



The path to a safer and stronger Victoria

All Victorians should live free from violence and feel safe where they live, learn, work and play.

Investing in the prevention of gender-based violence helps create safer communities and stronger health, justice, education and housing systems. As Victoria faces growing concerns about cost-of-living pressures, community safety and pressure on frontline services, prevention has never been more important.

This paper highlights opportunities to strengthen action to prevent violence against women and their children in Victoria ahead of the 2026 Victorian election. Our Watch is a multipartisan organisation and shares these priorities with political leaders, candidates and advisers across all parties.

Over the past decade, Victoria has been a national leader in preventing gender-based violence through sustained investment and reform. Victoria now has a stronger prevention workforce, stronger policies and institutions, and a range of initiatives aimed at stopping violence before it occurs. Data shows encouraging progress, with significant reductions across multiple forms of violence against women.¹

To build on this progress, Victoria must maintain whole-of-government leadership and long-term investment to continue driving positive change.



Key opportunities for Victoria

- 1 **Invest** in prevention to strengthen Victoria's future
- 2 **Support** student wellbeing and learning
- 3 **Coordinate** prevention action across governments and communities
- 4 **Create** safer communities for all Victorians
- 5 **Sustain** Victoria's prevention workforce

1. Invest in prevention to strengthen Victoria's future

Gender-based violence continues to cause significant and preventable harm across Victoria. It increases pressure on hospitals, mental health, justice, housing and community services through injury, trauma, long-term psychosocial impacts, housing instability and homelessness.^{2 3}

Economic insecurity can increase the risk of intimate partner violence,⁴ highlighting the importance of investing in prevention during periods of financial stress and uncertainty.

Continued investment in primary prevention is critical not only to improving safety, but also to reducing long-term pressure on essential services and supporting healthier, safer and more connected communities. Long-term investment will help Victoria build on the progress achieved through past reforms and deliver lasting social and economic benefits through a strong and sustainable primary prevention system, including organisations such as Respect Victoria.

Coroners Court highlights the critical role of primary prevention

In December 2024, coronial findings highlighted the importance of primary prevention in **reducing reportable deaths**. Judge John Cain, State Coroner of Victoria, emphasised the need to

"urgently increase the total quantum of primary prevention funding and prioritise longer-term funding."



2. Support student wellbeing and learning

Victoria is a national leader in Respectful Relationships Education (RRE). Schools are critical places for shaping attitudes, behaviours and relationships that influence lifelong outcomes. Exposure to violence and harmful gender norms can affect student wellbeing, behaviour and engagement⁵ placing additional pressure on educators and disrupting learning.

Evidence-based RRE supports respectful behaviours, challenges gender stereotypes, reduces bullying and strengthens student-teacher relationships.⁶ Building on more than a decade of Victorian Government investment in Respectful Relationships Education, continued effort and resourcing is needed to ensure RRE is delivered consistently across all Victorian schools leading to improved long-term health, wellbeing and educational outcomes for young people.

Opportunities also exist to strengthen a whole-of-school-community approach by building teacher confidence and supporting parents and carers to reinforce key RRE messages. Continued investment in monitoring, evaluation and research will strengthen the evidence base, improve implementation and ensure positive outcomes for students, schools and communities.

3. Coordinate prevention action across governments and communities

Coordinating action across governments and communities is essential to achieving lasting change in systems such as health, education, justice and housing. Working across state and local governments ensures prevention efforts reach Victorians where they live, learn, work and play.

The Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV), as the peak body for local government, plays an important leadership and coordination role across Victoria's 79 councils. Sustained funding is needed to maintain and expand prevention efforts at the local level. Through its community and social infrastructure, local government has an unrivalled ability to reach communities and support the conditions needed for prevention to succeed.

Place-based initiatives such as *Respect Ballarat* demonstrate how prevention can mobilise community leadership and respond to local needs and priorities, advance the evidence-base and accelerate prevention efforts. These approaches require investment in workforce and community capability, ongoing evaluation and specialist family, domestic and sexual violence services, to ensure prevention is complemented by an effective response system.

50%

After Yarrunga Primary School implemented **Respectful Relationships Education**, antisocial behaviour dropped by 50% in one year.



4. Create safer communities for all Victorians

Prevention approaches must be inclusive of Victoria's diverse communities so that all Victorians can live safely and participate equally in community life.

This includes First Nations communities, multicultural communities, women with disabilities, LGBTIQ+ communities and others who may experience gender inequality, discrimination or violence in different ways. Continued long-term support for, and engagement with, organisations working with diverse communities will help ensure prevention efforts remain locally relevant, culturally safe and responsive to community needs.

Family violence is the leading cause of homelessness for women and children

(ANROWS, 2019) ⁷



5. Sustain Victoria's prevention workforce

Victoria has built a strong workforce that supports schools, workplaces, sporting clubs, local government and communities.

Continued investment in workforce development and sector leadership organisations such as Safe and Equal will help retain specialist expertise and support consistent delivery across Victoria.



Endnotes

- 1 Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2023). *Personal safety, Australia, 2021-22*. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/crime-and-justice/personal-safety-australia/2021-22>.
- 2 Our Watch. (2021). *Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women in Australia* (2nd ed.). Our Watch.
- 3 Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission. (2025). *Yearly report to Parliament*. Australian Government.
- 4 Morgan, A., & Boxall, H. (2022). *Economic insecurity and intimate partner violence in Australia during the COVID-19 pandemic*. ANROWS & Australian Institute of Criminology.
- 5 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2026). *Family, domestic and sexual violence—Children and young people*. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/family-domestic-and-sexual-violence/population-groups/children-and-young-people>
- 6 Our Watch. (2025). *Respectful relationships education: A blueprint for preventing gender-based violence through education systems*. Our Watch.
- 7 Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety. (2019). *Domestic and family violence, housing insecurity and homelessness: Research synthesis* (2nd ed.; ANROWS Insights No. 07/2019). ANROWS.
- 8 Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2023). *Personal safety, Australia, 2021-22*. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/crime-and-justice/personal-safety-australia/2021-22>.

Victoria has seen encouraging progress, with

women's reported experiences of violence significantly decreasing across more measured types of violence than other jurisdictions.

(ABS, 2023)⁸



A real opportunity for Victoria

Victoria has built strong foundations to prevent gender-based violence. The next step is clear.

With sustained investment and whole-of-government action, the next Victorian Government can reduce harm, support women and children's safety and ease pressure on frontline systems. At a time when Victorians are focused on cost-of-living pressures, crime and community safety, investing in prevention is a practical and evidence-based way to address the drivers of violence before harm occurs.

Preventing gender-based violence is essential to Victoria's future prosperity, safety and wellbeing.

To discuss more ways to invest in prevention in Victoria, contact:

Sanjugta Vas Dev

Director, Government Relations,
Policy and Evidence

sanjugta.vasdev@ourwatch.org.au

ourwatch.org.au

**Our
Watch**

Preventing violence
against women