thought that is fantastic. — Julie Kun, Women with Disabilities Victoria*

STATEWIDE WORKFORCE STRENGTHENING

The Centre for Workforce Excellence in the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing commissioned Safe and Equal to review and develop a proposed update to the *Prevention of Family and Violence Against Women Capability Framework*. It ran a thorough consultation, incorporating current primary prevention practice and workforce views, an integration of the connection between primary prevention and family violence response, and validation of the workforce and their skills.[xxviii]

A new capability framework is also being developed to support capability uplift for the specialist sexual assault workforce. The *Responding to Sexual Violence and Harmful Sexual Behaviours Capability Framework* is being developed in partnership with Sexual Assault Services Victoria, and it is due for release in late 2025.

Safe and Equal expanded its membership to include organisations and practitioners working in primary prevention during the reporting period (alongside those delivering early intervention, response and recovery programs), and it launched its inaugural primary prevention strategy (143). Safe and Equal plays a lead role in supporting workforce capability and practice expertise among its member organisations and more broadly to the prevention workforce, including by providing a range of professional development offerings such as training, communities of practice, practitioner events and resources, as well as PreventX, the leading national prevention conference. Over the reporting period, the Partners in Prevention network that Safe and Equal convenes grew by 800 members to a total of more than 4,000 practitioners. For further discussion of workforce strengthening, see **Growing and supporting the workforce**, pages 126-133.

WOMEN'S HEALTH SERVICES

Victoria's strong, networked women's health services sector has continued to deliver health promotion, advocacy, community education and capacity building, and supported its networks to respond to emerging legislation such as the Gender Equality Act 2020 (Vic) (144).

Women's health services lead nine regional violence prevention partnerships that provide critical infrastructure for coordinated and collaborative place-based prevention activity, including local workforce development, evidence building and community mobilisation (144). These nine partnerships cover the state. This partnership brokerage function has been key since the disbanding of Primary Care Partnerships during the reporting period. The regional partnerships maintain local focus on gendered violence and continue to drive prevention activity, despite often not being funded, or not funded to scale for this work (144).

> *The history and the continual prevention capital that has been created through the women's health services regional plans just keep paying dividends … You can see the continual dividends of that regional investment in bringing together, coordinating and slowly building. I think that's really important. — Prevention organisation executive*

xxviii This proposed draft was delivered by Safe and Equal to the Centre for Workforce Excellence in early 2025 and release is expected in late 2025.

The Women's Health Services Network plays an important role in collective advocacy, and Women with Disabilities Victoria, the Multicultural Centre for Women's Health and Women's Health Victoria provide specialist expertise on community-specific prevention work.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Local government continues to be an important setting for the delivery of prevention activity across the state (see case study 5). The Municipal Association of Victoria provides centralised leadership with deep and embedded primary prevention expertise, showing what can be achieved through a settings-based approach. Sustaining this crucial centralised role will be key to securing consistent leadership and commitment for primary prevention across all councils.

CASE STUDY

THE ROLE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN PREVENTION — MUNICIPAL ASSOCIATION OF VICTORIA

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The Municipal Association of Victoria is the legislated peak body for local government in the state. It supports councils with governance and legislative advice, sector development, policy and advocacy, insurance and procurement.

It was funded to build council capacity to implement The local government guide for preventing family violence and all forms of violence against women, support collaboration across councils and build the profile of local government in the prevention space.

The Municipal Association of Victoria partners with the Victorian Government's Free from Violence program to strengthen council initiatives in family violence prevention and gender equality.

KEY ACTIVITIES

The Municipal Association of Victoria supports Victoria's 79 councils' leadership and progress in activities that contribute to gender equality and family violence prevention efforts through:

- supporting the delivery of the Free from Violence Local Government Program, which supports councils to embed prevention practices into their work
- hosting the Gender Equality and Preventing Family Violence and all forms of Violence Against Women Network meetings with 75 of 79 councils involved
- developing a monthly gender equality newsletter with over 700 council subscribers
- collaborating with specialists to host webinars including a session held for urban and town planning on applying a gender lens (which attracted 320 people from 74 councils) and one on pornography and young people (which attracted 143 people from 47 councils)
- hosting forums for local government health and social planners, equipping councils with access to timely contemporary advice to meet their legislative requirement under the Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008 (Vic) and the Gender Equality Act 2020
- convening and facilitating the statewide Positive Ageing Network
- supporting councils to embed gender equity and Respectful Relationships
- being local government's voice at the table in statewide early years reforms
- supporting the convening of the Victorian Local Government Disability Planners Network, a network for liaising with and supporting local government officers developing community inclusion programs and strategies
- coordinating the Local Government Gambling, Alcohol and Other Drugs Issues Forum, which involves the intersecting issues of alcohol, gambling and family violence
- promoting maternal and child health services as a platform for trauma-informed and culturally safe practice in early intervention and family violence risk identification
- managing the Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Kindergarten Participation Project
- strengthening collaboration across sectors by facilitating relationships between councils and services and programs, including MABELS, Baby Makes 3, The Orange Door, Child Protection, and specialist family violence services

- working with the Department of Education to build workforce capability in using the Child Information Sharing Scheme
- continuing to play an active role in encouraging women to stand for council elections and providing professional development opportunities once elected — since development of the *Victorian Local Governments' Women's Charter* in 2002, the Municipal Association of Victoria has further identified actions to prevent violence against women outlined in *Change the story*, namely promoting gender equality and women's independence and decision-making in public life.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Each day, local governments deliver services that touch the lives of a broad cross-section of all Victorians. Councils are also large workforces with connections to local business and community groups. As such, they have a critical role to play in influencing community attitudes and behaviours to prevent violence against women.

Local governments vary in experience and expertise of primary prevention; however, there are some recognised enablers of successful implementation. Staff buy-in — particularly at a leadership level — is a crucial success factor, although it can be a significant challenge where it is difficult to attain. Partnerships are also a key enabler of implementation. Where funded councils have experience in primary prevention, they can build on existing partnerships, including with women's health services and primary prevention networks. Collaboration and connection between councils, and the support provided by the Municipal Association of Victoria, has been important for progressing work, particularly for councils without this established foundation. These factors, bolstered by appropriate resourcing, are important to strengthen progress made and enhance consistency across local governments. Sufficient resourcing is also a consideration for enabling consistent engagement with The local government guide for preventing family violence and all forms of violence against women.

ABORIGINAL SELF-DETERMINATION

The Dhelk Dja Partnership Forum connects Aboriginal community representatives across Victoria's regions from the 11 Dhelk Dja Action Groups, Aboriginal Services and the Victorian Government, and leads the development of localised action plans to respond to and prevent violence. Over the reporting period, the forum continued to drive implementation of *Dhelk Dja: Safe Our Way — Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families*. This is an agreement between Aboriginal communities and the Victorian Government that specifies Aboriginal-led prevention as one of five strategic priorities (71). The agreement works through partnerships and directions at a state, regional and local level, and it remains an important Aboriginal-led vehicle to enable Aboriginal communities and services and the Victorian Government to work together to ensure Aboriginal people and communities are 'stronger, safer, thriving and living free from family violence' (71).

The Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor delivered its report *Monitoring Victoria's family violence reforms: Aboriginal-led prevention and early intervention*, in December 2022 (145). This report highlighted opportunities for strengthening government accountability of delivery of initiatives that support Dhelk Dja priorities.

An evaluation of the first *Dhelk Dja 3 Year Action Plan (2019–2022)* was completed during the reporting period (in 2024), and it noted the importance of strengthening Aboriginal-led prevention systems and implementation (146). Key prevention-related outcomes and progress identified included: embedding cultural practices in policies, promoting safety and wellbeing, enhancing the evidence base, and increasing ACCO and community participation. The evaluation provided a series of recommendations for the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing and other stakeholders to support ongoing success, governance and Aboriginal self-determination.

The second *Dhelk Dja 3 Year Action Plan (2023–2025)* was released in April 2024, adopting a number of the The Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor's and first action plan evaluator's recommendations (147). Family Safety Victoria also worked with the Dhelk Dja Koori Caucus, an advisory group (including Respect Victoria) and ACCOs to develop the *Dhelk Dja Family Violence Prevention Framework*, expected for release in 2025.

STRONGER PARTNERSHIPS

As the prevention system has matured, so too have the number of strong partnerships across the prevention landscape and beyond. Report participants consistently highlighted the importance of collaboration in prevention work, with many identifying their partnership projects and activities as major achievements over the reporting period.

> *There's been a growth in collaboration across a range of different organisations working together on an advocacy agenda and working collaboratively with other peaks and bodies that are leading prevention in their own spheres of operation and influence. — Marina Carman, Safe and Equal*

Importantly, report participants expressed a view that the funding environment had been

less competitive than in previous years, creating space and opportunities to build trusting and collaborative relationships. Many funding models for government-funded programs increasingly build partnership into their models. For example, grants programs supporting prevention in multicultural and faith-based communities, affirmative consent, and prevention of violence through sport all required applicants to partner with organisations with complementary expertise and networks. Report participants reflected that partnerships have been critical for extending and sustaining work within a tight fiscal environment.

CASE STUDY

AGENCY, ACCESS AND ACTION — WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES VICTORIA & RESPECT VICTORIA

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Over one-third of women with disability experience one or more forms of intimate partner violence (148). Ending violence against women and gender diverse people with disability starts with open conversations, challenging biases and taking action to ensure that everyone is safe and equal. That's why, during 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence in 2024, Respect Victoria and Women with Disabilities Victoria partnered to deliver the campaign Agency, Access, Action. The campaign brought the voices and expertise of women and gender diverse people with disability to the front, exploring respect, ableism and agency, workplace access, dating, fashion, disability pride and the power of handstands.

Consisting of 13 short videos, the campaign focused on individuals sharing their own story and unpacking stereotypes that people with disability face. The videos also highlighted the biases that all of us can hold about abilities, wants, needs, decision-making, dating and relationships, who deserves to ask for care, and who should be respected.

INSIGHTS

The co-designed content was accessible, authentic, joyful and engaging.

A formal evaluation has not been undertaken, but there are clear indicators of growth and reach achieved through the campaign. Notably, the video on chronic pain achieved 1.3 million views on Instagram and generated a high volume of positive audience engagement. Both Respect Victoria and Women with Disabilities Victoria recorded an increase in followers and online engagement during and following the campaign period. In addition, audience engagement extended beyond Victoria to interstate and international audiences, suggesting that the campaign contributed to broader community awareness and visibility on the issue. The campaign was co-designed with women from Women with Disabilities Victoria's Experts by Experience group. Co-design enabled storytelling from a place of agency and strength, while still sharing the difficult realities of disability. The co-design process strengthened the relationship between partner organisations.

Respect Victoria's capacity to support community-led storytelling increased, including a deepening of its understanding of how to co-design creative work that that promotes access and agency. Lessons learned through this partnership included the value of building trust between organisations and cast and crew by allowing time and multiple meetings to ensure participants felt informed and comfortable before filming began.

KEY TAKEAWAY

This project demonstrated the value of gendered violence organisations, community-led organisations and people with lived experience co-designing campaigns. A paid partnership between organisations enabled Women with Disabilities Victoria to flexibly direct resources to support experts to participate. Regular conversations, adapted timelines and a willingness to learn and adjust throughout the process supported safety and quality. The campaign itself showed that it is possible to highlight violence and discrimination towards women with disability in a way that recognises their strengths, as they use their own voices to tell the story in the best way for them.

Prevention work can and should use trauma-informed and psychologically safe approaches, to ensure people with lived experience can shape and participate in the work. Partnerships between organisations and communities that prioritise power and resource sharing are best placed to deliver respectful, relevant and meaningful work.

Community-led organisations that participated in this report also reflected on the deepening of strategic partnerships between themselves and specialist prevention organisations. This has supported reciprocal leaning and building better understanding and capability in embedding inclusive practice and addressing intersecting drivers of gendered violence.

> *The other thing is just mutually supporting work as well. We're in meetings together and there is that sense of ongoing collaboration that is really appreciated, that mutual purpose, the ability to collaborate and be a safe space to talk about ideas. — Julie Kun, Women with Disabilities Victoria*

WHERE THERE ARE CHALLENGES

The prevention system is a critical part of Victoria's public health architecture, yet cutbacks and downsizing of departments and agencies responsible for leading prevention work and the discontinuation of important bodies such as the Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor[xxix] leave a significant gap in the governance and accountability mechanisms in place to provide independent oversight of the family violence system. It

xxix As noted on pages 54 and 56, the Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor was established to oversee implementation of the recommendations from the 2015 Royal Commission into Family Violence. It ceased operations in January 2023 when all recommendations were acquitted.

underscores the importance of Respect Victoria's role in supporting systems strengthening.

BETTER VISIBILITY OF AND COLLABORATION ACROSS PREVENTION WORK

While Victoria has valuable governance structures in place for primary prevention (unlike many other jurisdictions), report participants highlighted the need for greater visibility of the prevention work happening across government, and for stronger communication, collaboration and partnering to ensure effective coordination of prevention policy and programming and the ability to leverage efforts. Similarly, they noted some siloing within the family violence system due to the prevailing funding approach.

> *The silos in which government works is a big part of the problem. Silos are an innate design feature of the Westminster system, they're embedded in our system. However, government also often then fund services and systems through these silos in ways that are not helpful, and don't enable or encourage the joined-up, whole-of-person, community responses that are needed. –Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commissioner Micaela Cronin*

Connecting the various parts of the system to support alignment and coordination of prevention efforts is a core function of Victoria's family violence reform governance structure. The establishment of Respect Victoria, the Prevention Alliance and Primary Prevention Sector Reference Group have been important mechanisms to support sector coordination, with the Family Violence Reform Board and other intra-government mechanisms intended to support whole-of-government oversight and coordination.

Important foundations are in place that can be built upon, noting that effective coordination and collaboration takes time and sustained effort, particularly where funding and policy levers sit across different areas of government. Maintaining and enabling the existing coordination structures and their roles — despite the challenging fiscal environment — will be key to increasing visibility of the various government portfolios, organisations and actors involved in prevention work. This will also deepen understanding of this work between the actors to support decision-making and coordination, avoid duplication and bolster collective impact.

> *I think the sector really recognises the existence of that infrastructure and how important it is and how it needs to be there and be supported, but [this recognition] is not necessarily getting to the decision-making levels. — Adele Murdolo, Multicultural Centre for Women's Health*

The system would also benefit from stronger recognition of the prevention and early intervention work already being implemented across specialist family and sexual violence services and other service sectors. This is where the remit of Respect Victoria, as a statewide coordinating body, is important, as well as that of Safe and Equal (the statewide peak body on family violence), Sexual Assault Services Victoria (the statewide peak body on sexual violence), and the role of regional coordination mechanisms including the women's health

regional partnerships and the Municipal Association of Victoria.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ACTION

STAYING THE COURSE TO ALLOW THE SYSTEM TO CONTINUE TO MATURE

Victoria has successfully established a strong system with distinct yet complementary roles and responsibilities. Ongoing system maturity requires stability, hence it is crucial that the Victorian Government stays the course on primary prevention with secure and sustained bipartisan commitment.

STRENGTHENING COORDINATION

There is an opportunity to continue to strengthen the Victorian prevention system through stronger policy and funding coordination across government through a whole-of-government approach and between local government, the Victorian and federal governments. National Cabinet has been an important mechanism to foster strong cross-jurisdictional collaboration on prevention priorities under the *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children*. Ongoing collaboration and support for Victorian and national agencies (particularly statutory agencies) with complementary roles, functions and priorities will also be an important enabler — specifically, ongoing collaboration between Respect Victoria, Our Watch and the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission, as well as between the Commission for Gender Equality in the Public Service and the Workplace Gender Equality Agency. There are also opportunities to continue to draw insights from the coronial and justice systems, for example, by analysing trends and opportunities for prevention identified in systemic death reviews conducted by the Coroners Court of Victoria and the Commission for Children and Young People.

STRONGER GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY FOR ABORIGINAL-LED PREVENTION WORK

Maintaining and strengthening the infrastructure for Aboriginal-led prevention work is essential. This includes the Dhelk Dja Partnership Forum — its Koori Caucus and Regional Action Groups — and ACCOs leading on violence prevention work. These forums and organisations play a critical accountability role as well as a role in leadership, governance coordination and building an intersectional and integrated approach to prevention work.

The Dhelk Dja Koori Caucus has called for greater government accountability for addressing the impacts of family violence on Aboriginal communities, with a much stronger focus on prevention (21). The Victorian Government is readying itself for Treaty processes. For prevention work, this includes ensuring government systems, processes and staff are embedding self-determination and Indigenous Data Sovereignty into Aboriginal prevention governance, funding, programming and delivery. In particular, this requires supporting implementation of the forthcoming *Dhelk Dja Family Violence Prevention Framework* and Dhelk Dja regional action plans, and dedicated prevention funding for ACCOs.

For further discussion of the importance of self-determination and Aboriginal-led prevention, see page 38.

RECOMMENDATIONS: STRENGTHENING THE PREVENTION SYSTEM

RESPECT VICTORIA RECOMMENDS THAT THE VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT:

6. **Continue to strengthen prevention system infrastructure and coordination through dedicated and enduring funding for:**
    a. Respect Victoria — the statutory agency for prevention of family violence and violence against women
    b. the peak bodies for Victorian organisations specialising in the prevention of family violence, violence against women and gendered violence, including sexual violence
    c. the prevention workforce and sector, including women's health services, local government and specialist community-led organisations — particularly organisations led by and for Aboriginal, LGBTIQA+, and culturally and racially diverse communities; older people; and people with disability
    d. regional and statewide coordination and governance mechanisms, including self-determined infrastructure for and led by Aboriginal communities, and whole-of-government responsibility
    e. funded partnerships and programs focused on prevention of gendered violence, including those across the family violence continuum.

CHAPTER 4

GROWING AND SUPPORTING THE WORKFORCE

This section aligns with the following domains of the Theory of Change:

- **2.3** Workforce systems
- **3.2** Skilled and sufficient workforce

Victoria has a strong workforce of skilled and experienced prevention practitioners working across a broad range of sectors and organisations, delivering high-quality and effective prevention activity, and developing practice evidence.

WHERE PROGRESS HAS BEEN MADE

SIGNIFICANT WORKFORCE GROWTH

The prevention workforce has grown considerably in recent years, with more organisations and practitioners delivering prevention activities and seeing themselves as part of the prevention effort. Safe and Equal's 2024 evaluation report of the Statewide Prevention Workforce Development Program highlighted that more than 570 people participated in training and other professional development activities, and over 4,100 people participated in professional networks through the Partners in Prevention network (149). The evaluation notes that this total engagement represents an almost 24% increase on the previous year (150).

STRATEGIC FOUNDATIONS IN PLACE

The foundations for strengthening and growing the workforce are already in place, with government commitments set out in several policies and strategies including the *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children*, Victoria's *Building from Strength 10-Year Industry Plan for Family Violence Prevention and Response*, *Ending Family Violence* and *Free from Violence* action plans, and *Strong Foundations*.

The second rolling action plan under Victoria's *Building from Strength 10-Year Industry Plan* for Family Violence Prevention and Response was released in August 2024 (91). It sets out four focus areas for action:

- **Growing the workforce:** expanding the number of practitioners and organisations involved in prevention
- **Supporting strong organisations and workforce cultures:** fostering positive and supportive workplaces that promote wellbeing and effective practice
- **Building capability:** enhancing the skills, knowledge and confidence of the workforce through training and professional development
- **Building a system that works together:** promoting collaboration and coordination among different stakeholders to achieve a unified approach to prevention.

Our Watch's *Growing with change* report provides a model and practical guidance for developing the prevention workforce, while Safe and Equal's *Foundations for Action* report provides useful evidence and insights on what is

needed in Victoria (11, 151). These reports, together with the forthcoming prevention capability framework, will reinforce workforce capability building in Victoria.

> *The Foundations for Action project is a huge step forward. It was a sector-led process that allowed us to map what the workforce actually looks like and the sorts of work that people are doing and who they are, where they've come from, what were their pathways into the workforce, what do they want in terms of training, leadership, connection, wellbeing. — Marina Carman, Safe and Equal*

CASE STUDY

SAFE AND EQUAL — FOUNDATIONS FOR ACTION

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Safe and Equal delivered the *Foundations for Action: Understanding the primary prevention workforce in Victoria* report in 2024, funded by the Centre for Workforce Excellence and the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (11). The purpose of the report was to develop a detailed understanding of the nature and diversity of the current primary prevention workforce — across organisations, roles, sectors, settings, communities and locations — in order to support and develop this workforce into the future. Safe and Equal consulted with stakeholders, synthesised input, and outlined considerations for responding to current and future workforce needs.

KEY FINDINGS

The project found that the prevention workforce has particular needs in terms of professional development and leadership training, career pathways, job security and conditions, and opportunities to connect and access support (particularly in the face of backlash and resistance).

Sustainable funding was identified as key to attracting, retaining and further developing a specialist workforce. In addition, the report found that a large amount of prevention activity is taking place across specialist primary prevention organisations, women's health services, and family violence and sexual violence services, and in schools, councils, TAFEs, sports settings, universities, community-led services and organisations, community services, sexual health services, corporate settings, and research.

The report noted that the breadth of this work is increasingly recognised and valued as an integral part of the workforce.

KEY TAKEAWAY

This project from Safe and Equal delivered a thorough overview of progress and challenges in the Victorian prevention workforce, and suggested actions that will be important to implement over the coming years. The report discussed how organisations engaged in prevention need to identify ways of working better and more collaboratively with each other, to sustain what has been built to date, and continue to grow. This could be assisted by improving the visibility and valuing of prevention itself (and the people doing it), alongside efforts that support collaboration and organisational partnerships through trust building and relationship building over time. The project also highlighted that prevention leadership is not just found in an easily defined 'sector' but also exists through people leading the work across a much wider prevention system.

WHERE THERE ARE CHALLENGES

While significant progress has been made over the reporting period in defining, growing and developing the prevention workforce, consultations with report participants and review of key evaluations[xxx] highlighted several challenges, including:

- support for the wellbeing of practitioners, including with the impacts of vicarious trauma and practitioner isolation
- ongoing workforce capability development in new and evolving areas of practice, including intersectional practice and responding to emerging trends and challenges
- staff turnover, recruitment and retention
- resistance and backlash to gender equity efforts and progressive social change
- leadership support for settings-based work
- ongoing pressures to achieve immediate impacts (150).

THE IMPACTS OF RESISTANCE AND BACKLASH ON THE HEALTH AND SAFETY OF THE WORKFORCE

Report participants described the escalating intensity and severity of resistance and backlash to gender equality and its impact on the safety and wellbeing of practitioners, particularly for those from marginalised communities impacted by increasing levels of racism, homophobia, biphobia and transphobia and other forms of discrimination. In addition, some participants described rising levels of backlash and resistance in particular settings, such as schools, where the influence of online misogyny has led to hostility and harassment from boys and young men towards female and LGBTIQA+ prevention practitioners, as well as school staff and students.

Safe and Equal's *Foundations for Action* highlights the need for connection and support for a dispersed workforce that faces substantial backlash and resistance. Meaningful connection to professional peers facing the same challenges was noted as affirming, validating and informative (11), and as providing an important form of support for sustaining the work (152). Connection and support, such as that provided through communities of practice and regional prevention partnerships, decreases the risk of isolation and increases workforce wellbeing, peer learning and staff retention.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ACTION

CAPABILITY BUILDING WITHIN A COMPLEX ENVIRONMENT

Overall, there was wide acknowledgement from report participants of the importance of continuing to build the capability of the prevention workforce.

Report participants spoke of the complexity of prevention work and the need to continuously develop new knowledge and skills to be able to address emerging issues, such as the increasing engagement with violent pornography (particularly for children and young people) and

xxx Such as the evaluation of Safe and Equal's Statewide Prevention Workforce Development Program.

fast and increased adoption of new technology — such as monitoring technology and artificial intelligence that allows for greater and more sophisticated tech-facilitated abuse (153). However, capacity to engage in ongoing learning and development is constrained by the time and resources available. For example, often grants or other funding agreements only allow for program implementation rather than workforce capability building. Safe and Equal's Statewide Prevention Workforce Development Program and Fast Track leadership programs are examples of the sorts of workforce capability building initiatives that, with appropriate resourcing and scale, can address these challenges.

SUPPORTING THE RESPECTFUL RELATIONSHIPS WORKFORCE

Those working to support delivery of respectful relationships education interviewed for this report described the pressure and lack of readiness that teachers feel when delivering content on complex subjects such as sexual consent or responding to disclosures of violence that may arise. They noted this can lead to teachers skipping important modules within the respectful relationships curriculum or presenting them with gaps. Specialist external providers such as those from Victoria's sexual assault services are often called on by schools to provide support and training, but these specialists can only support this demand on a population level if they are provided with adequate funding and resourcing (154).

A skilled, supported and suitably sized Respectful Relationships regional workforce, including specialist prevention experts within the Department of Education, is crucial to continue to build confidence, skills and culture across the school system to deliver the whole-school approach to Respectful Relationships as it has been intended, and to continue to build knowledge, confidence and capability for teachers (see page 86 for a case study on Respectful Relationships). Continued support and resourcing is also needed for community-led organisations, women's health services and other specialist sexual violence and gendered violence services to further support the school system to deliver effective prevention, especially where their students are at high risk of experiencing or using violence (11, 144, 155).

STAFF RETENTION IS IMPACTED BY FUNDING UNCERTAINTY

Many report participants highlighted the frequent staff turnover and loss of experienced and skilled practitioners as an ongoing challenge. This is driven by funding uncertainty, short-term contracts, delayed career progression and job insecurity, as well as burnout associated with workload pressures and the challenging content of prevention work and potential vicarious trauma.

To ensure the ongoing, strategic and coordinated growth and development of the prevention workforce in Victoria, adequate funding is required to maintain the workforce, and funding agreements need to provide more certainty to organisations so they can maintain staff over at least the medium term. An equal pay review would also be a powerful way of ensuring that pay and conditions for workers in the sector are fair and reasonable, supporting ongoing staff retention and workforce growth.

Continued investment is also required in statewide entities that support prevention system strengthening, workforce development,

IT IS ABOUT MAKING THE MAINSTREAM MORE INCLUSIVE... WHEN YOU MAKE THE SECTOR MORE INCLUSIVE, YOU'RE A VITAL STEP TOWARDS MAKING THE COMMUNITY MORE INCLUSIVE.

Julie Kun, Women with Disabilities Victoria

practitioner networks, communities of practice and strategic partnerships that support capability building. These entities include Respect Victoria, Safe and Equal, Sexual Assault Services Victoria and Victoria's Women's Health Service Network.

> *I think workforce is a really important priority. We need to make sure we retain the workforce we have and the supports you need to put around that workforce to make sure there is continuity in the work, but also expand and bring in newer workforces. — Marina Carman, Safe and Equal*

GREATER DIVERSITY, INCLUSION AND CULTURAL SAFETY WITHIN MAINSTREAM ORGANISATIONS

For the prevention sector to realise its goal of eliminating gendered violence for all, it needs to be staffed by a diverse workforce that represents the community it serves. Report participants emphasised the need for greater diversity, particularly cultural diversity within the prevention workforce, reflecting evidence that highlights the need for ongoing action to address intersecting drivers of gendered violence such as exclusion and discrimination faced by marginalised communities both in society and in the workforce itself (151). Report participants noted that 'mainstream' organisations (i.e. those organisations that are not controlled or led by specific communities) need to do more to embed culturally safe and inclusive workplace practices to support their workforce.

> *It is about making that mainstream more inclusive... when you make the sector more inclusive, you're a vital step towards making the community more inclusive. — Julie Kun, Women with Disabilities Victoria*

In addition, report participants noted more work is required by mainstream organisations to increase the capability of prevention practitioners to effectively deliver prevention work with diverse and marginalised communities and build intersectional practice, in collaboration with community-led organisations. The need to upskill the prevention sector in LGBTIQA+ competency was raised particularly. This requires an anti-oppressive lens, with a focus on power sharing, trauma-informed practices, recognition of structural violence, and commitment to concurrently addressing multiple forms of violence including on the basis of gender, race, disability, sexuality and other social identities. This is something that can be learnt from community-led organisations through development and networking of practitioners, and it will be important to capture in the forthcoming *Prevention Capability Framework* implementation (for further discussion, see **Strengthening the prevention system**)

RECOGNISING AND INTEGRATING LIVED EXPERIENCE IN THE WORKFORCE

While the reform process coming out of the Royal Commission into Family Violence led to the creation of defined lived experience roles and structures in the family violence response system, many people with current or prior lived experience of violence and structural inequalities that drive violence (such as racism, colonialism, ableism, ageism, homophobia, biphobia and transphobia) also take on roles

in prevention and do not always disclose their lived experience. The recognition and integration of lived experience in the prevention workforce — while in its infancy in comparison to response — strengthens the sector's capacity to serve its community and create impact (156).

Some report participants noted that people with lived experience may face particular challenges when working in prevention and require additional supports. This includes the risk of re-traumatisation or vicarious trauma where, for example, their work causes them to remember or revisit past traumatic experiences or they find they are unable to achieve systems change at the pace or scale they hoped. Work-life balance may also be hard for people with lived experience to attain, as they cannot 'switch off their identity' at the end of the workday, and they may face pressure and scrutiny from their community or peers for outcomes outside of their control.

To appropriately support staff wellbeing and safety in the prevention workforce, organisations need to assess and invest in their capability to value and integrate lived experience. This includes developing, refining and implementing workplace policies and practices, and assessing and building organisational readiness to embed lived experience. Safe and Equal's Health, Safety and Wellbeing self-assessment tool, Monash University's analysis of the Victim Survivors' Advisory Council and the work of the WEAVERs provide guidance that can be further built on and embedded within the sector (157, 158).

RECOMMENDATIONS: GROWING AND SUPPORTING THE WORKFORCE

RESPECT VICTORIA RECOMMENDS THAT THE VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT:

7. Actively work to grow and strengthen the primary prevention workforce in Victoria by:

- **a.** implementing *Framing the Future,* the second rolling action plan under the *Building from Strength 10-Year Industry Plan for Family Violence Prevention and Response*
- **b.** progressing the actions put forward in Safe and Equal's *Foundations for Action* report on further building workforce knowledge, skills, confidence and connection
- **c.** enabling sector-led implementation support of the forthcoming *Victorian Prevention Capability Framework*
- **d.** conducting an equal pay review of the family violence sector to ensure remuneration is fairly awarded to skills and activities
- **e.** enabling the sector to continue to embed intersectional and inclusive practice, including through resourcing community-led and specialist organisations to deliver capability building initiatives and to engage in partnerships with mainstream organisations.

CHAPTER 4

BUILDING EVIDENCE AND DATA

This section aligns with the following domains of the Theory of Change:

- 1.2 Research and evaluation systems
- 1.4 Theoretical and practice frameworks
- 2.1 Knowledge and evidence

Research, monitoring and evaluation are essential to understanding the prevalence, trends, drivers and reinforcing factors of different forms of violence. Such evidence shows the magnitude of problems related to family violence, gendered violence and all forms of violence against women, the opportunities for intervention and how best to measure the effectiveness and impact of such interventions.

Important progress has been made over the reporting period, and there are opportunities to continue to build evidence on what works in violence prevention and to better evaluate Victoria's progress.

WHERE PROGRESS HAS BEEN MADE

MONITORING AND EVALUATION WORK BY RESPECT VICTORIA

Respect Victoria's Statewide Theory of Change builds on the work of *Free from Violence* by mapping a series of short-, medium- and long-term outcomes required to enable enduring change across Victoria (see page 68). The theory underpins a monitoring framework of indicators and measures that track progress in prevention. Establishing consistent, reliable and valid measurement tools for these indicators — and building the data collection and reporting infrastructure — is a long-term project that Respect Victoria continues to progress.

Respect Victoria is also working with the Ballarat community to build a theory of change and an indicators and outcomes framework to measure progress and impact for the place-based Respect Ballarat project.

A core function of Respect Victoria is to support Victoria's prevention practice by building sector literacy, capability and alignment in monitoring, evaluation and learning. Over the reporting period, Respect Victoria launched and revised the monitoring, evaluation and learning toolkit to support practitioners, project managers and organisations (159).

> *I would like to do a little pat on the back to Respect Victoria for the really hard work that you've done on trying to cement monitoring and evaluation as business as usual, because the family violence space in general struggles with that from the National Plan down, that difficult work of measurement .. And I know this stuff is really hard .. but yeah, you've just done an amazing job of just getting out there and putting it on the table.*
> *— Phillip Ripper, No to Violence*

FUNDED PROGRAM EVALUATIONS

A number of government-funded programs have also been independently evaluated throughout the reporting period or currently have independent evaluations underway. These include:

- Supporting Young People to Understand Affirmative Consent
- Supporting Multicultural and Faith Communities to Prevent Family Violence
- Free From Violence Local Government Program

- Targeted early intervention with boys and young men to address violence against women and build workforce capacity program
- Preventing Violence Through Sport Grants Program
- Starts With Us, Women's Legal Service Victoria
- Women's Health Services Capacity Building Project
- Statewide Prevention Workforce Development Program
- All Come Out to Play!

When made publicly available, these sorts of program evaluations can make a valuable contribution to the evidence base and support continuous improvement across the sector.

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE FOR THE ELIMINATION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

In 2022, the Australian Research Council announced a $34.9 million grant over seven years to establish a world-first Centre of Excellence for the Elimination of Violence Against Women (CEVAW), to examine the structural drivers that cause and compound violence against women and pioneer new, evidence-based approaches to improve policy and practice across Australia and the Indo-Pacific. Launched in 2024 and headed by Monash University, CEVAW comprises 13 chief investigators from six Australian universities, and 45 Australian and international partner organisations including Respect Victoria.

Specifically, CEVAW states it is adopting an Indigenous-centred approach to evidence building, in order to 'build an interdisciplinary and data-driven research evidence base, co-designed with partners, on what works to reduce VAW [violence against women] … and mobilise partnerships to deliver scalable approaches to eliminate VAW across communities' (160).

RESEARCH AND EVIDENCE RELEASED IN THE REPORTING PERIOD

Research into family violence, violence against women and gendered violence from universities, independent research groups, government agencies, and prevention organisations has grown in volume and sophistication over the reporting period (161). *The 2021 National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey* (NCAS) was also released in this reporting period and is discussed in more detail at page 160.

UNDERSTANDING THE DYNAMICS AND DRIVERS OF GENDERED VIOLENCE

Respect Victoria released *Summarising the Evidence*, a commissioned set of evidence reviews to better understand the prevalence, nature, drivers and risk factors of different forms of violence against women, family violence and gendered violence (23, 162). The project sought to explore the extent to which addressing the gendered drivers of men's violence against women helps to prevent other forms of family and gendered violence, including adolescent violence in the home, child maltreatment and elder abuse.

These evidence reviews indicated that continued efforts to address the gendered drivers of men's violence against women are very likely to have positive outcomes for preventing other forms of violence. The project also highlighted where more evidence is needed to better understand how to effectively prevent different

forms of gendered and family violence across communities. Importantly, the project provided a foundation for building practice knowledge about how intersecting forms of structural oppression overlap with the gendered drivers of men's violence against women to shape how and why violence occurs.

ABORIGINAL-LED FAMILY VIOLENCE PREVENTION

In support of the Dhelk Dja Partnership Forum, Respect Victoria partnered with Family Safety Victoria to publish two research reports on Aboriginal prevention in Victoria: the *Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention Evidence Review* and the *Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention Mapping Project* (19, 93). They are important contributions to the evidence on, and practice of, Aboriginal-led prevention. They highlight key challenges, gaps and opportunities to strengthen prevention work and better support ACCOs. These approaches are further explored in **Recognising and enabling community-led and specialist prevention work.**

PLACED-BASED PREVENTION APPROACHES

In the reporting period, Respect Victoria commissioned an evidence review that synthesised global and Australian evidence on the effectiveness of place-based approaches to violence prevention (96). This included a focus on combining interventions at individual, family, organisational, community and society levels to mutually reinforce each other for greater impact. The review was instrumental in building a business case for the development of a saturation model, which resulted in the Victorian Government funding the Respect Ballarat initiative.

Community organisations have also conducted work on place-based partnerships led by women's health services including the Community Champions for Primary Prevention Action in the West project and Taking ACtion: Affirmative Consent in the North project (163, 164).

UNDERSTANDING MEN AND MASCULINITIES

Our Watch released the *Men in focus practice guide* in 2022, an important research translation piece that built on the 2019 *Men in focus: Unpacking masculinities and engaging men in the prevention of violence against women* evidence review. This guide outlines five key evidence-informed principles for engaging men and boys in primary prevention activities, specifically that work needs to be intersectional, gender transformative, strengths-based, and accountable to women, and to have solutions across all levels of society.

It outlines the long-term, collective and intersectional approach needed to dismantle and transform the norms, structures and practices that reinforce gender inequality and lead to men's violence against women (165). Additional Men in focus practitioner resources including videos, tips, reflective questions, support guides and infographics were also released in 2024 (166).

In 2022, Respect Victoria partnered with The Men's Project, an initiative of Jesuit Social Services, to undertake the *2024 Man Box study*, the second national study exploring the association between attitudes to masculine stereotypes and the behaviours of men aged 18–45 years. The study found that the more men agreed with harmful masculine norms, the more

likely they were to hold violence-supportive attitudes and to self-report several other harmful attitudes and behaviours including perpetrating intimate partner violence, engaging in risk-taking behaviours and frequently accessing violent pornography. Notably, most participants had mixed relationships with these masculine norms, and even those who were less aligned with them still held harmful attitudes.

Respect Victoria expanded on the findings of the 2024 *Man Box study* to develop a companion report, *Willing, capable and confident: Men, masculinities and the prevention of violence against women* (95).

CASE STUDY

WILLING, CAPABLE AND CONFIDENT: MEN, MASCULINITIES AND THE PREVENTION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN — RESPECT VICTORIA

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Better evidence on how to help men engage in preventing gendered violence is key to solving this entrenched social problem. The *Willing, capable and confident: Men, masculinities and the prevention of violence against women* report (August 2024) explores men's perspectives about the ways they navigate, challenge or conform to masculine norms across different aspects of their lives, and what this tells us about how to support their engagement in violence prevention.

Willing, capable and confident centres on Respect Victoria's analysis of focus groups with men aged 18 to 45 that were designed to provide deeper insight into men's attitudes and behaviours related to masculine norms. These focus group discussions were conducted as part of the 2024 Man Box study, a research project led by The Men's Project, an initiative of Jesuit Social Services, in partnership with Respect Victoria.

KEY FINDINGS

Men were asked about the effects of social pressure to conform to masculine norms, such as:

- acting tough and being stoic, and how this can affect men seeking help
- being the breadwinner in heterosexual relationships
- compliance with heteronormative and heterosexual masculine norms, and how this varies for straight and gay, bi+ and queer men.

Most participants described how concerns of social exclusion, judgement or rejection influenced how they choose to either conform to or resist masculine norms. Where men feel greater pressure to conform to harmful gender norms, the value they place on maintaining relationships can mean that they dismiss, ignore, reinforce or encourage violence-supporting attitudes and behaviours. This demonstrates how engaging men in primary prevention means acknowledging the richness of their relationships and how protecting a sense of belonging can shape their behaviours.

The report presents five key opportunities for building men's willingness, capability and confidence to address the gendered drivers of violence against women:

- Men see and understand the benefits of emotionally supportive, safe and equitable intimate partner relationships.
- Fathers understand how gender norms can influence their parenting and impact their children, and many fathers feel strongly motivated to parent in less rigidly gendered ways than their fathers did.
- Men's families and social networks can support them to let go of harmful ideas about what it means to be a man.
- Men's increased openness to discuss their mental health can be built upon with gender-transformative primary prevention efforts.
- Workplaces can provide opportunities to challenge harmful ideas about what it means to be a man.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Willing, capable and confident supports existing research and practice evidence demonstrating that while individual attitudinal change is an important aspect of prevention, this alone may not be sufficient to change men's behaviour, given the strong and complex interplay of broader social norms and practices in Australia around masculinity or masculinities. This elevates the importance of concurrent resourcing for policy and practice efforts that affect structural, institutional and organisational change related to prevention efforts.

YOUNG MEN ONLINE

Over the reporting period, the eSafety Commissioner (eSafety) continued to contribute important evidence on masculinities and the experiences of young men online through its two-part research series, conducted in partnership with Deakin University and Queensland University of Technology. *Part 1: Being a young man online* explores what influences, motivates, shapes and informs their online experiences. *Part 2: Supporting young men online* maps opportunities to support young men to have safe and positive online experiences, and eSafety's role in supporting men online and shaping healthy masculinities (167, 168).

> *The impetus for doing that research came out of our team, because we wanted to identify intervention points for young men and boys, and help them to not go down that patriarchal masculinity direction [that drives gendered violence and harm] — Carolyn Wilkes, eSafety*

TECHNOLOGY-FACILITATED GENDERED VIOLENCE

eSafety conducted a literature review that detailed the prevalence and nature of technology-facilitated abuse in the context of family, domestic and sexual violence; the groups most impacted; and the most effective responses for addressing it (169).

ANROWS conducted a study on workplace technology-facilitated sexual harassment, including behaviours, characteristics and trends, the specific

drivers of this type of violence, and ways that employers and regulators can better prevent, detect and respond to it (170).

Respect Victoria partnered with Body Safety Australia in late 2024 to undertake research into social media algorithms and AI-generated image-based abuse, and implications for the prevention of gendered violence among children and young people. The findings will be released in late 2025.

ATTITUDES TOWARDS AND IMPACT OF ONLINE PORNOGRAPHY

eSafety published a research series on young people's experiences with and attitudes towards online pornography. In addition, Our Watch examined the impact of pornography on young people, including attitudes towards gender identities, roles and stereotypes, and ideas about healthy relationships (171, 172). These studies provide important considerations for incorporating strategies to address the impact of online pornography into prevention policy and practice.

FAMILY VIOLENCE AND CHILD MALTREATMENT

The Australian Child Maltreatment Study (2023) released results from a survey of Australians over 16 years of age, creating the first nationally representative estimates of child maltreatment including physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, neglect and family violence. The study estimates that 62% of Australians experienced at least one type of child maltreatment indicating widespread and long-running impacts of trauma for people, families and communities (29). The study also illustrated the gendered nature of this violence, finding that girls experience higher rates of sexual abuse than boys (37% versus 19%) and emotional abuse (36% versus 25%) — with these forms of violence, together with multi-type child maltreatment, being most strongly associated with adverse outcomes (29). These findings highlight why preventing abuse and neglect towards children and creating recovery and healing pathways for them within domestic, family and sexual violence systems are key to preventing future pathways into perpetration and victimisation.

EXPOSURE TO CHILDHOOD VIOLENCE AND FUTURE OFFENDING

Research to better identify and understand sexual offending was released during the reporting period. An ANROWS study examined the relationship between young men's perpetration of sexual harm and violence and their experience of domestic and family violence as children (173). Jesuit Social Services, in partnership with the University of New South Wales, conducted a study on sexual offending against children among Australian men, which reported on the prevalence of sexual offending, risk behaviours and attitudes, and correlations between offending behaviours and perpetrator characteristics and experiences (174).

WHERE THERE ARE CHALLENGES

While important progress has been made, report participants highlighted the need to further strengthen evaluation, to better measure impact and outcomes, address data gaps, strengthen data collection systems and capacity, and build monitoring and evaluation capability.

We're not investing properly in the monitoring and evaluation to be able to tell a story of impact. That would be my key message — data costs money, and we need to invest in the data to build the evidence to help us figure out what does and doesn't work — Anonymous report participant

EVALUATION FOCUSES ON ACTIVITIES RATHER THAN OUTCOMES

Robust evaluative evidence is essential for the Victorian Government and prevention system to show collective impact over time and safeguard the investment, political leadership and community support required to maintain progress. However, evaluations of prevention initiatives often focus on the activities delivered and the outputs of these activities, such as the number of participants, rather than whether the project achieved the outcomes it was designed to deliver.

This can be due to reporting requirements, resourcing and capability constraints, a lack of time in project timeframes, lack of available population-level outcome measures and service usage data, and the inherent complexity of measuring outcomes in prevention, which is, by its nature, long-term generational work. More outcome evaluations are needed to provide evidence for changes in knowledge, attitudes, efficacies and behaviours. Evaluations should also consider short-, medium- and long-term outcomes, and take a cumulative approach when assessing. More flexible and appropriate approaches to reporting will also lead to better data and evidence of outcomes.

Report participants also highlighted a paucity of evaluative evidence illustrating long-term impact.

We need to increasingly look at how we measure the longitudinal outcomes of our prevention work, so we can better understand its lasting impact — particularly for young people. For example, understanding the impact five years after they have participated in a prevention program. — Jo Pride, Family Safety Victoria[xxxi]

LACK OF TRANSPARENCY IN DATA SHARING

Report participants also raised the importance of publishing or sharing major evaluation reports, for example, those pertaining to government-funded prevention programs, to support collective understanding of what is working and how prevention programs and practices could be improved. While they acknowledged the potential sensitivities of sharing evaluation reports, they emphasised the need to implement ways of sharing evaluation findings to support continuous learning and improvement of prevention practices and approaches.

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xxxi Note the Women's Safety Package released in May 2024 included additional resourcing for the Department of Education to undertake further evaluation of Victoria's Respectful Relationships initiative, which is now underway. It is understood that this evaluation will include a longitudinal component.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ACTION

MEASURING IMPACT AND OUTCOMES THROUGH CONTINUING TO BUILD A STATEWIDE MEL SYSTEM

Despite *Strong Foundations* specifying impact measurement as a priority for the next stage of reforms, it was viewed by report participants as a gap. Report participants acknowledged the work Family Safety Victoria had done to progress the prevention domain of the *Family Violence Outcomes Framework* and highlighted where more work is needed to connect it to prevention work on the ground, and to strengthen consensus and buy-in from prevention-focused organisations and sectors on appropriate indicators and measures to support its implementation. Some participants also emphasised the importance of ensuring the framework is directly linked to prevention efforts, to ensure accountability for investment in programs and initiatives.

> *We need better outcomes measurement that's directly linked to the primary prevention effort … It's like, well, this takes generations, but that's not always the case … I think it's more about increasing the levels of accountability with clear links to reducing men's violence including through a better outcomes framework. — Matt Tyler, Jesuit Social Services*

To complement the prevention domain of the *Family Violence Outcomes Framework* and provide greater visibility of prevention progress, Respect Victoria has been building a statewide monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) system designed to encompass government funded and non-funded activity across Victoria. Together with the Statewide Theory of Change (see page 68-69) and the Monitoring and Evaluation Advisory Group, Respect Victoria has developed an impact framework to enable effective measurement of short-, medium- and long-term indicators of collective, statewide progress. However, Respect Victoria requires sustained funding to implement it across the state, including to set up the required infrastructure to support data collection and reporting against that framework, and to generate valuable prevention evidence. Organisations in the prevention system will also require resources and support to align with and report against this framework.

STRENGTHEN DATA COLLECTION SYSTEMS AND CAPACITY

Report participants highlighted a lack of systems and processes to support effective data collection, storage and analysis, an issue that can limit effective monitoring, evaluation and reporting efforts. In some cases, organisations are collecting good data but have limited time and capacity to analyse and use it to inform their work. This is also an issue across government departments where data is being routinely collected but is not always applied to inform decision-making.

To improve monitoring and evaluation of prevention programs and activities and demonstrate the impact of prevention work, organisations need to be funded and supported to develop their data collection systems as part of a broader strategy to build a statewide MEL system.

Report participants reflected that the more government grant programs are linked to a whole-of-program theory of change and/or logic model, the better the opportunity for them to link to shared outcomes and impact. This provides government and service providers with a clear picture of the link between activities, outcomes and where gaps lie. Currently, there is a deficit in data linking specific initiatives to changes in behaviours, which has made it difficult to demonstrate the impact of primary prevention on longer-term outcomes, including incidences of violence and harm.

BUILD MONITORING AND EVALUATION CAPABILITY

In parallel to continuing to develop a comprehensive MEL system, there is a need to further build the capability of prevention practitioners to monitor and evaluate their work. This would ensure more consistent evaluation approaches are used across programs and organisations to continue to build a more cohesive picture of prevention impact.

This work would include sharing evaluation and practice evidence across programs and organisations to support continuous learning and improvement, including sharing what has not worked. This capability building could be a stronger focus in statewide workforce development activities as well as communities of practice for specific initiatives.

ADDRESSING RESEARCH GAPS AND DATA ON WHAT WORKS

There has been growing recognition of the need to improve data collection and dissemination on the use of violence, with many report participants highlighting the need for data on areas such as pathways into and out of perpetration, perpetration dynamics, drivers and risk factors.

The Victorian Parliament held an inquiry in 2024 into capturing data on people who use family violence in Victoria (175). The Parliamentary Committee's final report provides an extensive account of the current gaps in data on people who use violence, and it outlines opportunities to improve data collection systems and processes (176). In particular, it recommended national and statewide surveys, as called for by Respect Victoria, Our Watch, No to Violence and survivor advocates and researchers, including Lula Dembele and Michael Flood (176-178). Such surveys would provide deeper insights into the full scope of perpetration, including trends, risk factors, effectiveness of interventions, and opportunities for targeted prevention.

Report participants highlighted the need for better data and research on the experiences and needs of specific communities and population groups, particularly children and young people, LGBTIQA+ communities (particularly trans and gender diverse people), older people, and women from migrant and refugee backgrounds. For instance, national reporting (such as the *Australian Bureau of Statistics' Personal Safety Survey*) has historically not captured information on sexual orientation, gender identity or intersex status, leading to under-reporting and invisibility of violence against LGBTIQA+ communities (179, 180). There is a need for more inclusive data collection processes and data that is disaggregated by demographics when evaluating prevention projects, to ensure the experiences

of diverse and marginalised communities are captured and can inform tailored prevention practices and approaches.

> *It's so hard to do this work within a data deficit for LGBTIQA+ communities. It's really a big challenge when you have services who haven't been collecting the data and still aren't collecting the data. — Joe Ball, the Victorian Commissioner for LGBTIQA+ Communities*

Report participants also noted the need to expand research into online misogyny and other forms of discrimination, and to address forms of violence perpetrated using rapidly evolving technologies. This should be done in collaboration with organisations and sectors already undertaking this work to meet the shared goals of gendered violence prevention and national security.

EMBED INDIGENOUS DATA SOVEREIGNTY AND BUILD THE EVIDENCE-BASE FOR ABORIGINAL-LED PREVENTION

Despite anecdotal evidence of promising practice, research highlights there is little evaluative data demonstrating the impact and efficacy of Aboriginal-led prevention in Victoria. Concerted efforts are needed to build the evidence base for Aboriginal-led prevention, and this must be supported by funded and Aboriginal-led evaluations, accessible data management systems, Aboriginal research positions and capacity and capability building in data analysis. Embedding Indigenous Data Sovereignty is also critical to addressing the evidence gap, by ensuring Aboriginal communities and ACCOs have access, ownership and control over data collected by and about them, and they can use it to validate, guide and strengthen Aboriginal-led prevention efforts. As discussed on page 38, embedding Indigenous Data Sovereignty is also a key priority in ensuring Victoria is Treaty ready.

RECOMMENDATIONS: BUILDING EVIDENCE AND DATA

RESPECT VICTORIA RECOMMENDS THAT THE VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT:

8. Strengthen prevention data quality and evaluation through:

- **a.** adequately resourcing the evaluation of short-, medium- and long-term outcomes of government-funded initiatives to increase evidence on the effectiveness of current approaches and their impacts
- **b.** increasing the opportunities for sharing evaluative evidence, including through publishing government-funded evaluations wherever possible
- **c.** continuing to develop, refine, disseminate and implement evaluation frameworks, standards and tools to support consistent evaluation practice for initiatives related to the prevention of family violence, violence against women and gendered violence
- **d.** strengthening data collection capability, data linkage and use of existing evaluative data for prevention activity
- **e.** embedding Indigenous Data Sovereignty principles into data development and evidence building
- **f.** supporting sector capability and capacity to complete outcome evaluations and undertake effective monitoring.

9. Continue to work in partnership with organisations undertaking prevention work, to harness, build and disseminate research and practice evidence about:

- **a.** perpetration of family violence, violence against women and gendered violence in Victoria
- **b.** effective intersectional and community-led approaches to address the many drivers of family violence, violence against women and gendered violence against marginalised communities
- **c.** evolving approaches to prevent family violence, violence against women and gendered violence across digital platforms, tools and communities, including strategies to safeguard against the gendered harms of social media algorithms, generative artificial intelligence and gendered dis/misinformation online
- **d.** newly prevalent forms of violence, including technology-facilitated abuse
- **e.** what works to drive enduring behavioural, attitudinal and social norms change at scale.

CHAPTER 4

RECOGNISING AND ENABLING COMMUNITY-LED AND SPECIALIST PREVENTION WORK

This section aligns with the following domains of the Theory of Change:

- **1.5** Quality programs
- **1.6** Partnerships and collaborations
- **1.7** Programs are inclusive

Community-led organisations are an integral part of the prevention landscape. They not only lead and deliver prevention programs and activities tailored by and for specific communities, they also have a key role in driving policy and systems change, practice development, and building the capability of mainstream prevention organisations and practitioners to embed safe, inclusive and intersectional prevention practices (11, 181).

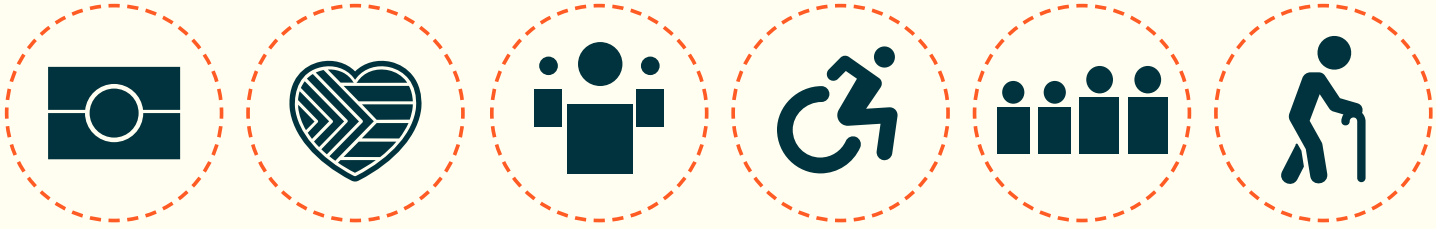
Community-led organisations also have well-established and trusting relationships with the communities they serve. This means they are ideally placed to effectively engage their communities to design and deliver prevention programs and activities that are appropriate, relevant and impactful. In the context of this report, community-led organisations are those led by and for specific groups or communities, including those outlined in Figure 15.

WHERE PROGRESS HAS BEEN MADE

GOVERNMENT SUPPORT FOR COMMUNITY-LED WORK

The Victorian Government had a more explicit focus on community-led prevention work over this reporting period, funding several community-led programs and initiatives including the Supporting Multicultural and Faith Communities to Prevent Family Violence Program, the LGBTIQ Family Violence Prevention Project, the Gender and Disability Workforce Development Program and

FIGURE 15: SOME GROUPS OR COMMUNITIES THAT HAVE COMMUNITY-LED ORGANISATIONS DEDICATED TO THEM



First Nations People | LGBTIQA+ people | Culturally and racially marginalised people | People with disability | Children and young people | Older people

the 'Raising awareness of elder abuse in ethnic communities' project.

They also continued to support the Dhelk Dja Partnership Forum and its critical role driving the implementation of *Dhelk Dja: Safe Our Way — Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families*, and they funded several Aboriginal-led prevention projects through the Community Initiatives Fund.

OLDER PEOPLE

Since 2023, the Victorian Government funded Celebrate Ageing, a charity combating ageism and building respect for older people, to lead a community of practice for the eight elder abuse prevention networks. Members of the networks include local councils, community legal centres, aged care providers and many others. The project has built the capacity of network leads to deliver primary prevention action with larger scale and engagement, strengthen partnerships and improve outcome evaluation approaches.

The conclusion of the Commissioner for Senior Victorians role in May 2023 closed an important avenue for the voices and experiences of older Victorians to be heard and integrated across state government priorities, including violence prevention. The Senior Victorians Advisory Committee, including community and sector members advising the Minister for Ageing, was established in December 2024 and is a voice to the government on the lived experiences of older Victorians. The committee's workplan includes a focus on elder abuse, including prevention. Engagement with advocacy organisations supporting and advocating for older people — including the Council on the Ageing Victoria — offers an opportunity to better reflect their experiences in prevention work.

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

The Supporting Young People to Understand Affirmative Consent Program was funded from 2022 to 2025 by the Victorian Government as a response to the implementation of the new affirmative consent model in Victoria.
The program supported 12 projects to test and trial approaches to engaging with young people and their key influencers, to improve knowledge on affirmative consent. Projects applied a variety of youth co-designed approaches including workshops, peer-to-peer education models and the development of digital and multimedia resources. The program complemented the Respectful Relationships program delivered in Victorian schools, ensuring young people received consistent and reinforcing messages about affirmative consent and healthy relationships.

It has also been incredibly important and welcomed to see the advocacy of young people with lived experience of childhood violence and trauma become powerful advocates for the rights and needs of children and young people — for example, advocacy of young leaders such as Conor Pall in Victoria and Grace Tame, Chanel Contos, the Teach Us Consent organisation and many others nationally. During this reporting period, advocates representing children and young people have been part of state and national conversations to address violence, including as part of the Rapid Review of Prevention Approaches, within the Victim Survivors' Advisory Council and several national roundtables.

RECOGNITION OF DEEP EXPERTISE AND SECTOR LEADERSHIP

Report participants widely acknowledged the deep prevention expertise and capabilities of community-led organisations. They also emphasised the important leadership role community-led organisations play in guiding and driving more inclusive and responsive prevention policy and practice that recognises and addresses the drivers of violence against their communities.

PEOPLE WITH DISABILITY

The Gender and Disability Workforce Development Program was established in this reporting period, seeking to build capability in this sector on prevention of violence against women with disabilities. The program developed a suite of resources including some with a focus on deepening understanding of the intersection of race, gender and disability (182).

> *Organisations like ours, Women with Disabilities Victoria, Rainbow Health [Australia] — where you've got specific cohorts that are particularly vulnerable to gendered violence and also need a specialist approach to prevention … are really well positioned to provide that specialist approach. — Adele Murdolo, Multicultural Centre for Women's Health*

Women with Disabilities Victoria also partnered with both Respect Victoria and Our Watch in this period. Our Watch and Women with Disabilities Victoria developed new resources to support primary prevention organisations and professionals working with people with disabilities. Respect Victoria and Women with Disabilities Victoria worked together on a campaign — Agency, Access, Action — featured in a case study on page 120.

ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES

The Dhelk Dja Koori Caucus worked with the Victorian Government to review and refine the *Indigenous Family Violence Primary Prevention Framework* (first developed in 2012) to ensure it reflects Aboriginal ways of knowing, being and doing, and places Aboriginal leadership at the centre of long-term, systemic change. In addition, ACCOs continued their long history of developing and delivering culturally appropriate family violence prevention programs.

Importantly, Aboriginal-led prevention approaches are some of the best examples of integrated prevention in Victoria. There is significant opportunity for the broader prevention sector to learn from Aboriginal-led prevention through stronger partnerships and collaboration with ACCOs, the Dhelk Dja Koori Caucus and its Regional Action Groups.

CASE STUDY

KOORI WOMEN'S PLACE — DJIRRA

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Koori Women's Place (KWP) started as a pilot in 2018 in response to the Royal Commission into Family Violence, which recognised that ACCOs are best placed to lead the design and delivery of family violence prevention and response for community. Since opening its doors in Abbotsford in Melbourne, KWP has become a culturally safe and welcoming space where Aboriginal women can connect with each other, heal, and access support and referrals on their own terms. It is also an entry point into Djirra's other services including its family violence legal service; specialist family violence case management; early intervention and prevention workshops Sisters Day Out, Dilly Bag and Young Luv; and alcohol and other drugs support and counselling.

The KWP delivered 345 workshops to almost 2,200 participants in 2022–24 and continued to evolve to meet Aboriginal women's priorities and needs.

There is extensive evidence that culture is a key protective factor in effective family violence programming and prevention efforts: that it can restore strength, dignity and self-determination for Aboriginal women and communities (19, 71). The team at KWP focus on developing trusted relationships, offering the right support in the right way, through relationships with Aboriginal women and connection to culture.

INSIGHTS

At KWP, primary prevention is a holistic and ongoing process that runs parallel to early intervention, response and healing, woven through every interaction, workshop and community gathering. KWP does not always fit within narrow Western definitions of primary prevention, which do not adequately account for the ongoing impacts of colonisation, racism and intergenerational trauma.

In KWP, prevention can look like fostering connection to culture and community through workshops. Whether its painting, working with possum skins, weaving or jewellery making, the yarns around the table increase understanding of family violence and Aboriginal women's rights and worth. Importantly, KWP offers a space for healing, for Aboriginal women to make sense of their experiences of violence; to reconnect with culture, with other Aboriginal women and with themselves, so they can continue to support their kids, families and community. Many women speak of KWP as a place where they feel safe, valued and empowered to take the next steps in their journey.

KEY TAKEAWAY

The impact of KWP extends beyond immediate service provision. It fosters strong connections between Aboriginal women and networks of support; it validates culture and sharing of cultural knowledge and creates pathways for Aboriginal women to access necessary resources without fear of judgement. Their authentic and self-determined approach to supporting Aboriginal women requires flexible, long-term funding that is compatible with Aboriginal led outcomes, trust building and sustained engagement.

LGBTIQA+ COMMUNITIES

Throughout the reporting period, the LGBTIQA+ Family Violence Primary Prevention Project has made great strides in increasing recognition of and prioritising violence against LGBTIQA+ communities in primary prevention work. Numerous resources have been developed including the Pride in Prevention Evidence Guide, Messaging Guide, Partnership Guide and Evaluation Guide (9, 183-186). This nationally and internationally significant work emphasised and acknowledged the shared drivers of violence against both women and LGBTIQA+ communities, and the ways in which efforts to prevent both types of violence are — and must be — intrinsically linked.

Several strategic partnerships were established and strengthened during the reporting period, with the aim of progressing intersectional prevention practice inclusive of LGBTIQA+ people, deepening understanding of the shared and overlapping drivers and goals of preventing violence against women and LGBTIQA+ people and building genuine allyship across the sector. This includes Our Watch partnering with Rainbow Health Australia to develop a national framework to prevent violence against LGBTIQA+ people and communities, which builds on the evidence and good practice already established through Pride and Prevention.

Zoe Belle Gender Collective also partnered with Women's Health in the North to support capacity building within women's health agencies, and this important work is now being modelled across the sector (see the case study on page 178).

CASE STUDY

TRANS AND GENDER DIVERSE INCLUSIVE PRACTICE TRAINING AND CAPACITY BUILDING INITIATIVES — ZOE BELLE GENDER COLLECTIVE

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The Zoe Belle Gender Collective has been a leader in developing trans and gender diverse best practice across a wide range of services and organisations throughout Victoria since 2007. This is shared through its training sessions for professionals across government and the community sector on the needs and experiences of trans and gender diverse people.

All trainings and workshops are created and delivered by members of the trans and gender diverse community. The training sessions are presented to practitioners and other workforces across peak bodies and community organisations, and are tailored to suit organisational needs.

Over the reporting period, Zoe Belle Gender Collective held 132 training sessions and educational presentations reaching over 3,500 workers. Aims of the training sessions include developing:

- organisations' capacity to understand the drivers of violence against trans and gender diverse people
- practitioners' understanding of trans and gender diverse peoples' experiences of discrimination and violence
- practitioners' understanding of the shared drivers of violence against cisgender women and trans and gender diverse people

- organisational and individual practitioners' skills and capability to provide inclusive, respectful and welcoming services to the trans and gender diverse community
- organisations and practitioners to meet the unique needs of the trans and gender diverse community
- practitioners' knowledge of gender affirmation and trans and gender diverse healthcare pathways
- organisations' understanding of the legal frameworks protecting the human rights of trans and gender diverse people.

INSIGHTS

Zoe Belle Gender Collective has observed that mainstream organisations often have a very limited understanding of the significant backlash against trans and gender diverse people, and how it is driving increased experiences of discrimination, street-based harassment, intimate partner violence and family violence.

As prevention of violence organisations typically have significantly more resources than organisations led by trans and gender diverse people, training and empowering these organisations to include trans and gender diverse people in their work is highly effective and important. Mainstream organisations have greater reach than dedicated community organisations, and often the people perpetrating violence against trans and gender diverse people are not LGBTIQA+, so these mainstream organisations are well placed to change attitudes and make impact.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Many organisations working on the prevention of family violence and violence against women need support in developing their knowledge and practice to meaningfully include trans and gender diverse people in their frameworks, priorities and activities. However, when they have a better understanding of the extremely high levels of violence against trans and gender diverse people and its links to the same drivers of violence against cisgender women, their capacity and capability to include trans and gender diverse people in their work increases.

CULTURALLY AND RACIALLY MARGINALISED COMMUNITIES

Report participants from organisations that serve multicultural, refugee and migrant communities advised about the importance of their work in upskilling and supporting mainstream organisations. These organisations ensure that prevention work accurately reflects the diversity of the community. This work often happens through strategic partnerships, for example, between Multicultural Centre for Women's Health and Safe and Equal in the 'Connecting Communities: Improving our approach to community-led prevention' program (187). This initiative produced several different resources, as seen below.

CASE STUDY

ENGAGING MEN FROM MULTICULTURAL AND FAITH-BASED COMMUNITIES IN PRIMARY PREVENTION — MULTICULTURAL CENTRE FOR WOMEN'S HEALTH & SAFE AND EQUAL

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The *Engaging Men from Multicultural and Faith-Based Communities in Primary Prevention* resource was developed under the Connecting Communities program — a collaborative initiative between the Multicultural Centre for Women's Health and Safe and Equal. This partnership provides capacity building support to the 33 funded organisations in the Victorian Government's Supporting Multicultural and Faith Communities to Prevent Family Violence program. The program aims to strengthen funded organisations' community-led efforts to prevent gendered violence and family violence across Victoria.

The brief guide is designed to enhance the practice of engaging men and boys from multicultural and faith-based communities in the primary prevention of family violence. Recognising that violence prevention requires the participation of all community members, the resource provides practical strategies grounded in community insights and the broader evidence base. It seeks to dismantle gendered power structures and promote gender equality through inclusive, culturally responsive engagement.

The content was shaped by the experiences and reflections of the Connecting Communities

network –organisations that are recipients of the Supporting Multicultural and Faith Communities to Prevent Family Violence Grant and work directly with migrant and refugee communities in Victoria.

INSIGHTS

Key findings from the project were as follows:

1. **Community-led, intersectional approaches:** The guide emphasises that engaging men effectively begins with understanding the intersections of culture, race, gender and other social identities. Community-led models that reflect lived experiences and local leadership are key to success.
2. **Inclusive framing of violence:** Practitioners found that framing family violence as a global and human rights issue that affects everyone — and not as an issue tied to any one culture — reduced stigma and encouraged broader engagement.
3. **Elevating marginalised voices:** A critical strategy is to ensure that men's engagement efforts are led and informed by women, non-binary and gender-diverse leaders from their communities. This supports equity and avoids reinforcing existing hierarchies.
4. **Male role models and advocates:** The resource highlights the value of training men as community advocates who model healthy masculinities. These men work alongside women to promote respectful relationships and challenge harmful norms.
5. **Creative and values-based messaging:** Tailoring engagement through shared community values — such as respect, care and family wellbeing — proved effective. Initiatives such as cooking classes, sports events and discussion forums provided accessible entry points for men and boys.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Together, project partners have produced a concise, practice-informed tool to support the broader prevention workforce. It affirms that achieving safe, connected communities requires tailored approaches to meaningfully engage all members of our diverse community, including multicultural men, as part of the solution.

WHERE THERE ARE CHALLENGES

RESOURCING COMMUNITY-LED WORK

Report participants stated that despite the increasing recognition and support for community-led prevention work, the amount and structure of funding available creates resource burdens for community-led organisations, impacting their capacity to deliver community-oriented work. They noted that funding streams and grants are often insufficient, insecure and too short-term to sustain programs and activities for long enough to demonstrate their outcomes and impact.

Community-led organisations are often called on to support the development and implementation of government policy and sector-wide frameworks, but without additional funding to support their involvement and contribution. As such, their funding needs to reflect the resources required to support this strategic uplift across the entire sector.

SUPPORTING SYSTEM-WIDE CAPABILITY BUILDING

Community-led organisations play a critical role in workforce capability building across the system, including by delivering training and other professional development activities; developing practice frameworks, tools and resources; and contributing to a range of practitioner networks and communities of practice. Several community-led organisations in Victoria were funded to deliver workforce development programs or communities of practice over the reporting period, including Women with Disabilities Victoria, Rainbow Health Australia and the Multicultural Centre for Women's Health. However, there are opportunities to ensure this work is adequately resourced, so organisations are able meet significant levels of demand for the specialised training and support they provide.

THE COSTS OF PARTNERING

Participation in prevention networks and partnerships is important, yet community organisations are often not adequately remunerated for their participation. For small organisations, participation in this context reduces their capacity to deliver other services and programs. This is particularly challenging for community-led organisations that are asked to contribute to multiple partnerships and committees to deepen intersectional practice and ensure representation. This forces organisations to choose between representing their community but reducing resources or maintaining their resources for community-oriented work but not being represented in important collaborative spaces.

> *When you are working with marginalised communities that are already really stretched, you need to make time and resources available for that. — Julie Kun, Women with Disabilities Victoria*

Victorian prevention grant opportunities encourage partnership because of the benefits to practice, but participants in this review noted that funding is often not reflective of the contribution community-led organisations make. Funding models and prescriptive grant criteria can limit the ability of community-led organisations to apply, given their work often involves self-determined approaches that are more effective and/or

culturally safe yet do not neatly match mainstream criteria — for example, programs that integrate primary prevention, early intervention, response and recovery approaches.

> *How are we all ensuring that no communities are left behind in our response to gendered violence? I think we need more peer-led community-based programs representing a diverse range of communities, including First Nations trans women and trans women of colour. — Starlady, Zoe Belle Gender Collective*

In the current social and political context of increased homophobia, biphobia, transphobia and transmisogyny, it is particularly crucial that LGBTIQA+ community-led organisations such as Rainbow Health Australia and Zoe Belle Gender Collective are supported to actively participate in existing partnerships across government and prevention-focused organisations to grow practice that is inclusive of and responsive to LGBTIQA+ and transgender people, in particular.

MEANINGFUL AND EQUITABLE ENGAGEMENT

Report participants reflected that prevention work being delivered by community-led organisations can sometimes be rendered invisible. This can happen through a lack of recognition for work that does not align with dominant frameworks and evidence-based models of prevention, tokenistic and/or extractive engagement, or unequal power dynamics in partnership work.

> *There's willingness .. [but we need] that proactive approach from broad major organisations to recognise the role of community organisations and be willing to work with them, and build their [own] capacity to actually have an equitable partnership — Vivienne Nguyen AM, Victorian Multicultural Commission*

Recognising and enabling community-led prevention work should be prioritised as an integral part of prevention system strengthening work, including in policy development, practice leadership, evidence-building, workforce development and capability building of the sector more broadly. This requires adequate funding for strategic partnerships and collaboration between peak bodies, specialist prevention organisations, community-led organisations, and grassroots or peer-led organisations. It also requires consistent recognition that prevention is not truly whole-of-population unless it meaningfully acknowledges and engages with the diversity within Victorian communities and their distinct experiences.

While organisational engagement is important, the voices of individuals themselves are essential to create representative prevention work. For example, while there are organisations that represent the interests of children and young people (including the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare and the Commission for Children and Young People) and groups which include the voices of young people (such as the Victim Survivors' Advisory Council and Berry Street's Y-Change), opportunities to directly include and promote the unique voices and perspectives of children and young people within prevention policy, design and delivery can be strengthened.

ABORIGINAL-LED PREVENTION

The Dhelk Dja Koori Caucus and ACCOs consulted as part of this report highlighted the urgent need for greater government accountability and investment in Aboriginal-led prevention.

> *Lapsing and insecure funding continues to undermine Aboriginal-led prevention initiatives. Without long-term investment, successful projects are left vulnerable, staff and community trust are lost, and momentum for change is stalled. Funding cycles need to align with the long-term vision for prevention — Dhelk Dja Koori Caucus*

They noted the importance of government upholding the principle of Aboriginal self-determination and supporting ACCOs to lead and determine priorities and approaches based on their communities' needs (17). This includes providing secure, long-term funding to enable ACCOs to deliver prevention work in flexible, culturally safe and impactful ways.

A number of report participants called for the government to recognise the holistic and integrated approach of Aboriginal-led prevention, and the importance of initiatives that address the intersection of gender inequality, race and colonisation as drivers of violence against Aboriginal people. Commitment to implementing the forthcoming refreshed *Aboriginal Family Violence Primary Prevention Framework*, including through Dhelk Dja Regional Action Plans, would significantly support these steps. Dhelk Dja Koori Caucus also called for formal agreements between the prevention sector and the caucus to support engagement with Aboriginal community to design, deliver and evaluate prevention activities.

The release of the Yoorrook Justice Commission's recommendations related to family violence also set out a clear agenda for action, and mirrored feedback from report participants. The commission recommended the establishment of a First Peoples prevention of family violence peak body and greater investment in primary prevention and early intervention that addresses the intersection of racism and family violence. The commission also recommended that the Victorian Government provide sustainable, long-term funding to ACCOs to expand their specialist family violence services and establish First Peoples Women's Centres for First Peoples women affected by family violence (188). (See pages 38-39 for further information about Aboriginal-led prevention and the Yoorrook Justice Commission, and page 149 for a case study on Djirra's Koori Women's Place.)

CASE STUDY

DEADLY LOVIN' — VICTORIAN ABORIGINAL CHILD AND COMMUNITY AGENCY

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The Victorian Aboriginal Child and Community Agency's (VACCA's) Deadly Lovin' program was designed and developed as a healthy respectful relationships training package for professionals working with Aboriginal young people aged 12–17 years. Developed between 2021–23, Deadly Lovin' is delivered as a train-the-trainer package to equip youth and family practitioners with the tools, resources and confidence to facilitate yarns and workshops about 'deadly' relationships with young mob (189).

The program aims to reduce the overrepresentation of Aboriginal communities in the cycle of family violence by helping young people understand consent, healthy boundaries and what respectful relationships look like.

Through culturally safe activities and advice, the program meets young people where they are and draws upon cultural strengths to build a sense of pride and empowerment. This often takes place in peer learning environments such as camps, therapeutic groupwork or classroom settings, to support open learning, promote insight sharing and reinforce program content.

The program has received multiple short-term funding cycles, at various times supported by state, philanthropic and now federal funding, to ensure that the program has adequate resourcing to run.

INSIGHTS

Many of the young people supported at VACCA are in out-of-home care, meaning they are at increased risk of experiencing family violence as they grow into their adult years. Compounding this is the high correlation between being in out-of-home care and chronic absenteeism within schools. This means that many young people connected to VACCA don't receive the same information about healthy respectful relationships as their peers who live at home and regularly attend school.

Staff trained in the Deadly Lovin' program have shared stories about their experiences delivering the package to the young people they support. These stories include supporting young people to navigate unhealthy intimate partner relationships and find pathways to safety, and supporting young people who have disclosed historical abuse to access support. These are tangible positive impacts for young people who are facing real problems navigating relationships while having limited access to prevention initiatives.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Deadly Lovin' demonstrates why it is critical to embed prevention programs within ACCOs, which are connected to and trusted by the young people who need this information the most.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ACTION

INVESTMENT IN ABORIGINAL-LED PREVENTION

Long-term investment in First Nations–led prevention is critical to self-determination and effective action. ACCOs bring deep expertise and cultural safety to this work, yet they have received unpredictable and short-term funding for many years. ACCOs working in this space must be well resourced to lead prevention in their communities, and to participate in governance and leadership across the sector.

INVESTMENT IN COMMUNITY-LED ORGANISATIONS AS CRITICAL PREVENTION INFRASTRUCTURE

Ongoing strengthening of the prevention system will require that specialist, community-led organisations are adequately and sustainably funded. This will support their critical leadership role driving policy and systems change, building the capability of prevention practitioners to embed safe and inclusive practices and content for marginalised communities, and addressing the shared and unique drivers of violence against marginalised communities. At a minimum, this should include funding to support their participation in government and sector partnership groups and networks, and the delivery of workforce development activities.

MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT OF MARGINALISED COMMUNITIES

Prevention efforts must be inclusive, representative and community-led to prevent family violence, violence against women and gendered violence effectively and equitably. The meaningful engagement of marginalised and under-represented groups strengthens the relevance, safety and impact of prevention initiatives and reduces the likelihood of unintended negative consequences. It is also crucial for accelerating progress towards a violence-free society, given marginalised groups often experience higher rates of violence. To make this possible, community engagement must be adequately resourced and remunerated to ensure it is ethical, sustainable and not extractive. It is also important to ensure equity in partnerships between larger organisations with higher levels of funding and smaller community-led organisations.

Uncertain and fixed-term funding results in reduced capacity of marginalised communities and community-led organisations to engage with the prevention sector, and the cessation of promising programs. Well-resourced organisations can progress prevention with their communities and build capacity in the wider sector to use inclusive practice.

RECOMMENDATIONS: RECOGNISING AND ENABLING COMMUNITY-LED AND SPECIALIST PREVENTION WORK

RESPECT VICTORIA RECOMMENDS THAT THE VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT:[xxxii]

10. Require, remunerate and resource inclusion of the perspectives and priorities of marginalised communities and under-represented voices in relevant government-funded prevention policy and program design. This includes, but is not limited to the following communities and the specialist organisations that represent them:

a. children and young people

b. LGBTIQA+ communities, in particular trans and gender diverse people

c. culturally and racially marginalised people

d. people with disability

e. First Nations communities

f. older Victorians.

11. Guarantee long-term funding for First Nations led prevention work to address disproportionate rates of family violence and support self-determined prevention activity. This should include resourcing to enable specialist Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to realise Indigenous Data Sovereignty and participate in sector governance and leadership.

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xxxii See also recommendations 2(f) and 6(c), which address issues canvassed in this section.

CHAPTER 4

COMMUNITY AWARENESS, UNDERSTANDING AND BEHAVIOUR CHANGE

This section aligns with the following domains of the Theory of Change:

- **2.4** Community engagement with and exposure to prevention
- **2.5** Community demands action on prevention
- **3.4** Community understanding of gender-based violence

Community education and engagement are critical to whole-of-population approaches to preventing family violence, gendered violence and violence against women. These strategies aim to reach a wide audience to increase understanding of different forms of violence, de-stigmatise the issues, and challenge the attitudes, behaviours and social norms that drive violence (190).

Social change work, such as campaigns, can build community literacy, prompt individual action and reflection, and support community mobilisation to prevent and address family and gendered violence. When designed to support mutually reinforcing and evidence-based prevention and early intervention programs, campaigns can be a powerful facilitator of social change (96, 191).

WHERE PROGRESS HAS BEEN MADE

UNDERSTANDING OF AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) conducts the National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey (NCAS) every four years. It is a periodic and representative survey of the Australian population's understanding of and attitudes towards violence against women and gender inequality. Each main NCAS scale corresponds to one of the four *Change the story* drivers of gendered violence, thereby acting as national and state proxies for progress against the national framework.

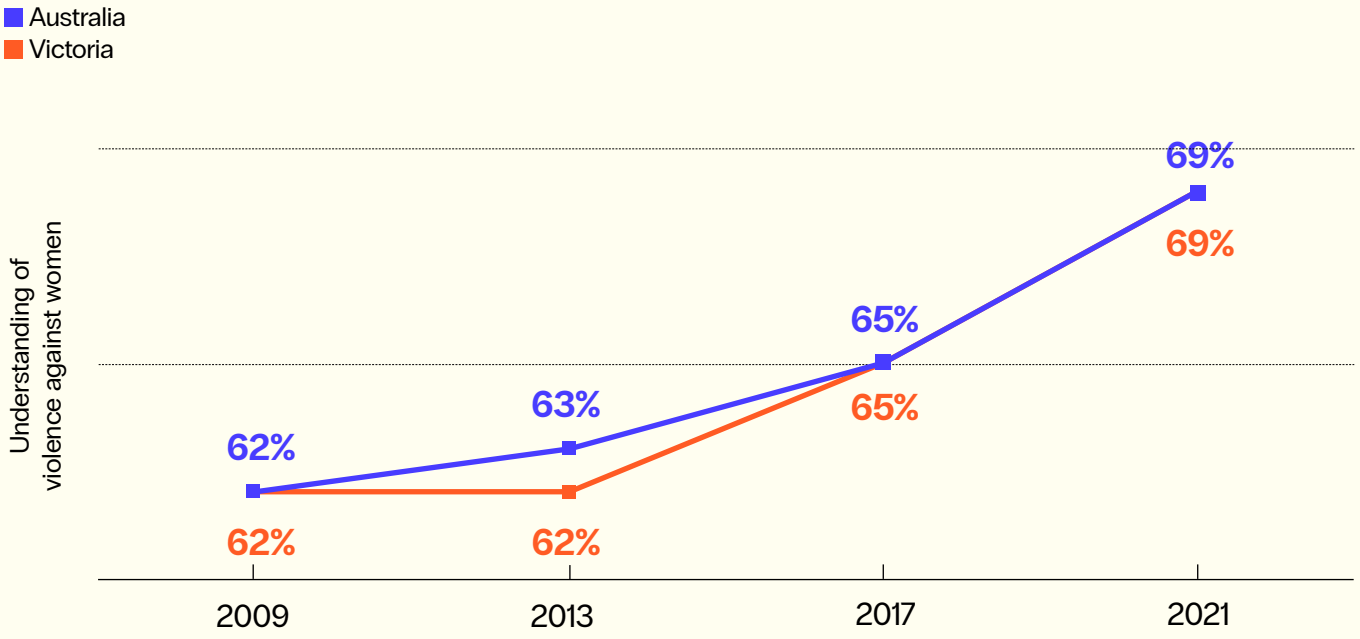
The 2021 findings were released in 2023, and Respect Victoria conducted secondary analysis of a boosted Victorian sample to allow for a more nuanced understanding of the state results (92, 136).

The analysis shows Victorians had a significantly higher understanding of violence against women in 2021 compared to previous years. That is, more Victorians can recognise what constitutes violence against women and domestic violence. Figure 16 shows that the mean understanding of violence against women score in Victoria has increased from 62 in 2009 to 69 in 2021.

However, concerningly, a substantial proportion of Victorian (39%) and Australian (41%) respondents thought domestic violence was perpetrated by men and women equally, contrary to Australian quantitative studies and police and court data that shows most perpetrators are men (192, 193). This indicates more work is needed to strengthen community understanding of the gendered nature and impacts of such violence.

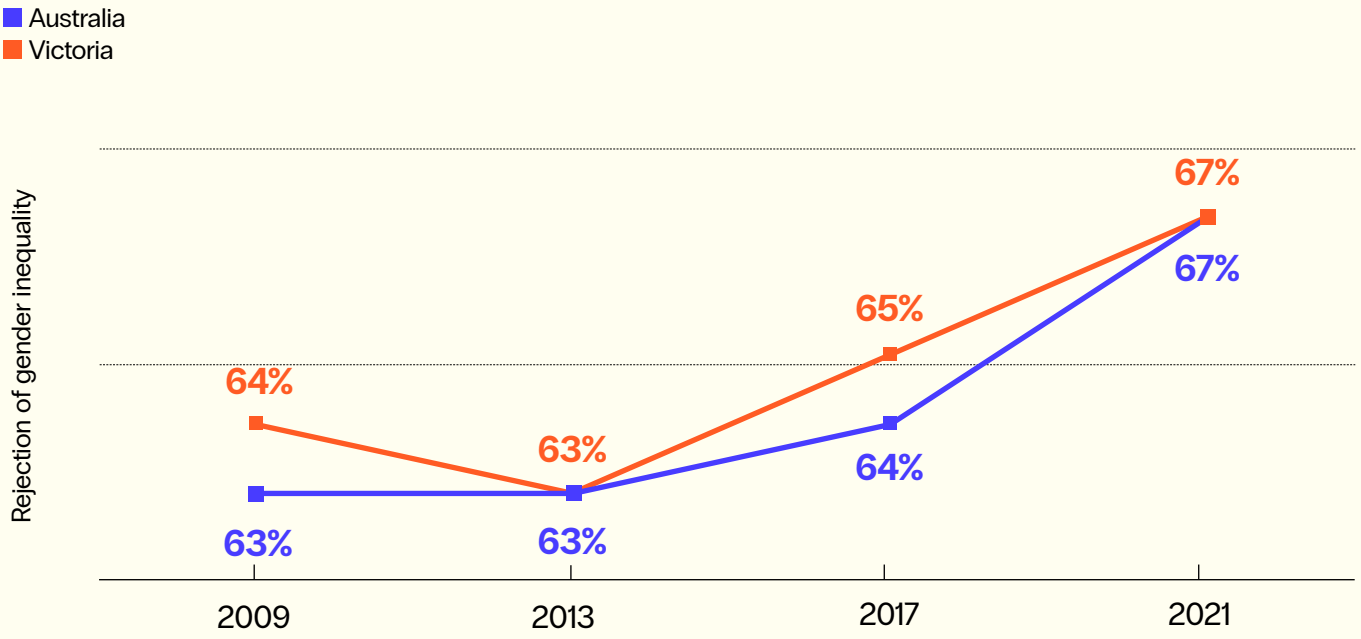
Victorian men are also less likely to recognise forms of domestic violence that do not involve physical abuse or property damage. They displayed a lower understanding of the violence faced by people in marginalised groups, such as

FIGURE 16: UNDERSTANDING OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN OVER TIME (NCAS)



Source: (92)

FIGURE 17: ATTITUDINAL REJECTION OF GENDER INEQUALITY OVER TIME (NCAS)



Source: (92)

transgender people and people with disabilities. In other words, they were less likely to recognise violence against these groups as wrong. These findings validate the increasing policy and programmatic focus on engaging men and boys in prevention efforts.

ATTITUDES TOWARDS GENDER INEQUALITY

There was also a significant increase in the number of people who reject gender inequality — in other words, recognise it is wrong and support the goals of a more gender equal society. Figure 17 shows that Victorians' mean attitudinal rejection of gender inequality score has increased from 64 in 2009 to 67 in 2021.

Attitudes to gender inequality, understanding of violence and attitudes towards violence are interconnected. Respect Victoria's secondary analysis validated existing understandings that denying gender inequality and upholding rigid gender roles have a strong relationship to violence-supportive attitudes.

ATTITUDES TOWARDS SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Both Victorian and Australian respondents showed a significant improvement in attitudes that reject sexual violence in 2021 compared to 2017 (meaning more Victorians and Australian recognised sexual violence was wrong). Despite this, Victorian men demonstrate higher agreement with attitudes that minimise, deny or shift blame in cases of sexual violence than Victorian women.

ANROWS reports on state- and national-level NCAS results that are averaged to produce scale scores on different dimensions. Respect Victoria's analysis of the boosted sample found that the story beneath may be one of positive shifts alongside increased backlash. In other words, as the broader population moves towards healthier, less violence-supporting and patriarchal attitudes, a minority of men may be becoming polarised and aligning more strongly with opposing attitudes that reject gender equality (136).

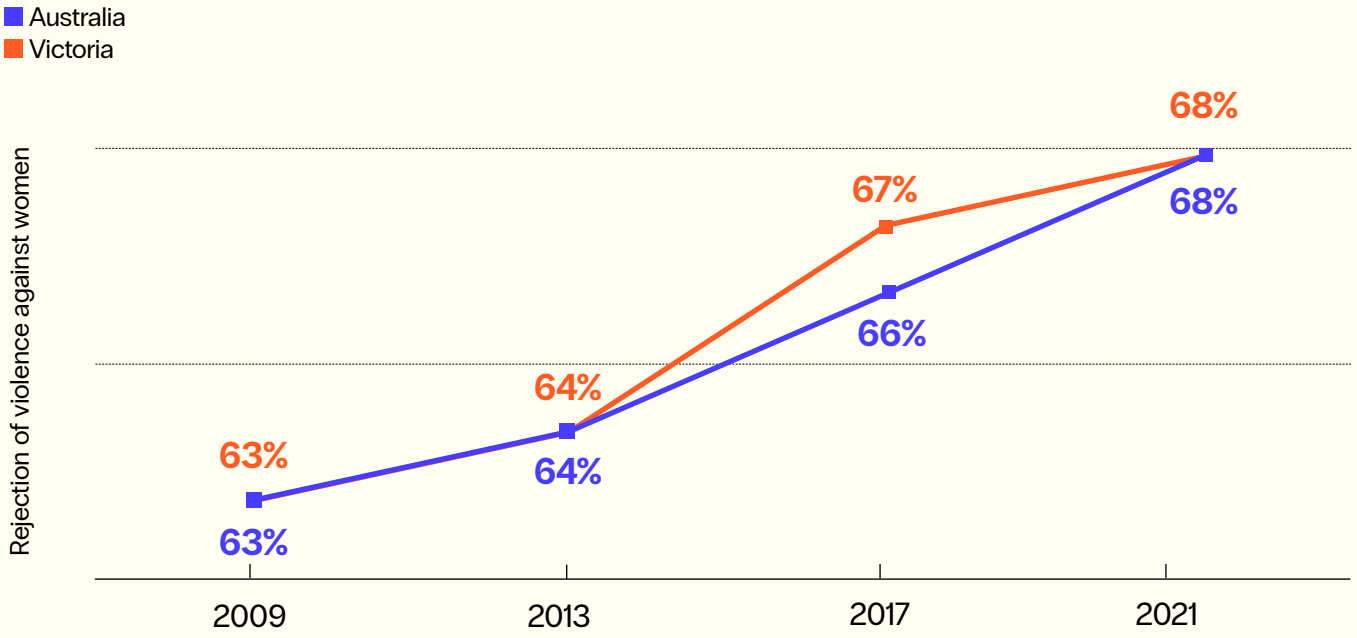
Sexual violence and the belief that sexual assault accusations are weaponised against men appear to be domains where this polarisation effect is occurring in Victoria — reinforcing the need for a targeted focus on preventing sexual violence as discussed at page 180.

ATTITUDES TOWARDS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Figure 18 shows there was no significant difference in the rejection (i.e. condemnation) of domestic violence between 2017, where the mean score was 67 and in 2021 68, but that it has changed since 2009 (92).

These NCAS findings indicate there is room to improve. Shifting entrenched community attitudes situated within a global sociopolitical context of intensified backlash and resistance is complex. In this context, it is commendable that prevention efforts have kept pace, with attitudes improving and/or remaining stable. Given a stable majority of Victorians (68%) reject violence against women (recognising it as unacceptable), it may be that a significant portion of the remaining 32% have more extreme or fringe views that will require more intense or tailored strategies to shift.

FIGURE 18: REJECTION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN OVER TIME (NCAS)



Source: (92)

COMMUNITY AWARENESS OF FAMILY VIOLENCE AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Report participants noted they had observed that public awareness and understanding of gendered violence, family violence and violence against women had increased over the reporting period, including the harms of tech-facilitated violence and abuse, and the role of tech-facilitated abuse in coercive control.

Conversations on social media indicate a growing community awareness of sexual consent, sexual assault and stealthing, and the harm that victim-blaming causes, particularly in relation to new affirmative consent and non-fatal strangulation laws (194).

In addition, several evaluations of prevention initiatives reported positive changes in awareness, knowledge and understanding of family and gendered violence and its drivers, as well as specific topics or issues (109, 195-197). Examples include:

- harmful impacts of sexism and stereotypes in advertising
- sexual consent and affirmative consent legislation
- gender equality in sport
- preventing child sexual abuse and promoting child safety.

INCREASED MEDIA COVERAGE

Media plays an important role in signalling, shaping and reinforcing social norms and attitudes about gendered violence (194, 198). Sensitive and accurate media coverage can build community awareness, catalyse community mobilisation and support systemic, attitudinal and cultural change (198, 199).

Media attention on family violence, and violence against women specifically, increased significantly over the reporting period. The monthly average of total posts and news reports increased from 27,500 to 33,500 from

2022 to 2023 (200). News coverage relating to prevention, including the impact of pornography and technology-based abuse, also increased during the reporting period (200). Increased media reporting on financial abuse and the role of technology in facilitating it have driven an increase in awareness and community advocacy on the issue, including calls for support services, reporting and policy, and law reform (194).

However, it is important to note there is distinct under-reporting of cases against First Nations women and Women of Colour in the media, and when cases are reported, reporting often condones the violence or racially stereotypes the victim (201). Research and practice knowledge have informed a better understanding of effective ways to discuss the experiences of marginalised communities, including trans and gender diverse people, and how they can be engaged better to support these conversations (202). This provides an important opportunity for the media to take a more nuanced, holistic and non-discriminatory approach in its reporting.

The shEqual initiative, led by Women's Health Victoria and funded by the Victorian Government, called on the advertising industry to harness the power of advertising to foster a more gender-equal and inclusive society. It played a critical role in driving cultural change across the advertising industry, including developing an evidence base on sexism in advertising, raising awareness and understanding of the problem of sexist advertising, and building a movement for change (203). However, it did not receive renewed funding in 2024 and has since been wound up.

COMMUNITY DEMAND FOR ACTION

Reports of marches and community activism indicate an increased community readiness and willingness to mobilise for change, particularly in the aftermath of violent attacks and murders of women.

> *I think where community conversation and public discourse goes now is from 'it's a tragedy', when a woman is murdered, to 'it's not acceptable'. We need to take action. And those extra steps, I think, are absolutely palpable. — Phillip Ripper, No to Violence*

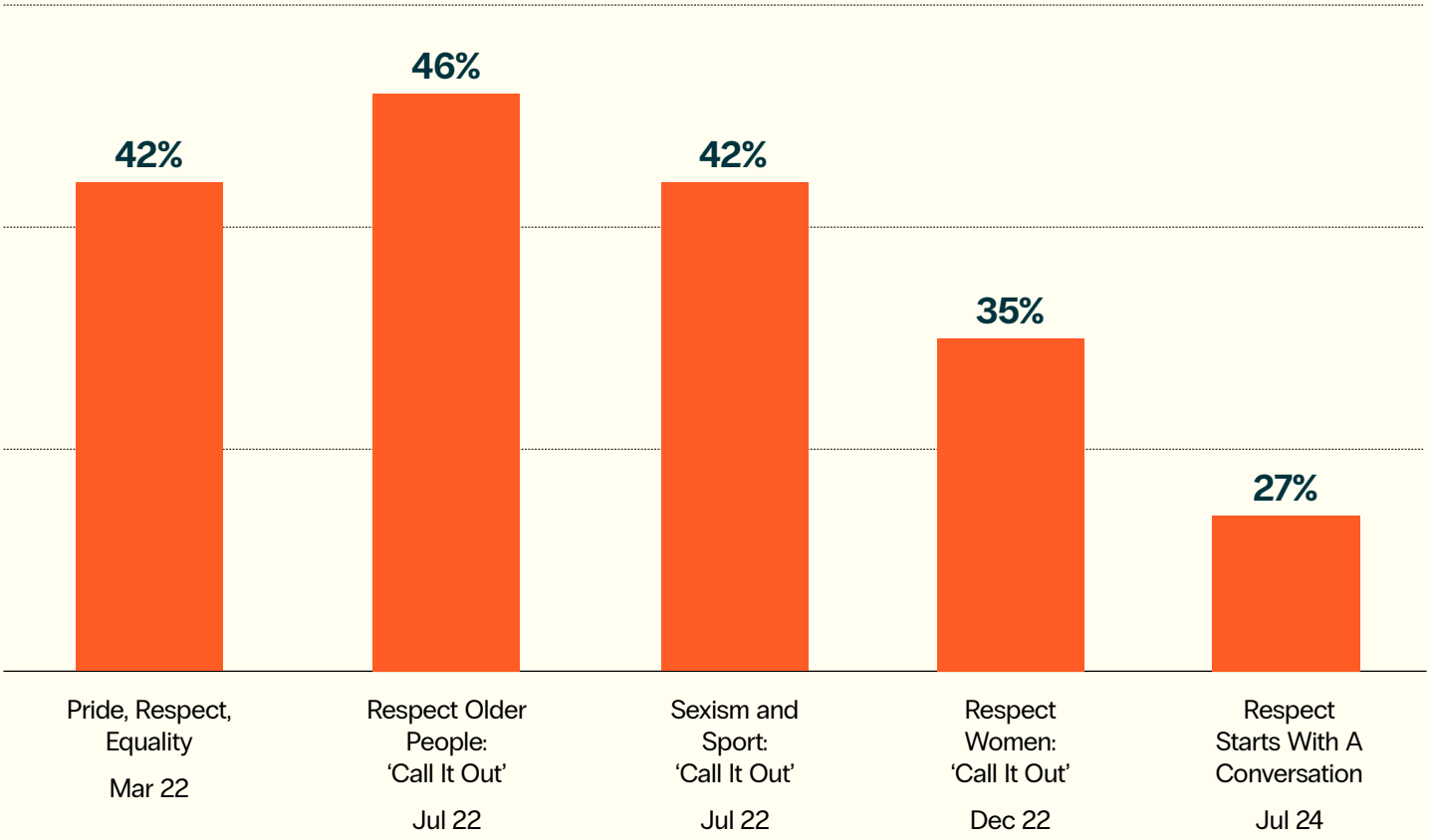
Report participants indicated that they see more people speaking up and calling out harmful attitudes and behaviours than ever before. Those working in schools and other education settings are seeing more young people intercepting problematic beliefs by calling out their friends for sexist and misogynistic comments and behaviours.

Conversations on social media about bystander action have increased, with a focus on people speaking up when they see or hear abusive behaviour (194). While it is viewed as everyone's responsibility to call out abusive behaviour, many conversations online emphasised the need for men to call out other men on sexist behaviour (194).

RESPECT VICTORIA SOCIAL CHANGE CAMPAIGNS

Social change campaigns using a variety of media have been a key feature supporting primary prevention programming in Victoria over the past three years. Respect Victoria has developed campaigns that engage with the Victorian community on various forms of family violence

FIGURE 19: PROPORTION OF VICTORIAN POPULATION REACHED BY RESPECT VICTORIA CAMPAIGNS [XXXIII]



xxxiii 'Reached' in this context refers to individual people aged 18+ years who have seen campaign material. While the cost per person reached remained reasonably stable across these campaigns, the total quantum of funding for each campaign varied, and this also impacted reach.
Source: (204)

and violence against women, as well as promoting the role of active bystanders in 'calling out' harmful attitudes and behaviours.

Respect Victoria delivered the following campaigns between 2022 and 2024:

- Respect Starts With A Conversation
- Respect Women: 'Call It Out'
- Respect Older People: 'Call It Out'
- Sexism and Sport: 'Call It Out'
- Pride, Respect, Equality
- Agency, Access and Action: Women with Disabilities Victoria x Respect Victoria.

Respect Victoria conducts regular evaluations to assess actions taken by individuals after viewing campaigns. These evaluations find clear and direct connection between the campaigns and positive community outcomes and conversations (204).

Evaluation findings suggest that when campaign messaging is connected and reinforced by other prevention activity in the community, it helps people make the link between what they see on social media and behaviours around them in their daily lives (204).

16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM

Respect Victoria supports the state's participation in the global 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence, a yearly grassroots campaign to end violence against women and girls. 16 Days of Activism commences with the Walk Against Family Violence in the Melbourne CBD, which had its highest attendance of 8,500 people in 2024.

The 2022, 2023 and 2024 16 Days of Activism campaigns saw funds distributed by Safe and Equal, in partnership with Respect Victoria, to local councils, women's health services, and community organisations and services. This resulted in near-statewide coverage. For example, in 2023, 75 out of 79 local councils applied for and received a grant to participate in activities for the 16 Days of Activism campaign, and in 2024, this increased to 75 local councils (205). Nearly all these funding recipients (95%) agreed that the campaign contributed to increased awareness and knowledge of the issues and/or changing attitudes to gender equality and preventing violence against women in the community (205). The evaluation also found organisations reporting less backlash and resistance (205).

Visibility of campaigns such as these in community settings has created opportunities for conversations about family violence that would not otherwise be happening (206).

> *And I think small things like that are just such amazing pockets of good practice that wouldn't exist without .. the 16 Days campaign grants. — Family violence youth advocate*

WHERE THERE ARE CHALLENGES

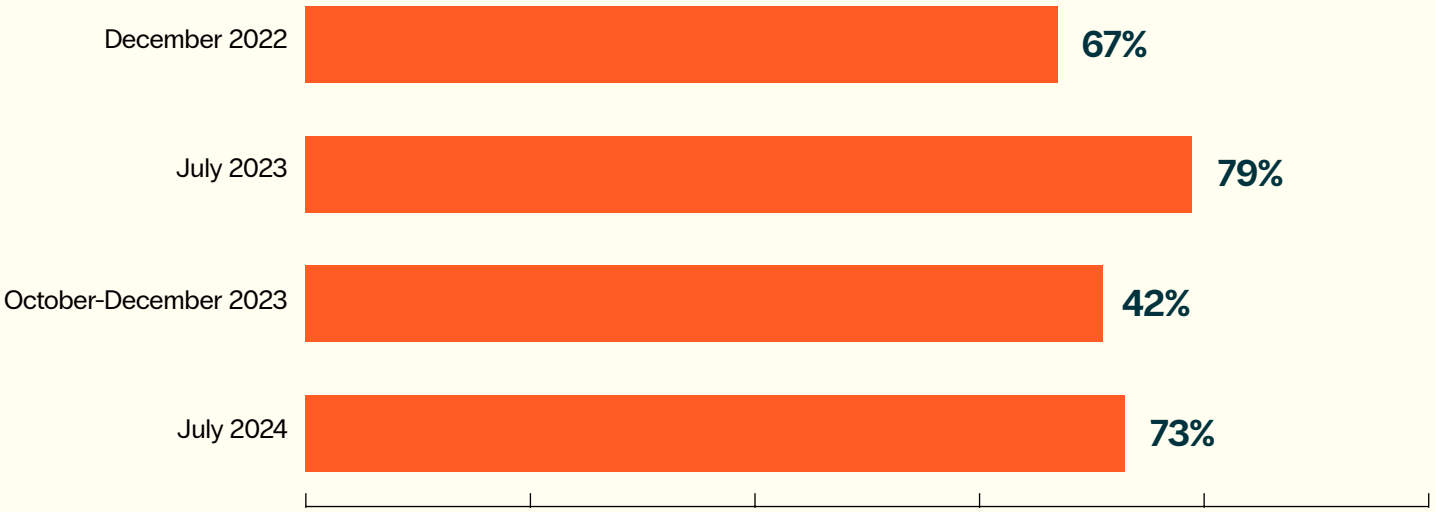
In the coming years, it will be critical to continue to support the design and delivery of social change campaigns that are anchored to evidence-based mutually reinforcing programs.

STRENGTHENING ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION WITH COMMUNITIES

A strong theme in this report's consultations was the need to improve approaches to engaging and communicating with various audiences and communities about prevention, not only to the public, but also to the people and organisations who have a role in delivering prevention activities. One area emphasised was sexual violence.

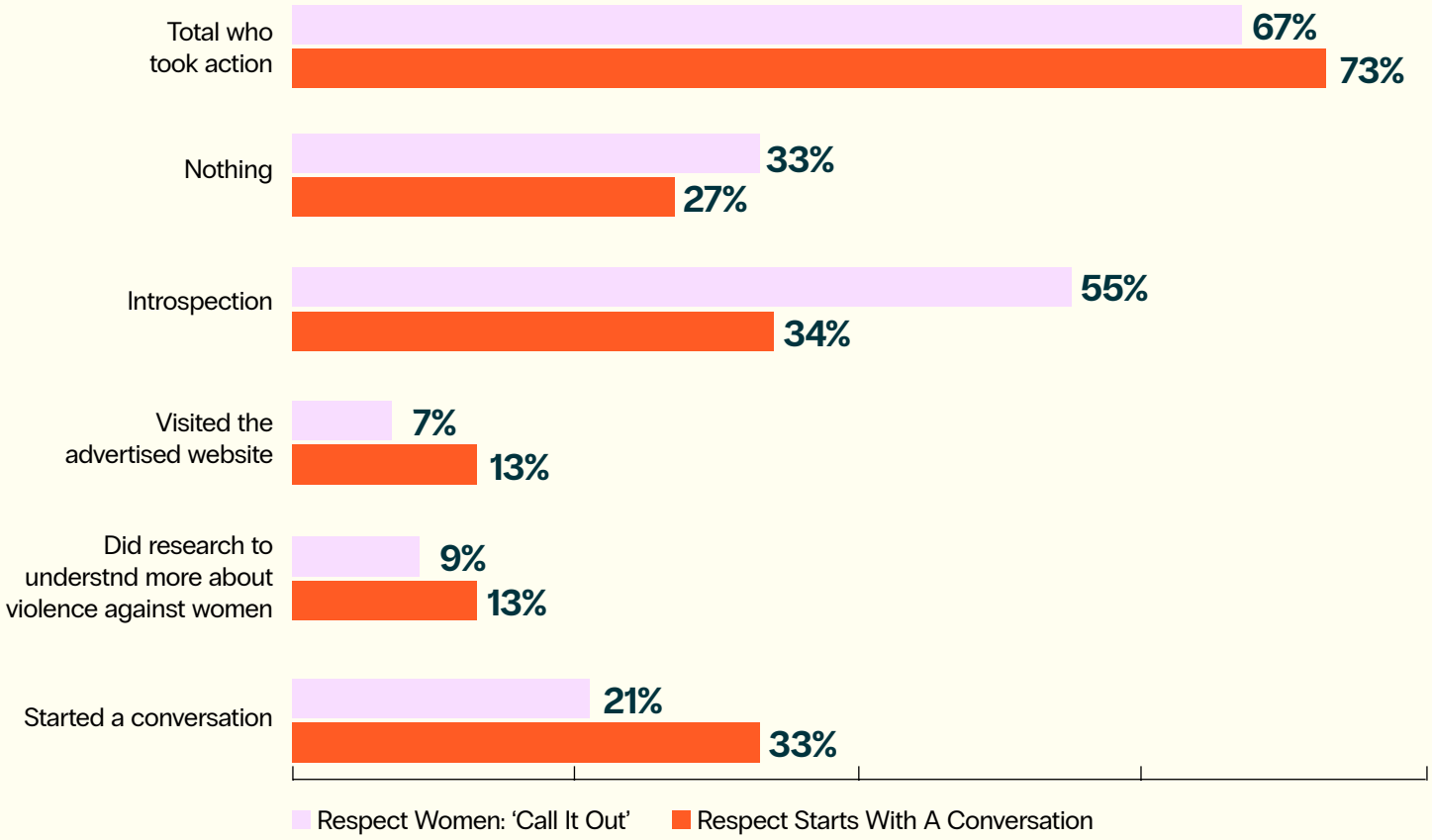
> *There's a lot of good stuff happening in the messaging and what we are doing, but I think it just needs to be a bit more constant and normalised in lots of different spaces, and at the same time, a bit more nuanced for people that are not getting it. — Jade Blakkarly, WIRE*

FIGURE 20: PERCENTAGE OF PEOPLE WHO SAW A RESPECT VICTORIA CAMPAIGN AND TOOK SOME FORM OF REFLECTIVE OR CONVERSATIONAL ACTION, BY CAMPAIGN PERIOD



Source: (204)

FIGURE 21: PERCENTAGE OF THOSE WHO SAW A RESPECT VICTORIA CAMPAIGN AND TOOK SOME FORM OF ACTION, BY TYPE OF ACTION AND CAMPAIGN



Source: (204)

Work in this area is already progressing, with values-based messaging being increasingly adopted in the sector, and several reports released over the reporting period highlighting ways to improve communication and messaging, including Safe and Equal's 2024 national conference PreventX: Messaging for a Movement.

Family Safety Victoria commissioned a series of research projects to inform more effective messaging and communication approaches to prevent family violence, with a focus on affirmative consent, engaging parents and carers in discussions about pornography, and engaging men and boys in conversations about masculinity and gender equality (207-209). The findings of this research provide new insights on effective communication strategies and approaches that will help evolve prevention messaging.

Report participants highlighted the need to explain prevention concepts using clear language and terminology that fosters a shared understanding of what drives violence and how to prevent it, particularly in the form of concise, accessible and practical resources for communities.

Report participants also emphasised the importance of tailored messaging that respects and attends to diverse communities' cultural ways of being and knowing, and that resonates with a broader audience.

> *How do we make sure that there are spaces for people from diverse communities to lead the work of messaging around prevention and primary prevention, and how do we ensure that communities own that messaging in order to make sure that it continues to reflect where communities are and what's going to get cut through? — Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commissioner Micaela Cronin*

Safe and Equal and the Multicultural Centre for Women's Health have developed Communicating for Connection, a resource which draws on the existing evidence base to outline how a values-based messaging approach can be applied with multicultural and faith-based communities to strengthen prevention messaging (210).

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ACTION

WORK WITH MEN AND BOYS

Working with and engaging men and boys in the prevention of family violence has increasingly been acknowledged as a priority by organisations working in prevention and in the *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children*. However, there is a need to more clearly define what this means in practice, as it relates to changing attitudes and behaviours, promoting healthier masculinities, and engaging men and boys to take action in prevention efforts (95, 211).

> *Our research with young men showed we are not communicating with boys and young men well around ideas of privilege and structural and patriarchal systems. — Carolyn Wilkes, eSafety*

Report participants consistently reported the importance of this work but acknowledged that, until recently, prevention approaches have faced resistance from men and boys, and that most

do not see gendered violence as an issue that impacts or concerns them. This is reflected in the latest NCAS and Man Box results (92, 94).

Report participants highlighted opportunities to strengthen work with men and boys, including:

- stronger collaboration and strategic partnerships between the prevention sector and organisations and practitioners doing early intervention and other direct work with men and boys
- working in settings where there are positive role models who can influence men and boys
- strengths-based messaging and approaches that engage men in conversations about gender norms, healthy masculinities and the role they can play in ending gendered violence.

> *We have to work with men to end the use of violence and disrupt pathways into violence, engage men who are using violence, provide pathways out of violence — Phillip Ripper, No to Violence*

Report participants raised concerns about the potential for programs and interventions targeting men and boys to cause more harm if they are not underpinned by principles of accountability and gender-transformative approaches. They emphasised the importance of these programs and interventions being designed and delivered in partnership with specialist prevention organisations, including women's health services and LGBTIQA+ organisations. This would ensure that programs adequately engage with gender-transformative approaches, challenging the causes of gender inequality, and are not collusive — for example, where programs may minimise, blame, justify or excuse men's use of violence and its associated impacts to create camaraderie with workshop participants (165).

Report participants referenced Respect Victoria's *Willing, capable and confident* report, noting its contribution to the current evidence base on ways to engage men and boys.

> *[A lot of my engagement] I structure around the* Willing, capable and confident *report from Respect Victoria. I use that as my north star really in everything. — Anonymous report participant*

The findings of the report are already informing prevention practices and approaches, including Respect Victoria's new campaign on men and masculinities (95). The What Kind of Man Do You Want to Be? campaign invites Victorian men to engage in preventing gendered violence by encouraging them to reflect on the social pressures that can harm them and those around them.

It is essential for work on masculinities to engage with intersectionality. Community-led organisations such as Rainbow Health Australia (which hosted a forum on Challenging homophobia and engaging men and boys in 2024 that examined the connections between homophobia, gendered violence and masculinity) and The Australian Muslim Women's Centre for Human Rights are leading the way in this work (212, 213).

CASE STUDY

VOICES FOR CHANGE — AUSTRALIAN MUSLIM WOMEN'S CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The Australian Muslim Women's Centre for Human Rights (AMWCHR) was funded under the Victorian Government Family Violence Prevention program in 2021 to deliver its Voices for Change project. The community program was delivered to 461 members of Victorian Muslim communities between 2022 and 2024.

Voices for Change sought to raise awareness and build capacity among Muslim communities in Victoria to prevent family violence.

The Voices for Change project had multiple components including:

- community programs
- community consultation
- research
- launch of a framework.

The initial stages of the project incorporated group-based primary prevention programs for Muslim women, young women, young men, girls and boys. These programs explored family violence, healthy relationships, parenting for equality, and the role of culture, religion and community on understandings of gender equality.

INSIGHTS

AMWCHR saw shifts on the ground because of their community program, and participants reflected an increased understanding of the different forms of violence against women. Participants also reported increased confidence to promote gender equality. This was associated with increased knowledge about the importance of speaking against family violence and how their advocacy can support other women at risk.

It was also widely recognised among participants that to achieve effective and sustained prevention of family violence, it is critical to engage men and boys — as parents, partners, community/religious leaders and individuals. Based on this community sentiment, AMWCHR undertook research to identify and outline the barriers inhibiting Muslim men's engagement in family violence prevention and identify the ways these can be overcome.

Findings from the research suggested there are structural, cultural and individual barriers that are preventing Muslim men and boys from engaging in formal and informal prevention initiatives to the degree that is required to achieve widespread change. Participants believed that men and boys should be provided with appropriate information, role models and social supports to grow their understanding of underlying drivers of family violence and become active allies and participants in promoting community values of equality, wellbeing and women's rights. At the same time, parents must be engaged in programs to build capacity around gender-equal parenting and address biases that may perpetuate gendered roles that favour boys, to effect generational shifts.

Based on findings from the research and community programs, AMWCHR launched the *Framework for Engaging Muslim Men in the Prevention of Family Violence* as the final stage of Voices for Change, for use by community workers and/or services considering engaging, or already engaging, Muslim men in family violence prevention work.

KEY TAKEAWAY

AMCWCHR identified that there are many elements of culture and faith that can be brought into tailored, strengths-based family violence prevention initiatives to maximise reach, resonance and impact for Muslim communities. The research and framework provide helpful examples of how organisations can incorporate these elements in practice.

Recent investment in programs and interventions targeting men and boys includes:

- $34.8 million from the Australian Government in an early intervention trial for adolescent boys who have experienced family and domestic violence, and may be using or at risk of using violence in their relationships
- investment from the Victorian Government in the expansion of the Jesuit Social Services healthier masculinities program Modelling Respect and Equality into more schools.

Given the scale of investment, there is a need to develop practice guidelines and standards to ensure quality design and delivery for all programs engaging men and boys (214).[xxxiv]

> *Particularly relevant to this work is the need for a stronger reflection and understanding of standards of evidence when commissioning evaluation and also as part of procurement. You can only talk about efficacy if there's actually documentation of practice. — Matt Tyler, Jesuit Social Services*

xxxiv Respect Victoria is responsible for developing prevention program standards under *Until every Victorian is safe: Third rolling action plan to end family and sexual violence 2025 to 2027*, which was released after the reporting period in September 2025.

INTENSIFIED FOCUS ON SHIFTING ATTITUDES TOWARDS SEXUAL VIOLENCE

With strong community opposition to violence against women generally, there is an opportunity to focus more intensively in the years ahead on transforming harmful attitudes towards sexual violence, which remain challenging to shift. This includes targeted and tailored programs addressing the unique drivers and reinforcing factors of sexual violence, which overlap with broader gendered drivers of violence but have some additional nuances and distinctions, including with respect to sexual violence towards LGBTIQA+ community members and children. As discussed on page 180, a statewide sexual violence strategy would be an important anchor to support coordinated, evidence-informed and impactful prevention practice in this space, as would a research focus on emerging trends and complexities concerning the role of pornography and the digital sphere in reinforcing harmful attitudes that normalise, excuse or indeed glorify sexual violence.

SOCIAL CHANGE CAMPAIGNS

Social change campaigns are a critical tool for shifting the attitudes, norms and behaviours that drive family and sexual violence. They include media and online campaigns, as well as grassroots behaviour change campaigns within communities. To be effective, they must be grounded in community engagement and research and support work across the social ecology; in other words, they must reinforce work across multiple settings and levels to be most effective. Campaigns that address sexual violence — including countering the influence of violent pornography and promoting healthy, respectful relationships — are also essential.

Respect Victoria's campaign evaluations have shown that people value both role modelling and articulation of how individuals can act to prevent violence. Continued investment in well-designed, responsive campaigns aligned with evidence-based prevention practice will strengthen public understanding of violence and its drivers, and contribute to change in cultural and social norms.

Government should support collaboration between prevention practitioners - specialist prevention sector and community-led organisations and representatives — and prevention practitioners across allied fields of health promotion, mental health, and alcohol and other drugs. This would allow them to collaboratively develop and share values-based messaging on preventing violence that resonates with and has cut-through for community, in all its diversity.

RECOMMENDATIONS: COMMUNITY AWARENESS, UNDERSTANDING AND BEHAVIOUR CHANGE

RESPECT VICTORIA RECOMMENDS THAT THE VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT:

12. Continue to support the design and delivery of sustained and responsive social change campaigns that are anchored to evidence-based mutually reinforcing programs focused on:

a. promoting healthy masculinity and challenging rigid gender stereotypes that support a culture where violence can occur, particularly through programs targeting men and boys

b. sexual violence, particularly the risks of violent pornography and what healthy sexual relationships should look like.

CHAPTER 4

EVOLVING PREVENTION PRACTICE AND APPROACHES

This section aligns with the following domains of the Theory of Change:

- **1.4** Theoretical and practice frameworks
- **1.5** Quality programs

The field of gendered violence prevention has evolved over many decades, emerging from and building on health promotion and prevention science theory, evidence and practice. National primary prevention frameworks such as *Change the story*, *Changing the picture, Changing the landscape* and *Pride in Prevention* have provided a strong theoretical basis for prevention work over the past decade.

WHERE PROGRESS HAS BEEN MADE

The evidence-base for prevention is continuously evolving to inform a deeper understanding of what works to prevent the many forms of family and gendered violence, and the development of effective practices and approaches. This was particularly evident over this reporting period, with the national Rapid Review of Prevention Approaches catalysing discussion on the expansive nature of prevention work (see page 59 for further discussion).

UPDATING AND EXPANDING PREVENTION FRAMEWORKS AND TOOLS

The Dhelk Dja Koori Caucus worked with the Victorian Government to review the *Indigenous Family Violence Primary Prevention Framework,* which was first developed in 2012. The framework reflects Aboriginal ways of knowing, being and doing, and places Aboriginal leadership at the centre of long-term, systemic change. A refreshed framework is due for release in 2025. It will underpin prevention work with Aboriginal communities, and ACCOs must be supported to lead this work (130).

Our Watch and Rainbow Health Australia are currently developing a national framework to prevent violence against LGBTIQA+ people and communities, which will build on existing guidance in *Pride and Prevention* to make an important contribution to strengthening intersectional prevention practice, including through articulating the drivers of violence against LGBTIQA+ people and their overlap with the drivers of violence against women.

Our Watch also partnered with Women with Disabilities Victoria to develop new tools, released in July 2024, for primary prevention services and frontline staff working with people with disabilities. These tools and resources will support practitioners to operationalise the *Changing the landscape* framework and progress practice approaches to preventing violence against women with disabilities.

The *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032* recognised that women and children have different needs at different points of their lives. Building upon this, Celebrate Ageing developed T*he [un]Silencing of Older Women* (2024) to link the experiences and needs of older women to key components of the National Plan, applying a life stages approach to addressing elder abuse (215).

BESPOKE, PLACE-BASED APPROACHES

Report participants stressed the importance of communities being involved in the design and delivery of programs and activities, and therefore the need to fund and support community-led organisations to lead prevention work. They also spoke about the importance of place and context in prevention work, noting that readiness levels, needs and social norms vary widely across the state.

> *There is a growing recognition that there is need for more bespoke approaches for different cohorts of people, and different parts of the country too. — Anonymous report participant*

The Systems Mapping project brought Respect Victoria, women's health services and other partners together to explore the importance of local context in prevention delivery. The project used group model building to map the barriers to and enablers of local violence against women and gendered violence prevention efforts. While some influences were common across geographical boundaries, such as collaboration, workforce development, power sharing and leadership diversity, many were unique to place. This work demonstrates both the value of practice-led inquiry to grow prevention knowledge and the importance of understanding place in successful program delivery.

While place-based prevention has long been championed by women's health services, it had not been funded at scale until the announcement of Respect Ballarat in May 2024. Prior to this, Respect Victoria commissioned a review of Australian and international literature to understand how a 'saturation model' adds to the understanding of what works to prevent violence against women. This review will underpin the development of Respect Ballarat (see the following case study).

> *I really like the Ballarat saturation model .. it makes it real for people that don't necessarily understand how advocacy, communications campaigns and research all link together. There is a great opportunity for Respect Victoria to consider rolling this model out in other areas based on the data, risk factors and what we know about the implementation of the Ballarat model. — Sally Hasler, Women's Health Victoria*

Several report participants noted that this project will provide an opportunity to develop and test effective approaches to designing and resourcing complex place-based prevention of gendered violence. While international evidence suggests that multi-strategy, mutually reinforcing approaches are promising in terms of creating impact, this project will grow understanding of its applicability to the Victorian context.

CASE STUDY

RESPECT BALLARAT — RESPECT VICTORIA

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

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.

The Respect Ballarat initiative links mutually reinforcing prevention and early intervention approaches to ensure that places, settings and communities within Ballarat reinforce the same attitudes, beliefs and behaviours that prevent gendered violence and support equality and respect. Respect Victoria coordinates the initiative, building on the work of the existing CoRE Alliance led by Women's Health Grampians, to bring together many parts of the community including sports clubs, schools, workplaces, health services, councils and community organisations, in a coordinated approach.

Evidence shows that when prevention is delivered in an integrated way across social ecology, it has significantly more impact than small, time-limited, standalone programs. It is groundbreaking for Victoria to be resourced to deliver the breadth, depth and intensity of work needed for an integrated approach, with a rigorous evaluation.

The purpose is not only to reduce rates of gendered violence in the long term, but to demonstrate that meaningful, measurable change is possible through a prevention-focused approach that is designed in collaboration with the community.

CURRENT ACTIVITIES

Respect Victoria has been listening to and building necessary trust with Ballarat community members since the initiative was announced in May 2024, meeting with more than 250 people and 65 organisations or networks. This consultation process is essential to the development of the model and was conducted with local groups and networks, including with First Nations peoples, women with disability, and a community co-design working group.

Respect Victoria is working with organisations and people across the Ballarat community to collaboratively design the first iteration of the initiative taking place in the latter half of 2025. This process includes developing a theory of change, establishing a governance framework, and identifying the right mix of activities to drive and reinforce change. A robust monitoring, evaluation and learning framework will track progress and impact.

NEXT STEPS

Respect Victoria will work closely with the Ballarat community over the next three years to implement, evaluate and refine the model, deepening understanding of what is required to prevent gendered violence. Outcomes and evidence generated through Respect Ballarat will support both future practice and state and federal investment in prevention.

I REALLY LIKE THE BALLARAT SATURATION MODEL... IT MAKES IT REAL FOR PEOPLE THAT DON'T NECESSARILY UNDERSTAND HOW ADVOCACY, COMMUNICATIONS CAMPAIGNS AND RESEARCH ALL LINK TOGETHER.

Sally Hasler, Women's Health Victoria

WHERE THERE ARE CHALLENGES

INTEGRATING PREVENTION FRAMEWORKS

Report participants widely acknowledged that addressing the gendered drivers of family violence and violence against women remains critical, and they also highlighted the need to better integrate overlapping and intersecting drivers of violence arising from other forms of structural oppression into prevention approaches (those outlined in *Changing the picture, Changing the landscape* and *Pride in Prevention*).

> *One of the issues that we face is that often disability is still an add-on, and there can also be a resistance in the community, even amongst people that would call themselves feminists, of seeing [adding a disability lens] as a dilution of what needs to happen, rather than something that is elevating and bringing [prevention] up. — Julie Kun, Women with Disabilities Victoria*

> *We all have a responsibility to address the additional drivers of violence against LGBTIQA+ people, including homophobia, biphobia, transphobia and transmisogyny — they should be key targets in achieving gender equity. — Starlady, Zoe Belle Gender Collective*

CASE STUDY

ALLYSHIP IN ACTION — WOMEN'S HEALTH IN THE NORTH & ZOE BELLE GENDER COLLECTIVE

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Women's Health in the North and Zoe Belle Gender Collective (ZBGC) co-hosted the Allyship in Action forum in April 2024 to strengthen the prevention of violence against trans and gender diverse people through bystander action and allyship. Designed for professionals working in the prevention of violence against women and gender equity sectors, the forum focused on supporting participants to confidently and effectively intervene in instances of transphobia and transmisogyny.

Set against a backdrop of increasing anti-trans sentiment, the forum prioritised safety and inclusivity, offering a structured and trauma-informed environment. The agenda featured expert presentations from ZBGC, Transcend Australia, Women's Health in the North, Safe and Equal, and Rainbow Health Australia. These sessions explored the drivers and impacts of transmisogyny, backlash against trans communities, and practical tools for allyship and bystander intervention.

A panel of trans women and trans feminine people shared personal stories of discrimination and solidarity, illustrating the real-world consequences of inaction and the potential of meaningful allyship. Participants then applied good-practice bystander principles through case studies and group work, deepening their skills in recognising and responding to discriminatory behaviour.

INSIGHTS

The forum enhanced participants' knowledge, confidence and motivation to act as allies. Attendees reported a greater understanding of how transphobia and misogyny intersect, and how feminist and trans justice movements can support each other in shared aims of equity and safety. Allyship in Action demonstrated that there is an appetite within the prevention of violence against women sector to explore transformative frameworks that are responsive to both the shared and unique drivers of violence against women and trans and gender diverse individuals and communities.

The forum illustrated that building strong, respectful partnerships between mainstream violence prevention organisations and groups led by trans and gender diverse people is essential. The collaboration modelled this approach, demonstrating how equitable partnerships can amplify impact, share power and support mutual capacity building.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Women's Health in the North gained deeper insight into inclusive practice, while ZBGC accessed new tools and frameworks to support its advocacy. The forum also reinforced the importance of integrating trans equity work within broader gender equity and prevention efforts. Rather than treating discrimination against trans people as separate or specialist, the event framed this as intrinsically connected to feminist goals. As participants noted, preventing violence against trans and gender diverse people strengthens efforts to end gendered violence for all. This partnership work has influenced other Victorian women's health services to take action in trans-inclusive prevention efforts. Many have engaged ZBGC for professional development and have begun to embed trans-inclusive practice within their work.

TAILORED AND TARGETED APPROACHES

Report participants acknowledged that while universal primary prevention approaches that target the whole population remain crucial, there is a need to develop and implement more tailored and targeted prevention programs and approaches. This includes the need for more culturally and age-appropriate approaches across the life course, as well as approaches tailored to specific contexts and settings.

> *There's no one-size-fits-all approach to doing this work. We need to tailor our approaches so that they make sense to — and meet the needs of — the communities with whom we are working. For example, we need to support communities with different languages and cultural backgrounds to understand the issues and how they can have these conversations with their children. Factors such as age, gender, sexuality, disability, neurodivergence, geography and experiences of violence also need to be considered. Being informed by the communities we're working with is critical. — Marree Crabbe, It's Time We Talked*

Report participants highlighted the need to continue to strengthen a focus on causes of violence outside the gendered drivers (including 'reinforcing factors') and integrate them into prevention practice and approaches. They noted that prevention policy and practice has largely focused on men's physical intimate partner violence against women and that — while it is essential to keep driving that work forward — there is also a need to develop and use evidence and practice frameworks on other types of violence, particularly in relation to sexual violence, elder abuse, child maltreatment and non-physical forms of violence (e.g. financial/economic abuse, coercive control).

Work has commenced to develop a Victorian primary prevention of elder abuse framework by the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing.

> *One of the biggest issues is that the drivers of elder abuse are not as well understood. It's very hard to get that message out. — Ben Rogers, Council on the Ageing Victoria & Senior Rights Victoria*

Several report participants also spoke about the need to develop and test prevention interventions on specific forms of violence, namely sexual violence, online and technology-facilitated abuse, as well as interventions that prevent and address the harms of pornography. As noted earlier, while a sexual violence strategy was announced by the Victorian Government in 2022, it has yet to be released.

> *We need a sexual violence strategy that really sets out a framework for evidence-based sexual violence prevention. Really, that's a foundational building block. — Kathleen Maltzahn, Sexual Assault Services Victoria*

EARLY INTERVENTION

Early intervention was noted as a particular gap requiring a greater policy focus (as noted at page 108), as well as more programs targeting people and groups at higher risk of using violence, or showing early signs of harmful beliefs and behaviours. This was also a strong theme of

consultations, with report participants highlighting work with children and young people and 'at-risk' men and boys as particularly important priorities for this work.

> *Across Australia, there's a need for a much greater focus on early intervention as a core component of how we address family violence across the spectrum. It needs a lot more attention. — Jo Pride, Family Safety Victoria*

> *There's a need for similar kind of foundational policy settings as it relates to early intervention work — Matt Tyler, Jesuit Social Services*

Primary prevention and early intervention are distinct but complementary and linked approaches. There is an opportunity for more integrated approaches that combine primary prevention and early intervention, and more practice evidence and guidance is needed for these integrated approaches. There are already promising developments driven by organisations such as Jesuit Social Services, Body Safety Australia, Djirra, the Multicultural Centre for Women's Health and local council programs such as new parent groups and youth services. However, greater integration and coordination of early intervention alongside prevention is needed to guide future investment and practice.

Increased visibility and coordination of distinct and integrated approaches would also enhance Victoria's ability to demonstrate the collective, preventative impacts of work across primary prevention, early intervention and response, and it would illustrate the true spectrum of action and investment required to end family violence and violence against women.

> *A lot of critique of the primary prevention sector has been about its [perceived] lack of integration with the comprehensive gender-based violence sector … But I think that there's enough prevention literacy amongst people that understand early intervention and response and recovery that we're not going to lose the integrity of prevention by being more integrated — Prevention organisation executive*

> *A challenge for prevention is the intersection between primary prevention [and] secondary prevention: early intervention for people facing higher risk. I think that's a gap between primary prevention and response, and that space in between is still a really problematic one. — Jade Blakkarly, WIRE*

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ACTION

PLACE-BASED APPROACHES CAN ACCELERATE PROGRESS

As highlighted at page 93 in our discussion of prevention investment, place-based approaches can build lasting, community-driven change. Respect Ballarat is the first initiative of its kind in Australia and has the potential to improve Victoria and Australia's understanding of what works to prevent gendered violence on a wider scale — accelerating progress and maximising impact of the sector's collective efforts. It is based on global evidence that demonstrates that 'saturating' an

area with multiple activities that mutually reinforce each other has significantly more impact than relying on a single method or setting.

Continued investment across Victoria — building on initiatives such as Respect Ballarat as well as regional coordination of women's health services, local government, ACCOs and others — can drive locally tailored prevention, community readiness, and partnership expertise. Advocating for matched investment from the Australian Government will support scale and sustainability, ensuring that promising practice can be embedded and expanded across regions.

ADDRESSING COMMERCIAL DETERMINANTS AND MARKET-BASED CONTRIBUTORS

While prevention frameworks and practitioners have long acknowledged the various systems and structures that drive and enable violence, report participants reflected that increased national discourse on the role of commercial and market-based contributors to family violence and violence against women during the reporting period had brought renewed opportunity for cross-sector and cross-government collaboration.

The prevention sector has never been funded at the scale required to address, for example, the impact of gambling, alcohol, violent pornography or digital platforms that profit from online algorithms that spread gendered disinformation and misogyny. Yet, these global, multibillion-dollar industries have untrammelled power to undermine prevention efforts and entrench the harmful social norms, attitudes and systems that drive family violence, gendered violence and violence against women.

Therefore, prevention organisations must partner with adjacent sectors that are funded to do this work, such as health promotion organisations and others. Addressing the commercial determinants of violence is essential for long-term prevention of not just gendered violence but also a myriad of other social harms. Industries and environments that profit from or perpetuate gendered harms — such as alcohol, gambling, violent pornography, and online platforms and business models that support misogynistic radicalisation — must be subject to greater scrutiny and coordinated regulation. Discrete community-facing prevention programs cannot be expected to generate whole-of-population change unless strategic, evidence-based and courageous action is taken to curb the influence of these industries on driving and reinforcing harmful social norms, attitudes and behaviours.

The Victorian Government should support collaboration across sectors, portfolios and jurisdictions, including through public policy, regulatory reform, and partnerships with allied sectors and settings that have significant cultural influence such as community and professional sport.

In addition, there is increasing evidence and recognition of a pathway from online misogyny to radical extremism, often fuelled by gendered disinformation campaigns that stoke misogynist, anti-trans and/or racist prejudice (216). Gendered disinformation, as explained in *Disinformation in the City*, is the use of humiliating and sexualised content to spread misogynistic messaging in the community that is overwhelmingly about women and girls (217).

> *The negative consequences [of gendered disinformation] go far beyond the targeted individuals and undermine human rights, gender equality, inclusive democracy and sustainable development — UN Special Rapporteur Irene Khan (218)*

This is creating a new intersection between the priorities, expertise and mandate of those undertaking gendered violence prevention work and those responsible for deradicalisation and national security. In addition, evidence is building about the widespread harms of gendered disinformation by local and international actors (both online and offline) that undermines prevention efforts and reinforces drivers of violence (217). Experts have highlighted the urgency of collaborative, preventative action required by governments at all levels, sectors and community groups to pre-empt, 'pre-bunk' and de-bunk such efforts (217). Harnessing public sentiment and renewed momentum will be crucial for supporting cross-sector and inter-jurisdictional collaboration to address these issues going forward.

INTEGRATION AND COLLABORATION

There is increasing recognition that primary prevention can be — and often is — integrated across the prevention-to-recovery continuum, to address both immediate needs and the underlying drivers of violence. As outlined throughout this report, ongoing work to ensure an enabling policy and funding environment and a mature and sustainably resourced prevention system will foster more integrated practice and partnerships within and across allied sectors and settings in order to better connect and integrate prevention work for maximum impact.

RECOMMENDATIONS: EVOLVING PREVENTION PRACTICE AND APPROACHES

RESPECT VICTORIA RECOMMENDS THAT THE VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT:

13. Continue to invest in and build 'saturation' and place-based prevention and early intervention initiatives to prevent family and gendered violence across Victoria, including through:

- **a.** building on lessons from Respect Ballarat (the Ballarat Community Saturation Model) to guide longer-term (up to 10 years) investment in Ballarat and other sites across Victoria to enable impacts on gendered violence rates to be demonstrated
- **b.** advocating to other jurisdictions to learn from the development and implementation of the Respect Ballarat project and to build the workforce and system readiness required to pilot similar initiatives across Australian states and territories.

14. Work with prevention-focused organisations and agencies to better connect and integrate prevention work through:

- **a.** expanding efforts to design and deliver integrated prevention approaches, particularly those that combine primary prevention and early intervention approaches
- **b.** collaborating with other sectors to develop and deliver nuanced and effective prevention messaging, including through amplifying community voices and diversifying the prevention workforce
- **c.** identifying strategic opportunities to embed prevention lessons across early intervention, crisis response and recovery efforts, particularly in the justice system, housing, health and other social service systems.

15. Work with and advocate to the Australian Government and other Australian state and territory governments and agencies to address the commercial and systemic contributors to family violence, violence against women and gendered violence, including by regulating and/or supporting increased cross-sector collaboration on:

a. alcohol pricing, availability and advertising

b. gambling access and advertising

c. production, dissemination and access to violent pornography, particularly for children and young people

d. misogynistic radicalisation and gendered disinformation

e. interlinking social norms around masculinity, sport, drinking, gambling and pornography that normalise and drive family violence, violence against women and gendered violence.

CONCLUSION

Over the past three years, Victoria has continued its legacy of national leadership in preventing family violence, gendered violence and all forms of violence against women, with strong commitment from both the Victorian Government and the domestic, family and sexual violence sectors. However, this work requires long-term and transformational change; there is much work still ahead of us.

This report identifies the importance of prevention within the broader family and sexual violence system. It highlights that, above all, prevention has not yet been funded at the scale required to achieve population-level outcomes. Despite this, Victorian prevention efforts have made significant strides, and advances have been made notwithstanding systemic challenges and concerning trends. Victorian prevention activity and its many contributors have been resilient, adapting to challenges by deepening partnerships, leveraging research and innovation, and evolving to meet growing demand.

Eight key themes have been identified and verified through key informant interviews, sector consultations, reports and evaluations, and sensemaking workshops with stakeholders. These include the need for:

- Prevention investment
- Enabling policy and legislation
- Strengthening the prevention system
- Growing and supporting the workforce
- Building evidence and data
- Recognising and enabling community-led and specialist prevention work
- Community awareness, understanding and behaviour change
- Evolving prevention practice and approaches.

Fifteen recommendations have been made to the Victorian Government based on these themes, to ensure that crucial momentum is not lost. The recommendations aim to protect the progress already made and set priorities for continued leadership and investment. By building on what works, strengthening and safeguarding essential prevention system infrastructure, and courageously addressing persistent and emerging challenges, Victoria can continue to set the standard for what a whole-of-society approach to prevention looks like.

At the heart of prevention are the experiences of those impacted by violence — those who have had their lives taken from them, those who have had loved ones taken from them, and those that have experienced or are living with gendered violence or the threat of it right now. Overwhelmingly, Victorians want change, and this has driven the state to be a leader nationally and internationally. To move us closer to a Victoria where everyone is safe, equal and respected, we need a renewed focus and sustained investment in the system, workers and evidence that enable this essential prevention work.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: ORGANISATIONS CONSULTED FOR THE REPORT

- Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS)
- Body Safety Australia
- Commission for Gender Equality in the Public Sector
- Consent Labs
- Council on the Ageing Victoria
- Department of Education (Victoria)
- Department of Families, Fairness and Housing
- Dhelk Dja Partnership Forum, Koori Caucus and Secretariat
- Djirra
- Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission
- eSafety Commissioner
- Family Safety Victoria
- Gender Equity Victoria
- It's Time We Talked
- Jesuit Social Services
- Movember
- Multicultural Centre for Women's Health
- Municipal Association of Victoria
- Municipal Association of Victoria's Gender Equality, Preventing Family Violence and all forms of Violence Against Women Network
- No to Violence
- Office for Women, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (Victoria)
- Office for Women, Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (Australian Government)
- Office for Women in Sport and Recreation
- Our Watch
- The Prevention Alliance
- Primary Prevention Sector Reference Group
- Rainbow Health Australia
- Safe and Equal
- Sexual Assault Services Victoria
- Sport and Recreation Victoria
- Victim Survivors' Advisory Council
- Victoria Police
- Victoria's Respectful Relationships regional workforce
- Victorian Aboriginal Child and Community Agency (VACCA)
- Victorian Commissioner for LGBTIQA+ Communities
- Victorian Multicultural Commission
- Western Bulldogs
- WIRE
- Women with Disabilities Victoria

- Women's Health Services Network
- Women's Health Services Network's Evaluation Group
- Women's Health Victoria
- Women's Legal Service Victoria
- Zoe Belle Gender Collective

APPENDIX 2: THREE YEARLY REPORT TO PARLIAMENT SURVEY QUESTIONS

Section 1: About your work

1. How would you describe the organisation you work for? [select all that apply]
   - Advocacy organisation
   - Commercial or industrial business
   - Community health or mental health service
   - Community legal service
   - Community sporting club
   - Crisis response service
   - Early childhood education or care service
   - Faith-based community organisation
   - Family violence sector peak body
   - Federal government agency or department
   - Global or national non-government organisation (NGO)
   - Harmful sexual behaviour service
   - LGBTIQA+ organisation
   - Local Council
   - Media or advertising organisation
   - Multicultural, refugee or asylum seeker support organisation
   - Philanthropic organisation or charity
   - Private primary or secondary school
   - Public or private healthcare provider (hospitals, clinics etc)
   - Public primary or secondary school
   - Specialist sexual assault service
   - State government agency or department
   - Union
   - University, TAFE, or other registered training organisation
   - Victorian non-government organisation (NGO)
   - Women's health service
   - I work as an individual (including consultant/sole-trader)
   - Other _____

2. Which of the following best describes your role within your organisation? [select most applicable option]
   - Academic/Lecturer/Professor (e.g. teaching, lecturing in academic institution or research)
   - Board member or member of a governance/management committee
   - Consultant or sole trader
   - Counsellor or case manager (e.g. providing individualised support to victim-survivors)
   - Executive or senior leader (e.g. CEO or Director)
   - Policy advisor or advocate (e.g. working on policy development or advocacy)
   - Program Manager or coordinator (e.g. overseeing specific programs or initiatives)
   - Project officer (e.g. working on a specific program or initiative)
   - Support staff (e.g. administrator, Human Resources, IT support)
   - Teacher (e.g. delivering educational programs in schools)

- Trainer or educator (e.g. leading workshops, conducting training sessions)
- Volunteer
- Other, please specify _____

3. What type of activities do you undertake as part of your role? [select all that apply]

- Community development
- Community education and awareness raising
- Consent and respectful relationships education
- Direct participation programs with defined communities or population groups (e.g. men and boys, young people, new parents or new migrants or refugees)
- Direct service delivery (i.e. health or social care)
- Health promotion
- Media, communications and campaigns
- Mentoring programs with defined communities or population groups (e.g. young people)
- Policy advocacy
- Policy development and/or advice
- Research
- Resource development
- Support and advocacy for victim-survivors (e.g. counselling, support groups, legal support, crisis response)
- Training for professionals (e.g. healthcare workers, educators, social workers etc)
- Human resources and workplace policy and program development (e.g. gender equality or inclusion work in an organisation or setting)
- Other _____

4. Which communities or groups do you work with or target as part of your role? [select all that apply]

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities
- Boys, male adolescents and/or men
- Children (primary school age)
- Children in early childhood education and care
- Executive team, managers, staff, contractors and/or members of governance bodies (e.g. board members) at the organisation where I am employed
- General population
- LGBTIQA+ communities
- Low socioeconomic status communities
- Multicultural communities
- New parents
- Older people
- People from faith-based communities
- People from migrant or refugee backgrounds
- People in workplaces
- People with disabilities
- Prevention practitioners

- Sporting club members
- State or Federal government agencies, decision-makers or people of influence (e.g. Members of Parliament)
- University or TAFE students
- Victim-survivors
- Young people (secondary school age)
- Other _____

5. Which geographic regions are covered by your prevention activities? [select all that apply]

- Statewide – Activities implemented across all of Victoria
- Metropolitan Melbourne
- Eastern Metropolitan Melbourne
- Inner Metropolitan Melbourne
- Northern Metropolitan Melbourne
- Southern Metropolitan Melbourne
- Western Metropolitan Melbourne
- Regional Victoria
- Barwon South West
- Gippsland
- Grampians
- Hume/Goulburn North East
- Loddon Mallee
- National
- International
- Other (please specify)

6. What funding sources support your prevention-related activities? [select all that apply]

- Collaborative funding
- Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs
- Federal government
- Fee for service
- Fundraising including crowdfunding
- In-kind contributions
- International grants or funding
- Local government
- Non-government organisations (including women's health services)
- Philanthropy, including charities and trusts
- Private sector
- Social enterprise income
- State government
- Statutory authorities (e.g. water boards, Respect Victoria, VicHealth)
- University or academic partnerships
- Internal revenue
- None of the above
- Other _____

Section 2: Progress between 2022 and now

Options for all questions for this section were

- Much better
- Somewhat better
- Somewhat worse

- Much worse
- No change / about the same
- Unsure
- Better in some ways, worse in others [please specify]
- Prefer not to say

Your organisation

7. Compared to three years ago, support from my organisation's leaders to address and prevent gender-based violence is:
8. Compared to three years ago, collection and management of data (e.g. monitoring and evaluation data, demographic data, etc) for prevention initiatives within my organisation is:
9. Compared to three years ago, commitment to the monitoring and evaluation of prevention initiatives within my organisation is:

Any additional comments about your organisation? [open text box]

Victoria and the national context

10. Compared to three years ago, efforts to ensure that prevention of gender-based violence initiatives in Victoria are inclusive of trans and gender diverse people is:
11. Compared to three years ago, policies and legislation to improve Victoria's efforts to prevent gender-based violence are:
12. Compared to three years ago, the Victorian Government's data collection about prevention initiatives is:
13. Compared to three years ago, the political will of Victorian state MPs to address gender-based violence is:
14. Compared to three years ago, the awareness of the Victorian community about gender-based violence is:
15. Compared to three years ago, Victorian community readiness to take action to prevent gender-based violence is:
16. Compared to three years ago, the quality of Victorian community-led action to prevent gender-based violence is:
17. Compared to three years ago, men's willingness to discuss and learn more about their role in preventing gender-based violence is:
18. Compared to three years ago, men and boys' active participation in initiatives to prevent gender-based violence is:
19. Compared to three years ago, the amount of media coverage about gender-based violence is:
20. Compared to three years ago, the extent of media outlets (e.g. print, online, television, radio, social media) reporting on gender-based violence is:
21. Compared to three years ago, the quality of media reporting and coverage of incidents of gender-based violence is:

Any additional comments about progress in Victoria and the national context? [open text box]

Section 3: About the impact of your work

22. What are the main goals of the prevention work you do? [select all that apply]

- Advocating for policy and legislation change to improve safety and prevent gender-based violence at a state or national level
- Building the skills and capabilities of prevention practitioners
- Building the skills and capabilities of professionals to address and prevent gender-based violence (e.g. healthcare workers, teachers etc)
- Building skills for bystander interventions at an individual, organisational, or structural level
- Changing attitudes that condone violence against women
- Changing attitudes that limit women's independence
- Changing attitudes that discriminate against the diversity of women
- Changing attitudes that promote unhealthy gender norms, particularly related to masculinity
- Challenging different forms of oppression that intersect with gender inequality (e.g. racism, colonialism, ableism etc)
- Coordinating collective community action within a region or sector
- Engaging men and boys in prevention and/or gender equality efforts
- Fostering partnerships with organisations to collectively prevent gender-based violence
- Implementing policies and practices within organisations to improve safety and prevent gender-based violence
- Improving community awareness and understanding of gender-based violence
- Improving the inclusion of victim-survivor voices in primary prevention activities
- Improving young people's understanding of consent and respectful relationships
- Other _____

23. How effective do you believe your prevention activities have been in achieving their goals?

- Very effective — have met or exceeded their goals
- Moderately effective –have achieved some, but not all, of their goals
- Slightly effective — some progress has been made, but there is room for improvement
- Not effective — have not achieved their intended goals
- Mixed effectiveness — please specify
- Unsure / Too early to assess / too soon to determine the effectiveness
- None of the above

24. Which option best describes how your prevention activities are evaluated? [select all that apply]

- We administer surveys, collect data and analyse the results ourselves

- We collect data internally and an external evaluator analyses it and provides a final evaluation report
- An external evaluator collects all data and provides a final evaluation report
- We provide data or a report requested by our funder for evaluation
- We do not collect any data
- Other _____

25. What kinds of data do you collect as part of your prevention activities? [select all that apply]

- Quantitative data (typically closed or limited responses to questions in surveys, participant numbers, demographic information and countable outcomes)
- Qualitative data (typically open test responses in surveys, testimonials, interview responses, focus group responses, observational data)
- Community or stakeholder endorsements
- Anecdotal data
- Case studies
- Administrative data
- We do not collect any data
- Other _____

26. In your opinion, what is the most significant change resulting from your prevention work in the last three years (2022-2024)? [open text box]

27. What has helped or hindered your ability to do your prevention work effectively? [open text box]

Section 4: About Respect Victoria

28. To your knowledge, which (if any) of the following describes Respect Victoria's role/s [select any that apply]

- Promotes awareness and educates the community about family violence and violence against women
- Promotes behaviour change in the community to reduce family violence and violence against women
- Provides advice to government and organisations on policy and systems change to reduce family violence and violence against women
- Works with organisations leading and delivering prevention work to better co-ordinate efforts
- Leads and supports research on prevention of family violence and violence against women
- Leads systems to improve monitoring, evaluation, and evidence gathering on prevention of family violence and violence against women
- Submits a regular report to government on how prevention efforts across Victoria are progressing