

# Fact sheet 2.

## Prevention of violence against women



### What is primary prevention?

Primary prevention aims to stop violence against women before it starts. It addresses the drivers (causes) of violence, rather than the effects. This approach seeks to transform the social behaviours, attitudes and beliefs that uphold gender inequality. [\*Change the story\*](#) is a national framework that identifies **eight essential actions** needed to address the gendered drivers of violence and prevent violence against women.

Primary prevention sits alongside other approaches to addressing violence against women. For example, response and recovery approaches support individuals who have already experienced or used violence. Early intervention targets groups who are at higher risk of perpetrating or experiencing violence. **Primary prevention is a whole-of-population approach that works across multiple levels and settings in society.**

These approaches are closely linked and mutually reinforcing. Local governments that work in a number of different ways across their community are well-placed to act on primary prevention.

### Eight essential actions to address the gendered drivers of violence and change the social context in which it occurs

#### **ACTION 1.** **ESSENTIAL**

Challenge the condoning of violence against women

#### **ACTION 2.** **ESSENTIAL**

Promote women's independence and decision-making in public life and relationships

#### **ACTION 3.** **ESSENTIAL**

Build new social norms that foster personal identities not constrained by rigid gender stereotypes

#### **ACTION 4.** **ESSENTIAL**

Support men and boys to develop healthy masculinities and positive, supportive male peer relationships

#### **ACTION 5.** **ESSENTIAL**

Promote and normalise gender equality in public and private life

#### **ACTION 6.** **ESSENTIAL**

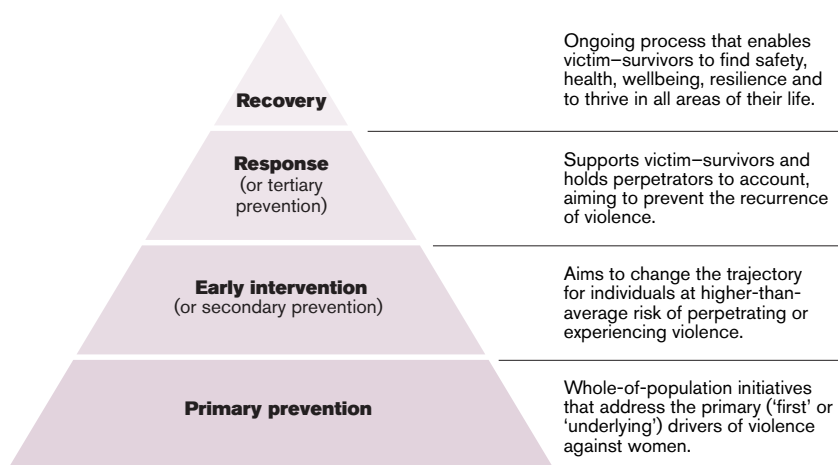
Address the intersections between gender inequality and other forms of systemic and structural oppression and discrimination, and promote broader social justice

#### **ACTION 7.** **ESSENTIAL**

Build safe, fair and equitable organisations and institutions by focusing on policy and systems change

#### **ACTION 8.** **ESSENTIAL**

Strengthen positive, equal and respectful relations between and among women and men, girls and boys, in public and private spheres



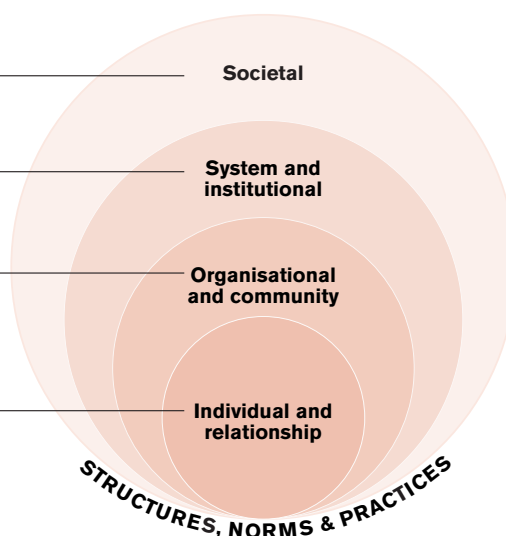
### The relationship between primary prevention and other work to address violence against women

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## The socio-ecological model of violence against women

**Examples of structures, norms and practices found to increase the probability of violence against women, at different levels of the social ecology.**

Dominant social norms supporting rigid roles and stereotyping, or condoning, excusing and downplaying violence against women.
Failure of systems, institutions and policies to promote women's economic, legal and societal autonomy, or to adequately address violence against women.
Organisation and community norms, structures and practices supporting or failing to address gender inequality, stereotyping, discrimination and violence.
Individual adherence to rigid gender roles and identities, weak support for gender equality, social learning of violence against women, male dominance and controlling behaviours in relationships.



### What do we mean by a 'whole-of' approach?

Primary prevention activities work to challenge and transform gender inequality across all levels of society and across a range of settings in which people live, learn, work, socialise and play. Because gender inequality is enforced by social structures, norms and practices, it must be addressed across whole populations. (See the diagram above for examples of structures, norms and practices that increase the probability of violence against women.)

'Whole-of' approaches are highly desirable when developing municipal strategies for the prevention of violence against women. Local government can take a whole-of-council, whole-of-workplace and whole-of-community approach to primary prevention that seeks to engage everyone in the population, community, organisation, association or group. These approaches recognise that change is complex and requires multiple actions, including policy, practice and structural change.

Effective violence prevention can be slow-moving and requires action over the long term.

While a whole-of-community approach might not be feasible for councils that have only recently started to work on the primary prevention of violence against women, early-stage prevention initiatives can be a simple first step. Fact sheet 5 has ideas on how to start small and get the ball rolling.

See MAV's [Local government guide for preventing family violence and all forms of violence against women](#), which takes a whole-of-council approach to embedding primary prevention initiatives.

### What are gender norms, practices and structures, and how are they relevant?

**Gender norms** are ideas, attitudes, beliefs, values or 'rules' about how girls and boys, women and men *should* think, behave and act. People learn these 'rules' early in life. **Practices** represent the ways these norms are acted out in everyday life, and **structures** refer to systems, policies and laws that direct our behaviour. These dominant and restrictive ideas perpetuate gender inequality across our society.

Examples of **gender norms** include the belief that women should be the primary carers of children, and the expectation that 'boys don't cry'. **Practices** could include women taking on a disproportionate amount of low-paid or voluntary caring work, and differences in childrearing practices for boys and girls. **Structures** include pay differences between men and women, and jobs traditionally held by women being paid less than jobs traditionally held by men.<sup>1</sup> Together, these position men as having power over women. Primary prevention activities seek to challenge and transform gender norms, practices and structures that entrench gender inequality.

<sup>1</sup> Our Watch. (n.d.). [The link between gender inequality and violence against women](#). Our Watch.