

Forum outcomes paper

Primary prevention in Queensland

A summary of two May 2021 National Primary Prevention Hub events hosted in partnership with [Ending Violence against Women Queensland](#)

Executive summary

This paper reports on two online events hosted by Our Watch in partnership with [Ending Violence against Women Queensland](#) (EVAWQ) on 13 May 2021, as part of the [National Primary Prevention Hub](#).

1. A webinar with panel discussions situated primary prevention in the Queensland context. It included a local primary prevention case study (Men4Respect), as well as a best-practice primary prevention initiative in Victoria (Preventing Violence Together).
2. An interactive discussion forum was held with practitioners from Queensland to reflect on challenges and opportunities in their work specific to the local context. Participants engaged in breakout rooms to discuss opportunities for primary prevention in Queensland including:
 - integrating a primary prevention approach in their work
 - ideas for the future
 - what needs to change in the Queensland context to enable progress on primary prevention.

This paper summarises the case studies and key themes that emerged during both events to promote information and knowledge sharing across the sector.



Key points

Primary prevention in Queensland

- Many non-government organisations are already integrating prevention of violence against women approaches and concepts into their existing work. Stakeholders are eager to incorporate primary prevention further into their work and across the sector, and there are many opportunities to do so.
- Stakeholders use community engagement to build awareness of violence against women and challenge the drivers of this violence. This engagement provides a strong foundation for further development of place-based approaches that have strong community ownership.
- Funding for primary prevention of violence is limited.

Opportunities for progress towards primary prevention

- Building commonality and harmonising a common vocabulary and understanding of primary prevention of violence against women concepts, frameworks and language across the prevention, early intervention and tertiary services and in the broader community is critical to strengthen and integrate primary prevention efforts across settings and systems.
- Successful primary prevention efforts require concurrent financial and human resourcing across the primary, early intervention and tertiary responses to effectively coordinate and address violence against women. This includes supporting and coordinating collaboration, information sharing and mutual learning of stakeholders to work across settings and socio-ecological model.
- Contextualising primary prevention of violence against women approaches, actions and infrastructure at local, regional and state levels to suit the context is vital. This includes bringing in various stakeholders to demonstrate the responsibility of all of society to address violence against women.
- There is a significant opportunity to expand knowledge and skill in the application of primary prevention of violence through capacity building, education and training.
- Investment in a coordinated and funded approach to primary prevention of violence is essential to success.

Introduction

This paper reports on a webinar and online discussion forum hosted by Our Watch, in partnership with [Ending Violence against Women Queensland \(EVAWQ\)](#) on 13 May 2021, as part of the [National Primary Prevention Hub](#).

The events were an opportunity for stakeholders to hear about the evidence underpinning primary prevention approaches in Australia, examples of promising practice and opportunities for action in the Queensland context. The discussion forum for non-government stakeholders provided an opportunity for participants to engage interactively including sharing opportunities and identify areas of need to progress prevention in Queensland.

This paper sets out the context and case studies discussed at the webinar, as well as opportunities identified by stakeholders in the discussion forum and subsequent stakeholder engagement.

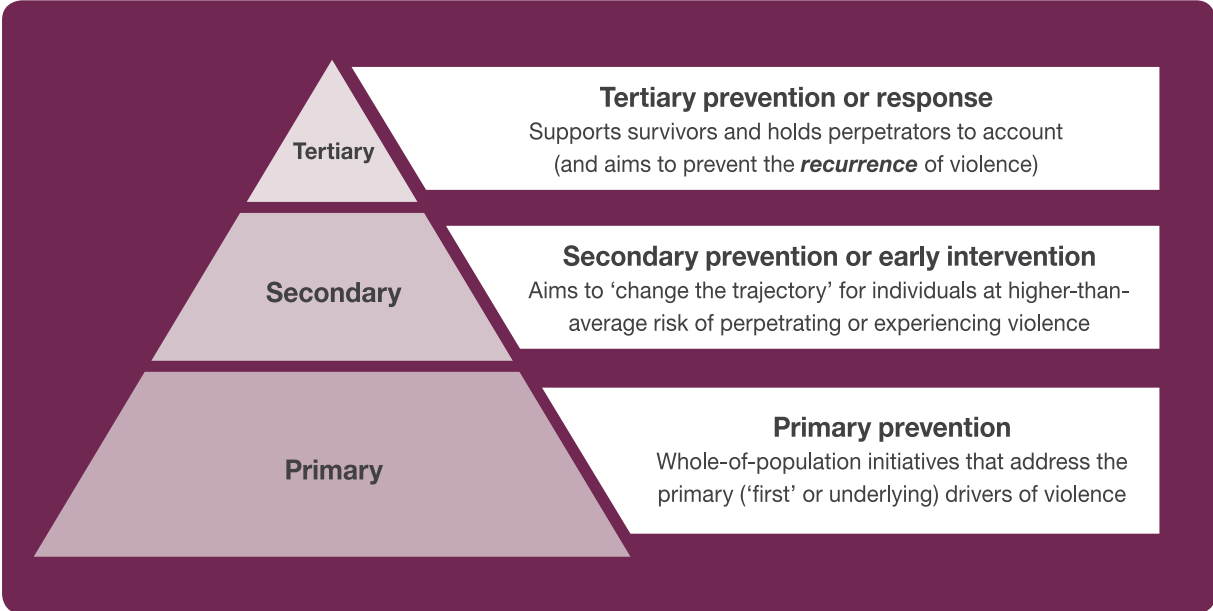
Primary prevention and the Queensland context

Preventing violence against women

Primary prevention of violence against women is an emerging area of work that focuses on stopping violence before it starts by addressing its deep-seated gendered drivers and promoting gender equality. This is distinct from, but complements, early intervention and responses to violence against women.

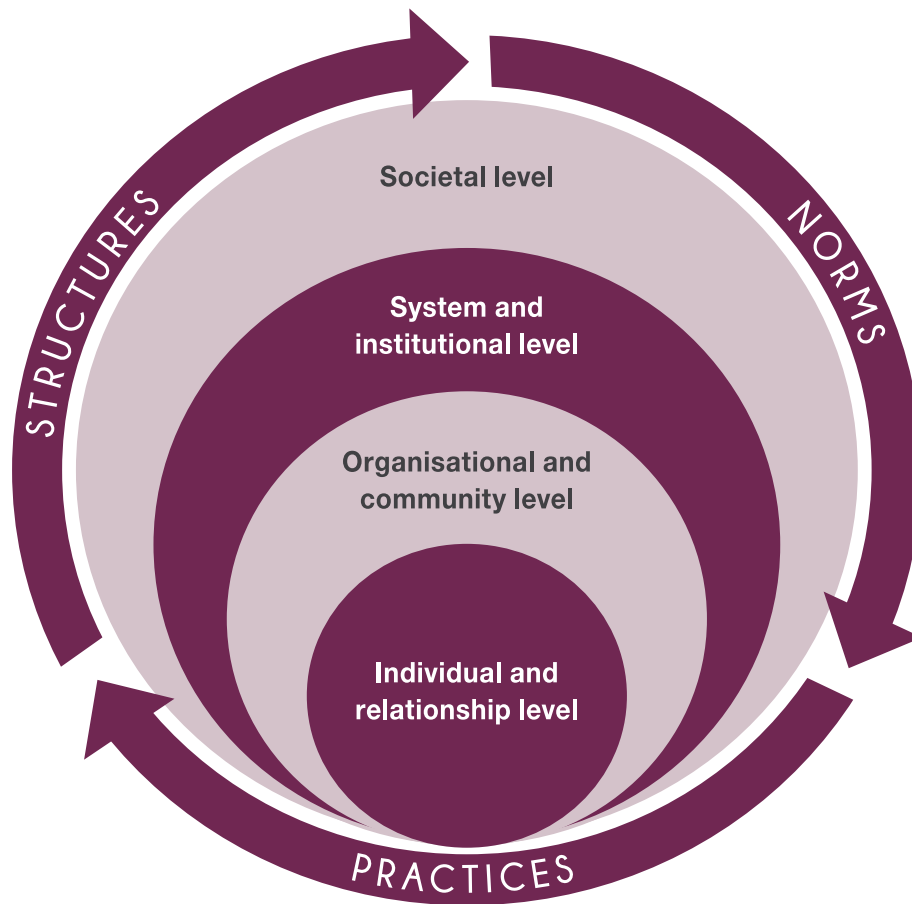
Primary prevention aims to stop violence against women from occurring in the first place. It works to change the [gendered drivers of this violence](#), and the underlying social condition of gender inequality in which it arises. While response and early intervention approaches work with individuals who are already experiencing or perpetrating violence (or at risk of doing so), primary prevention is a whole-of-population approach that aims to deliver a future where all women and their children live free from violence.

Figure 1: The relationships between primary prevention and other work to address violence against women



Primary prevention encompasses a diverse range of work at all levels of society, including with individuals, communities, organisations and institutions. This is referred to as the socio-ecological model in [Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children](#). This framework demonstrates the dynamic and interrelated factors that work across all levels of our society that are associated with higher levels of violence against women. The socio-ecological model encompasses the gendered social norms, practices and structures (both formal and informal) that sustain the environment of gender inequality in which violence against women occurs.

Figure 2: The socio-ecological model of violence against women



Change the story outlines the particular expressions or manifestations of gender inequality that are most consistently associated with higher levels of violence against women. The gendered drivers of violence against women outlined in the framework are:

- condoning of violence against women
- men’s control of decision-making and limits to women’s independence in public life and relationships
- rigid gender roles and stereotyped constructions of masculinity and femininity
- male peer relations that emphasise aggression and disrespect towards women.

To prevent violence against women, a multifaceted approach is required to address the gendered drivers across the socio-ecological model to reach everyone, challenging the gendered drivers where people work, live, learn and play. As part of this approach, primary prevention needs to be undertaken across various interrelated settings including education, sports, the arts, media, and public spaces.

There are different techniques that can be used, such as direct participation in primary prevention interventions, community mobilisation and strengthening organisational development, communication and social marketing, policy and legislative change, and civil society advocacy. For primary prevention to be successful, it requires a dedicated infrastructure that includes mechanisms for coordination, an expert workforce, policy and legislative reform, and shared monitoring and evaluation frameworks. It is a holistic endeavour, that requires coordinated, mutually reinforcing strategies at all levels of society.

The Queensland context

Queensland has developed a number of policies that address prevention, early intervention and responding to violence against women, such as the [Violence Against Women Prevention Plan 2016-2022](#), [Queensland Framework to address Sexual Violence](#), and [Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Strategy 2016-2026](#). Queensland's policies identify primary prevention as a priority and provide a strong foundation for this work. Existing frameworks in Queensland can be considered and expanded on to prioritise primary prevention strategies and actions and integrate into early intervention and response services.

In Australia, we are beginning to build strong foundations for primary prevention, and promising work is progressing at local, regional, state and national levels. However, there is much more to do.

EVAWQ is the peak body bringing together the refuge, sexual assault, women's health and domestic violence sectors to facilitate collaboration, skill sharing and partnership building. Central to EVAWQ's work is the understanding that violence is predominantly perpetrated by men against women and children, and that this violence is preventable.

Gender inequality is the central cause of men's violence against women. Australia's Global Gender Gap Index [fell from 15th in 2006, to 50th in 2021](#), and we are [now ranked 99th](#) in women's health and safety. Violence against women costs our nation approximately [one woman's life every week](#), and one [child's life every two weeks](#). In Queensland, the economic cost of violence against women is approximately [\\$4.77 billion every year](#).

Alongside the crucial work being done across Queensland to respond to and intervene in violence against women, primary prevention aims to identify and enact the social change needed to stop this violence occurring in the first place. There are four key elements to doing primary prevention work well in Queensland: collaboration, funding, structure and knowledge.

1. **Collaboration:** In Queensland, a whole-of-community approach can be employed by working across all levels of government, in all government departments, in all parts of business and the media, and in schools, sporting organisations and workplaces. In doing so, organisations and stakeholders can build on each other's skills and connections to break down rigid ideas of masculinity and reinforce positive equity messaging.
2. **Funding:** Funding for primary prevention is needed alongside (not at the expense of) frontline services. Every dollar we invest in prevention saves us money in the long run. Resourcing to support meaningful and long-term work is critical because changing structures and attitudes takes time.
3. **Structures and shared frameworks:** Queensland is a large and diverse state. In this context, a structured approach to primary prevention is needed based on shared frameworks that can be utilised to create local solutions, and a broader, state-wide approach.
4. **Knowledge:** In Queensland, there are opportunities to up-skill practitioners to support them to develop and implement primary prevention initiatives across communities. There is widespread enthusiasm for and commitment to this work which can be leveraged to build a broader primary prevention approach.

Case study: Respectful relationships education in primary schools pilot

Respectful relationships education that is embedded within schools has the potential to reach over four million students across Australian primary and secondary schools, as well as a workforce of over 290,000 teachers and wider community of over 9,500 schools.

From 2017 to 2018, 18 primary schools across Queensland and Victoria participated in the Respectful Relationships Education pilot, with a focus on Year 1 and 2 students. This project was a partnership between Our Watch, The Myer Foundation, The Luke Batty Foundation, Department of Education Queensland, Department of Education and Training Victoria, and participating primary schools.

The pilot included classroom teaching and learning using the Victorian *Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships* curriculum materials, professional development for staff, auditing of current school policies and processes, support for schools to engage parents in reinforcing messages of respect and equality, and the Our Watch [Respectful relationships education toolkit](#).

The [evaluation of the pilot](#) reveals how taking a whole-of-school approach to address gendered violence can have positive outcomes for student attitudes and teacher confidence and knowledge. The findings included significant changes in students' attitudes such as students being less likely to consider traditionally masculine and feminine jobs and activities for boys and girls only, and staff demonstrating a strong commitment to respectful relationships education. Using age-appropriate curriculum that addressed the drivers of violence against women was critical to achieving these positive changes.

The report also highlighted the need for respectful relationships education to be integrated long-term within a school community with comprehensive professional learning, support for staff and student wellbeing, as well as engaging with parents and families to reinforce messages of respect and equality.

Case study: Men4Respect

[Men4Respect](#) is a peer-to-peer primary prevention and education program that works with young men in schools, in community and on social media to foster healthy and respectful relationships and build their capacity to be active bystanders. Men4Respect was created in 2019 and runs out of the Youth and Family Service (YFS), a not-for-profit based in Logan, Queensland. The program has received a small amount of government funding, and a grant from the Vincent Fairfax Foundation.

The impetus for Men4Respect came from [an evaluation](#) of its sister program R4Respect. This evaluation found that while the peer-to-peer model effectively improved young people's understanding of interpersonal violence, young men's attitudes toward gender equality remained difficult to shift. It also found that R4Respect struggled to retain male ambassadors. Alongside this, there is a need to challenge concerning views around victim blaming and consent, and to promote bystander behaviour among young men.

In response to these findings, Men4Respect was created. Following R4Respect's award-winning peer-to-peer model, Men4Respect's young male ambassadors work with 20 male participants over an 8–10-week period. The program covers: accountability, toxic vs. healthy masculinity, empathy, consent, coercive control, and active bystander behaviours. In line with a male/female co-facilitation model, there is always a female ambassador present to share her experiences and hold the group accountable. Pre- and post-surveys are conducted to measure changes in attitudes toward consent, victim blaming and active bystander behaviour.

The central aim of the program is to “build a better human” by instilling:

- values of **empathy**, so participants will better understand women's experiences, and feel motivated to effect change
- values of **respect and equality** by increasing knowledge of male privilege, coercive control, and gendered double standards
- a sense of **accountability**, so participants feel confident to stand up and be an active bystander.

Men4Respect's hope is that these groups of young men will then go out into their schools and challenge toxic male cultures.

Survey results indicate that Men4Respect has been effective in challenging myths around gendered violence and empowering men to be active bystanders, with around half of participants stating they would feel confident challenging disrespectful behaviours. The program has improved facilitator retention by increasing remuneration and adjusting their recruitment strategy such that it focuses on drive and passion rather than knowledge, as the latter can be developed in training. Due to facilitator crossover between Men4Respect and R4Respect, this has also solved R4Respect's male ambassador retention issue.

A key challenge for Men4Respect has been reconciling the very high demand for its programs, with its relatively small capacity and a lack of long-term funding. However, Men4Respect aims to expand its reach and create more holistic change by working collaboratively with other local youth and men's organisations that address physical health, mental health and respectful relationships. Beyond this, Men4Respect would like to see their peer-to-peer model replicated statewide and across Australia, as part of a broader national primary prevention of violence against women strategy.

Case study: Preventing Violence Together, Women’s Health West

In response to stakeholder feedback, a Victorian case study was presented at the forum to share learnings from a place-based prevention initiative which could be considered in the Queensland context.

Preventing Violence Together (PVT) is a regional partnership led by Women’s Health West that connects and guides the primary prevention of violence against women in Melbourne’s metropolitan west. Launched in 2010, PVT partnership was the first regional primary prevention partnership and action plan of its kind in Victoria, with many other regions adopting a similar partnership approach to prevention in the following years. With 26 partners including seven local governments and Departments of Justice and Education, Victoria Police, a range of community health organisations, an AFL club, and a university, PVT has two tiers of governance that meet quarterly. In 2017, the partnership launched its second strategy, *Preventing Violence Together 2030: Western Region Strategy to Prevent Violence against Women* that aims to effect transformational and sustained change at the individual, family, community, institutional and societal level. This ten-year strategy is underpinned by PVT’s *theory of change*, a framework that has emerged from “practice wisdom, lived experience and the evidence outlined in *Change the story*”. The partnership uses this theory of change to visually and conceptually map prevention activities and work taking place in individual organisations. This allows PVT to ensure this work is connected and to identify areas where more work needs to be done to ensure that that women and girls across Melbourne’s west live free from violence and discrimination and have equal status, rights, opportunities, representation and respect.

A **culture of humility** is the foundation and guiding principle of the partnership to avoid competition against one another for critical but few resources. Practically this entails: a focus on outcomes; effective agenda design that creates space for all partners to share their organisation’s work; a structure that ensures partnership initiatives are not dominated by one perspective or organisation; acknowledging that no single organisation can do primary prevention alone; cross-sector partnerships and action are integral for primary prevention efforts to be effective; and an understanding and acceptance that mistakes will be made.

After a decade of working together, PVT has identified three key learnings from the partnership:

1. The opportunity to **learn from one another** through peer learning is the biggest benefit of coordinated, collective efforts in the primary prevention space.
2. There must be an ongoing commitment to **evaluation**, whether formal or informal. When working toward a ten-year strategy, it can be easy to lose focus on what is happening in the short term. Ongoing evaluation, dialogue and refinement will ensure that the work being done is as powerful as it can be.
3. **Connection, capacity building and collective learning** for all partners must be a priority and are integral aspects for collaborative partnership. From agenda design, to chairing responsibilities, these roles ensure each partner is involved and valued.

Stakeholders at the discussion forum reflected on the importance of such place-based approaches and working with partners and discussed how this approach could be applied in Queensland.

Opportunities for primary prevention in Queensland

These key themes are synthesised from discussions among non-government stakeholders at an online discussion forum on 13 May, and supplementary stakeholder engagement undertaken by the Hub.

Integrating a primary prevention approach into current work

Non-government organisations are integrating primary prevention approaches into their current work in Queensland. Stakeholders at the forum discussed the work that they are currently doing, and opportunities that they have identified for further integrating prevention into existing work:

- There is a strong desire to build awareness and understanding about violence against women into work with communities, across settings and systems, and throughout different stages of people's lives. For example, engaging with political, business and community leaders about the importance of preventing violence against women, and integrating prevention into the existing work of organisations, including leveraging existing community mobilisation work and proposing solutions to create future change.
- Shared concepts and frameworks about the gendered drivers of violence against women such as [*Change the story*](#) and [*Changing the picture: A national resource to support the prevention of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their children*](#) can support a whole-of-community approach. Building understanding of these frameworks can support organisations to integrate prevention into service delivery and crisis response work, core business of organisations, and gender equality initiatives more broadly, such as efforts to change individual attitudes or upskilling the prevention workforce and other associated professionals.
- Language and discourses are important. Efforts can be made to continuously highlight and (re)centre the gendered drivers of violence against women in violence prevention and response activities. This includes engaging prevention stakeholders and practitioners to ensure confidence in their knowledge of and ability to speak about the gendered drivers of violence.
- The media have a strong role to play in how we think and talk about violence against women. There are opportunities for greater capacity for media professionals to align with prevention principles when reporting on gendered violence and prevention.
- Promoting and facilitating connectedness among primary prevention, early intervention, and tertiary response stakeholders will contribute to shared understanding and learning.
- Aboriginal community-controlled organisations are leading work to prevent and respond to violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in Queensland.

Ideas for the future

Stakeholders who attended the discussion forum identified ideas for expanding primary prevention in Queensland:

- Given primary prevention of violence against women approaches have short-, medium-, and long-term strategies and there has only been a short period of adoption in Queensland, it can be difficult to show the positive changes occurring. It is important to remember that it is early days, and to put in place monitoring mechanisms, such as adapting Our Watch's [Counting on change: A guide to prevention monitoring](#), to demonstrate progress
- There are a number of interconnected settings across the [socio-ecological model](#) that offer opportunities for enhanced primary prevention interventions. This includes embedding prevention across people's life course and across systems in Queensland. For example, targeted interventions during key stages and moments of people's lives such as pregnancy and parenthood. This must be coupled with integrated primary prevention initiatives throughout people's educational and professional lives in schools, higher education and workplaces. Such continuity can be supported by evidence-based primary prevention interventions like [respectful relationships education](#) and [Workplace Equality and Respect standards](#).
- Adopt a multi-pronged primary prevention approach that consists of cultivating change through policy, organisational change, and other means and techniques would contribute to working across the socio-ecological model to address the gendered drivers of violence against women. This must be supported by a coordinated violence against women sector that is not siloed, but works together and is connected across primary prevention, early intervention, and tertiary responses.
- Engage men and boys in primary prevention of violence against women by building men and boys' understanding of the gendered drivers, including complicity in male privilege and stereotypical constructions of masculinities (and femininities) as outlined in [Men in focus: Unpacking masculinities and engaging men in the prevention of violence against women](#). There is scope for further coordination and information-sharing on best-practice in engaging men and boys to build those partnerships and have those conversations with men.
- Develop practical strategies and ready-to-use primary prevention actions in primary care settings.
- Everyone has a role in preventing violence against women; opportunities exist to engage potentially 'untapped' relationships with stakeholders that may not usually be involved in primary prevention. For example, partnering the private sector and encourage corporate investment as part of their social responsibilities.
- Develop place-based approaches to primary prevention that uses integrated models, engaging local Queensland communities to ensure ownership, legitimacy and context-appropriate primary prevention interventions.
- There needs to be clearer dissemination of primary prevention solutions, activities and achievements within the broader community to show that the sector is taking action.

What needs to change in the Queensland context to enable progress on primary prevention?

- Currently, much prevention work in Queensland is completed 'off the side of the desk' by services who primarily intervene in and respond to violence against women. Dedicated and sustained resourcing is critical to supporting and expanding prevention work in Queensland. This includes funding for collaboration and coordination of primary prevention among stakeholders, which is foundational to this work.
- In Queensland, communities are good at speaking up around violence against women. This needs to be supported by greater community education and capacity-building of common language, concepts and frameworks around gendered violence. Such dissemination must harness the expertise of the specialist sectors, who often lead this work, and expand to take a whole-of-community approach.
- Further support is needed for stakeholders to communicate effectively about primary prevention concepts and actions. This will support and build confidence of key stakeholders to embed prevention approaches in their work, such as teachers, community centres and local health clinics, and minimise potential resistance and backlash.
- Tipping points such as institutional reform and changes to laws and policies (e.g. decriminalisation of abortion) can provide openings for progress on primary prevention. Such 'windows of opportunity' can be capitalised on strategically to progress primary prevention upstream and downstream where appropriate. Stakeholders identified that this should be done in solidarity and collaboration with diverse groups that represent all women impacted by such changes.
- All levels of government can work together to support primary prevention. For example, local governments can provide a conduit from the community up to state and federal levels of government, and vice versa. This should be in collaboration with the sector and guided by existing (or future) evidence-based frameworks to support primary prevention work.