

Fact sheet 4.

The role of local government in preventing violence against women



Preventing violence against women is everyone's responsibility and requires commitment from all levels of government, different sectors, and members of the community.¹ As the closest level of government to the community, local government is uniquely placed to prevent violence against women.

What are the benefits of prevention for local government?

Local governments play an important role in enhancing the health, connectedness and safety of every resident in their community. This role aligns with the goal that all women, families and communities live free from violence. In addition to this, councils benefit from engaging in prevention by:

- achieving an accessible, inclusive and productive workplace culture by implementing gender equality policies and practices, making councils better places for everyone to work in
- becoming an employer of choice, appealing to a wider range of prospective employees
- increasing the capacity of women from diverse backgrounds to enter senior roles, thereby bringing new perspectives to leadership that can help councils be agile, effective and responsive
- improving community representation and civic participation in council decision-making
- reducing socioeconomic barriers for many community members through more equitable programming, planning and resource distribution
- complying with legislative reforms such as [Respect@Work](#)

- increasing community trust as councils become better able to meet community needs and the expectation of equality for all genders, ages, identities and abilities.

The cost of violence against women and their children in Australia was calculated at \$22 billion in 2015–16.² Therefore, preventing violence against women also has significant financial benefits. There is much evidence that when women are given equal opportunity to participate, community and economic wellbeing increases.³

How can councils play a role in prevention?

A key way to create a culture that is safe, respectful and inclusive for councillors and council staff and the whole community is to consider how council decisions, policies, programs and services will meet the needs of women, men and gender diverse people. This can easily be included in normal processes for developing policies, programs and services that impact communities and council itself as a workplace. As outlined in MAV's [Local government guide for preventing family violence and all forms of violence against women](#), councils have four domains of influence to prevent violence against women. These are:

- council leadership and decision-makers
- council as a service provider
- council as a workplace
- council as a community connector.

Each of these domains is showcased in more detail in Fact sheets 8–11.

¹ Commonwealth of Australia (Department of Social Services). (2019). [Fourth Action Plan—National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022](#)

² Commonwealth of Australia (Department of Social Services). (2016). [The cost of violence against women and their children in Australia: Final report.](#)

³ Workplace Gender Equality Agency. (2018). [Workplace gender equality: The business case.](#)

What are some practical actions that councils can take?

Practical actions that councils can take include:

- elected representatives and executive leaders showing leadership and modelling gender equality through their language, actions and decisions
- developing and implementing council policies, services, programs and partnerships that focus on gender equality and utilise a [gender lens](#)
- providing guidance and support for community-level prevention, which could include community campaigns, events, grants and other types of social infrastructure
- facilitating community consultations that are accessible to people with a wide range of perspectives, and ensuring that everyone has a way to voice their views (don't assume that certain people should not or do not want to be involved in having a say on a certain issue)
- using data that identifies gender, race, religion, sexuality, disability status and socioeconomic background demographics to address social inequalities in the population that you work with.

These and other steps can help to ensure that council decision-making includes a focus on gender equality, within a wider vision for a safe, thriving and inclusive community.

How can partnerships help in prevention work?

Working together is key to preventing violence against women across Australia. Councils are not expected to be the experts on prevention, they can collaborate with specialist family and domestic violence services and women's organisations to complement and support each other's work. Most councils work with community partners and specialist services to implement council plans and deliver services. This includes, but is not limited to, community-based organisations, contractors, emergency services,

workplaces and business organisations, schools and neighbouring councils. Partnerships can increase reach, relevance and success of prevention initiatives.

Many councils establish their own advisory groups comprising specialist organisations and community members focused on areas including emergency management, disability access, economic development, the environment, positive ageing, multiculturalism, and community wellbeing and safety. These advisory groups can integrate a focus on the essential actions to prevent violence against women. Councils can also establish advisory groups focusing specifically on gender equality.

Examples of prevention in local government

- Our Watch webinar, [Councils and Communities](#) – for staff working across a wide range of areas who have the opportunity to lead and support prevention initiatives in their communities.
- Inner West Council (NSW), [Gender Equity Strategy and Action Plan](#) – acknowledges that gender inequality sets the underlying context for domestic and family violence and ensures that gender equity is built into the council's operations, recruitment, planning, policy and strategy work.
- City of Salisbury (SA), [No More Excuses](#) (page 21) – a whole-of-community project where council partnered with local specialists to deliver respectful relationships programs in primary and high schools, and bystander workshops for council staff and community, and conducted a gender equity audit on council policies and workplace culture. They also funded grants for local advocacy and support groups, and programs related to gender equality and preventing violence.
- City of Greater Bendigo (Vic), [Coalition for Gender Equity](#) – a diverse collective of 41 organisations and groups (as at May 2022) in the public, private and community sectors, dedicated to advancing gender equity and the prevention of violence against women.