

JUNE 2025

Policy brief: **Men and Masculinities in the Primary Prevention of Gender-based Violence**

Policy, legislative and regulatory opportunities to promote positive and more expansive forms of masculinity and work with men and boys to prevent gender-based violence



OurWatch Preventing violence
against women

Acknowledgement of Country



Our Watch acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land across Australia on which we work and live. We pay respects to Elders past and present and recognise the continuing connection Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have to land, culture, knowledge and language for over 65,000 years.

As a non-Indigenous organisation, Our Watch understands that violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children is not an 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander problem.' As highlighted in Our Watch's national resource *Changing the picture*, there is an intersection between racism, sexism and violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

Our Watch has an ongoing commitment to the prevention of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children, who continue to experience violence at a significantly higher rate than non-Indigenous women. We acknowledge all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who continue to lead the work of sharing knowledge with non-Indigenous people and relentlessly advocate for an equitable, violence-free future in Australia.

About Our Watch

Our Watch is a national leader in the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia. We are an independent, not-for-profit organisation established in 2013. All Australian governments are members of Our Watch. Our vision is an Australia where women and their children live free from all forms of violence. We aim to drive nation-wide change in the culture, behaviours, attitudes, social structures and systems that drive violence against women. Guided by national frameworks, *Change the story* (2nd ed 2021), *Changing the picture* (2018) and *Changing the landscape* (2022), we work at all levels of society to address the deeply entrenched, underlying drivers of violence against women. We work in partnership with governments, practitioners, and the community, at all levels of Australian society, to address these drivers of violence in all settings where people live, learn, work and socialise.

About this Policy Brief

This brief is intended to outline policy, regulatory and legislative opportunities for promoting more positive and expansive forms of masculinity and working with men and boys to prevent gender-based violence.

Our Watch undertakes a wide range of work in this area, including as informed by a national consultation in 2024.

Our Watch recognises the important work being undertaken across Australia by a wide range of stakeholders as well as partner organisations who collaborate to build the evidence base on preventing gender-based violence. This brief is informed by this work and the existing evidence base, including the *Men in focus evidence review*, the *Men in focus practice guide*, the Jesuit Social Services *Man Box 2024* report, and other research.

The brief and the suggested opportunities within the brief complement existing activities being undertaken to work with men and address masculinities to prevent gender-based violence. The contents are intended to guide and support the work of Commonwealth, state and territory governments.

Our Watch, as non-Indigenous organisation, is committed to playing its role in ending violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. Our Watch acknowledges the important role that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and boys can and do play as allies and leaders in preventing gender-based violence, and is committed to supporting the development of a similar brief specifically focused on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and their roles in prevention. This work should be led by, or developed through a co-design process with, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and stakeholders.

There is also an opportunity to consider development of briefs or information relating to other opportunities for members of the LGBTIQ+ community, migrant and refugee communities, and people with disability.

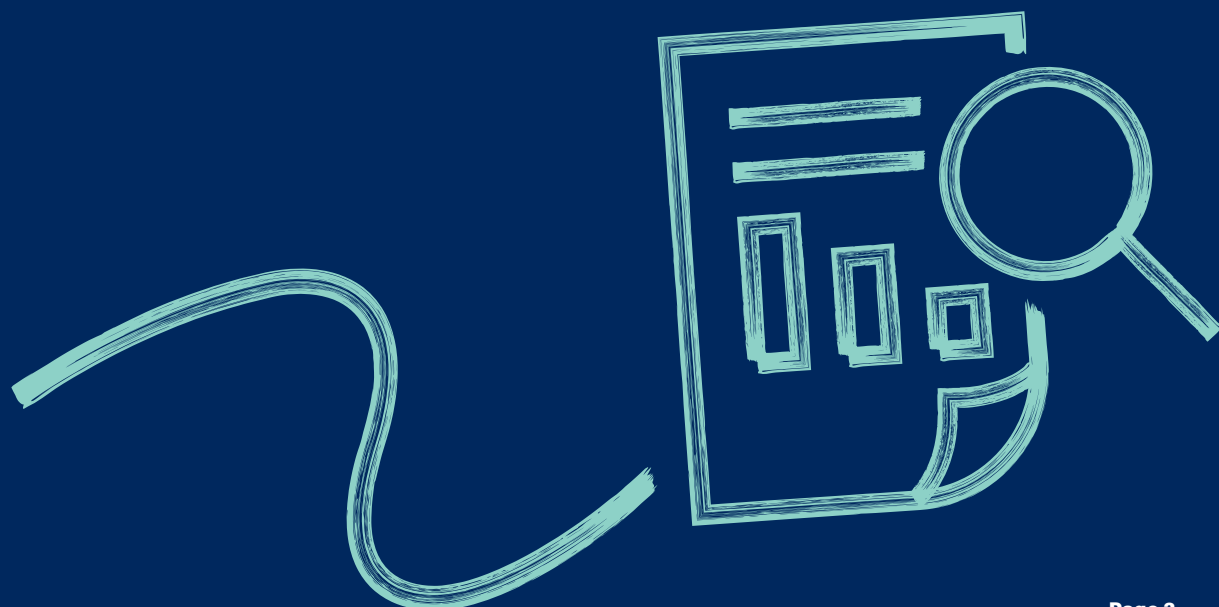
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Executive Summary

Ending gender-based violence requires preventing it occurring in the first place. Importantly, this requires work with men and boys, including to challenge the stereotypes and cultures that underpin the drivers of gender-based violence.

Working with men and boys to address masculinities has been an important and growing component of primary prevention efforts for some time. There is a wide range of primary prevention work that includes and/or is led by men and boys nationally, as well as key work focused on masculinities. Primary prevention work to date has generally focused less on the systems and institutional level of the socio-ecological model than on other levels, such as individual or societal. **This brief focuses on the systems and institutional level, including potential policy, legislative and regulatory reform with actions that have the potential to support broadscale changes across the whole of society.**

Potential opportunities outlined in this brief interact with other levels of the socio-ecological model – individual, relationship, organisational, societal – and they complement, rather than replace, action at these other levels. This is why the brief refers to both ‘working with men and boys’ and ‘addressing masculinities’. To prevent gender-based violence, evidence indicates it is important to engage individuals to reflect on their attitudes and behaviour, and also to change norms and expectations which are often reproduced by organisations, structures and institutions.¹

In 2024, Our Watch held a national consultation with 50 stakeholders to consider what is needed to build more coordinated and evidence-informed approaches to working with men and addressing masculinities to prevent gender-based violence. A key recommendation made in the report arising from the consultation was identifying and enacting policy, regulatory and legislative reforms to promote more expansive forms of masculinity and engage men and boys in preventing gender-based violence.² This policy brief forms part of Our Watch’s response to that recommendation.

Governments at all levels have a key role to play in developing and implementing prevention initiatives focused on working with men and boys, particularly through policy change. **There are a range of opportunities for governments to drive system-level change and use policy, legislative and regulatory levers to work with men and boys and address masculinities to prevent gender-based violence.**

This brief outlines a select number of practical ways Commonwealth, state and territory governments can use the various policy, regulatory and legislative mechanisms at their disposal to promote more positive and expansive forms of masculinity, and work with men and boys to prevent gender-based violence. Some opportunities relate to the Commonwealth, some to states and territories, and some apply to both levels of government. While state and territory opportunities are designed to be relevant across all jurisdictions, each government will need to tailor their approach to suit their specific context.

Opportunities outlined in this brief include:

1. Leveraging government mechanisms to prevent gender-based violence
 - 1.1 Whole-of-government coordination and employment
 - 1.2 Using government procurement and grants to have an impact in supplier and grantee organisations
2. Positively impacting cultures of masculinity online
3. Ensuring quality of work with men and boys to prevent violence
4. Using fatherhood as an opportunity to work towards gender equality

Importantly, these opportunities are practical and specific and were selected on the basis that they can be achieved through mechanisms which generally already exist and are readily available to government. Each opportunity relates to at least one of the drivers of gender-based violence, and contributes to one or more of the essential and supporting actions outlined

in *Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia*.

There are a wide range of other actions governments can take in these and other areas, as outlined in the frameworks and resources listed below.

MORE OPPORTUNITIES FOR GOVERNMENT ACTION:



Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia



Men in focus evidence review
Men in focus practice guide



Changing the picture: A national resource to support the prevention of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their children



Changing the landscape: A national resource to prevent violence against women and girls with disabilities

Background

Why men and masculinity?

Commonwealth, state and territory governments have committed to ending gender-based violence.³ To achieve this, it is essential to prevent violence occurring in the first place. As recognised in the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children, while not all men use violence, all men can play a vital role in preventing it.⁴ Men and boys make up half the population, and men are still more likely to hold positions of power in organisations, institutions and at the highest levels of decision-making. So, **without men and boys, achieving the kind of social change necessary is not possible.**

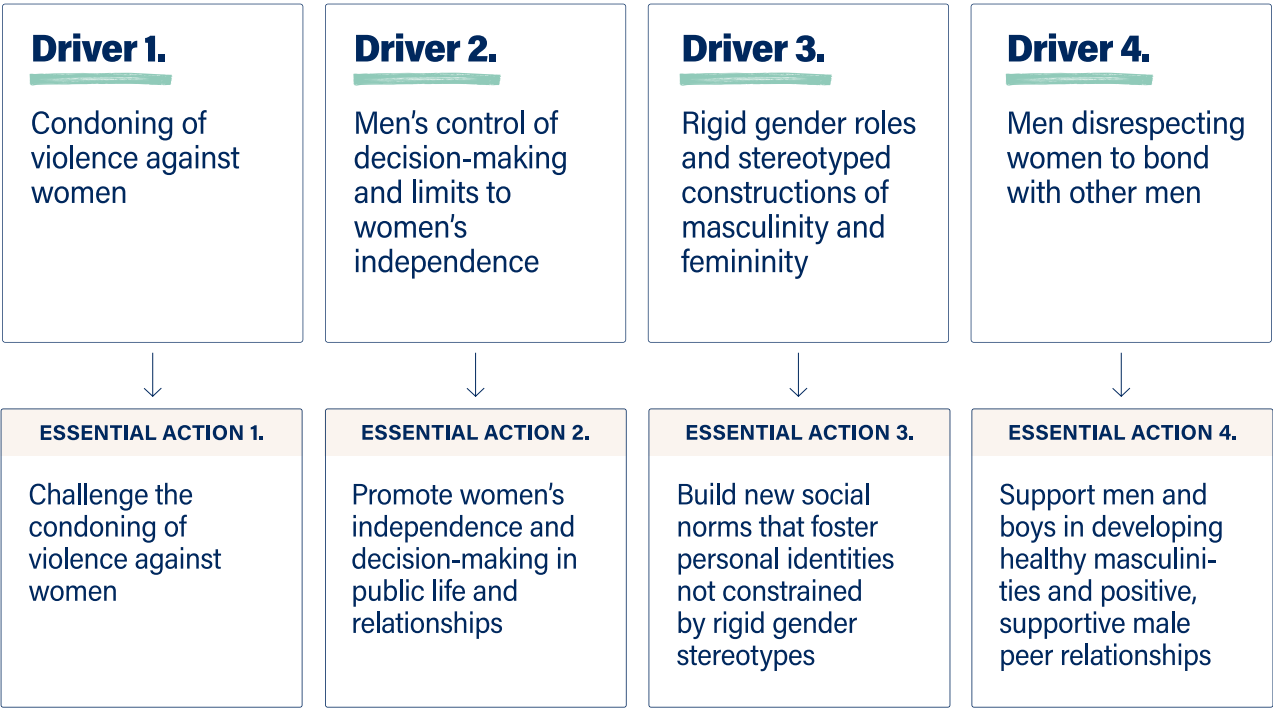
Research shows that dominant forms and patterns of masculinity – and men’s rigid attachments to these – help drive gender-based violence.⁵ It also illustrates that men with the strongest attachments to rigid ideas about masculinity are the most likely to use gendered violence, and to use behaviour harmful to themselves.⁶

Evidence indicates the main drivers of violence against women are gendered. These drivers include:

- men’s control of decision-making and limits to women’s independence;
- rigid gender stereotyping and dominant forms of masculinity; and
- peer relations and cultures of masculinity that emphasise aggression, dominance and control.⁷

The gendered drivers are part of a broader social context where gender inequality intersects with other forms of inequality and discrimination, including racism, colonialism, cis- and heteronormativity, classism and ableism. Given this context, it is critical that policy responses to preventing gender-based violence are developed in an intersectional way, including by recognising the way laws, policies, systems and institutions can reinforce multiple forms of discrimination and oppression.

GENDERED DRIVERS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN



ESSENTIAL ACTIONS TO ADDRESS THE GENDERED DRIVERS

All men have a role to play in challenging the stereotypes and cultures that underpin the gendered drivers. This means men and boys being supported to think about their actions and to actively question and resist harmful gender norms and stereotypes. It is equally important to promote positive messaging and a strengths-based approach that fosters the development of healthier identities and more respectful peer relationships. This work must occur across the life course – for example, working with boys at school and men at university and TAFE; engaging men during fatherhood; as well as work with men in adulthood when many are consolidating their personal and professional lives and can be engaged as positive role models. Beyond the individual level, men are uniquely positioned to drive structural and cultural change in that they still hold most positions of power and influence in society. There are opportunities for men to use these positions to challenge the gendered drivers of violence and advance gender equality across organisations and institutions.

Why focus on policy?

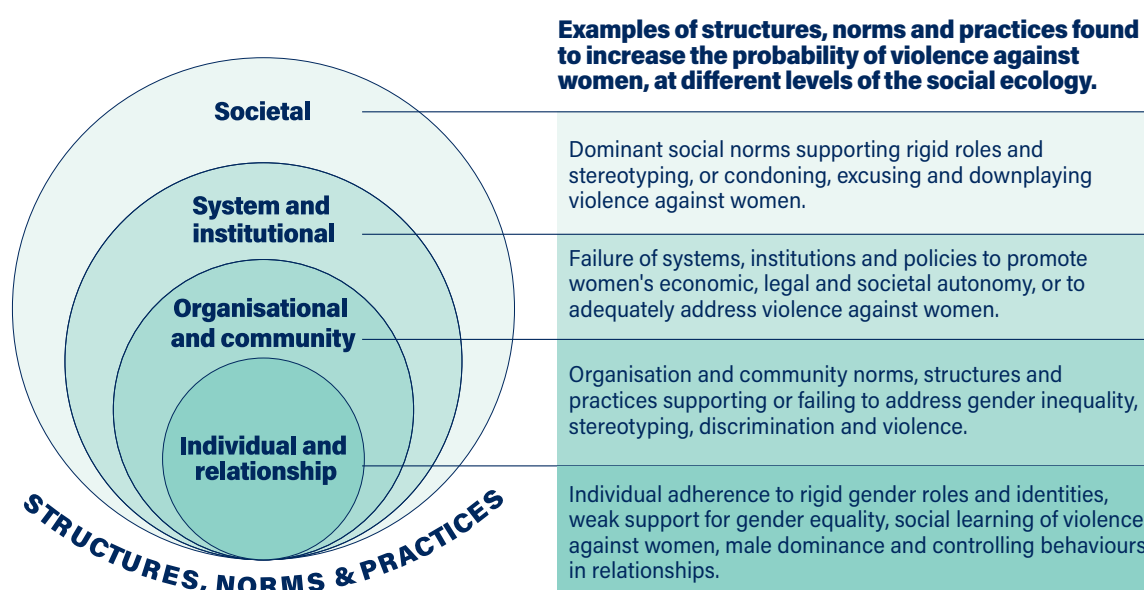
Policy decisions have the potential to influence the attitudes, behaviours and power imbalances that drive gendered violence at an individual, organisational, community and whole-of-society level. Crucially, individual attitudes and behaviours can be impacted by organisational, community or institutional cultures. For example, an individual man's rigid ideas about gender can be reinforced or challenged by the culture of his workplace, by media representations, or by how community leaders

model particular ways of being a man. These beliefs can also be shaped by the way in which government policy settings impact on the lives of both men and women. The socio-ecological model outlined in *Change the story* explains that violence against women is driven by a range of interconnected factors across multiple levels – including the individual and relationship level, the organisational and community level, the systems and institutional level, and the societal level.⁸

To date, primary prevention work with men and boys has generally focused more on the individual, relationship, community and organisational levels, and less on the systems and institutional level.⁹

By focusing specifically on policy, regulation and legislation, this brief suggests opportunities for action at the systems and institutional level. These actions have the potential to support broadscale changes across the whole of society.

It is important to note that these actions will have significant interactions with other levels – and that these actions complement, but do not replace, action at other levels of the socio-ecological model. This is why this brief refers to both 'working with men and boys' as well as 'addressing masculinities'. In addition to engaging individuals to reflect on their own attitudes and behaviours, it is also necessary to change norms and expectations that there is one 'right way to be a man' – norms and expectations which are often reproduced and legitimised by organisations, structures and institutions.¹⁰



A range of people and organisations work with men and boys, across a continuum from primary prevention of gender-based violence, through to early intervention, response, recovery and healing. For example, early intervention programs work with men and boys at particular risk of using violence to address early signs and change the trajectory of their behaviour. In the area of response, Men's Behaviour Change Programs work with men who have used violence, to support them to change. Primary prevention – the focus of this brief – aims to stop gender-based violence before it starts by working with men and boys and addressing masculinities to change the attitudes, norms and structures which drive this violence in the first place.

Importantly however, this work needs to occur in mutually reinforcing ways across the continuum. In practice, programs, services, and initiatives may also contain elements of more than one approach.

Opportunities to learn from diverse communities

Work with men and to address masculinities should consider how masculinity intersects with other expressions of identity, and recognise that there are many different ways of being a man.

There are valuable lessons to be taken from many communities on masculinity and other ways of expressing gender and other identities. Many members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer and asexual (LGBTIQA+) community have awareness and lived experience of the harms of rigid gender norms and heteronormativity, and can offer important insights for challenging rigid ideas of gender and promoting more expansive ideas of masculinity. Men from migrant and refugee backgrounds may enact masculinity in ways that challenge white, Western masculine ideals; community role models can play a powerful part; and they may also have experiences of racism and discrimination from which to draw to inform prevention work.¹¹ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men often draw on cultural strength, kinship and collective responsibility to lead in ways that promote safety, healing and respect, in the face of ongoing impacts of colonisation and racism.¹²

What has been done so far?

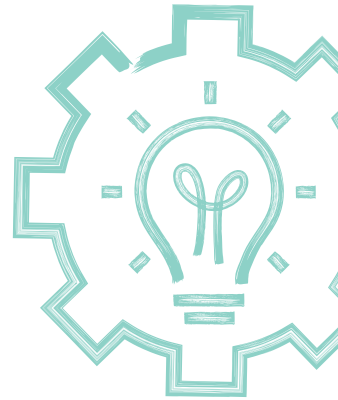
Working with men and addressing masculinities has been an important and growing component of primary prevention efforts for some time. Work by, and with, men to prevent gender-based violence has been occurring in some form for decades, led by a wide range of individuals and organisations, predominantly by women's organisations and women and gender-diverse people. Key developments more recently include:

- Incorporation of the need to support men and boys in developing healthy masculinities and positive relationships with their peers as an objective under the *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032*.
- Many governments are beginning to include work with men and boys in their efforts to prevent gender-based violence.
- *Change the story* explores the relationship between masculinity and men's violence against women.
- The *Men in focus evidence review* provides a summary of research on men, masculinity and gender-based violence.
- The *Men in focus practice guide* provides guidance for practitioners, educators and others undertaking this work.
- The *Man Box 2024* provides evidence on the attitudes to manhood and the behaviours of Australian men aged 18 to 45.
- *Willing, capable and confident: men, masculinities and the prevention of violence against women* draws key findings from qualitative research associated with the Man Box 2024.
- *Changing the picture: a national resource to support the prevention of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their children* includes a specific focus on initiatives, services and programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and boys.
- *Changing the landscape: a national resource to prevent violence against women and girls with disabilities* includes actions on challenging controlling, dominant and aggressive forms of masculinity to prevent violence against women and girls with disabilities.

Multiple advantages of this work

There are significant and varied advantages of a focus on men and masculinities, beyond preventing gendered violence. Supporting men to be free from rigid gender norms has the potential to positively impact men's mental health.¹³ It can also support building critical literacy to reduce men's exposure to and engagement with violent and extremist content and groups.¹⁴ Additionally, it can help to reduce homophobia and transphobia and prevent men's violence against LGBTIQ+ people by challenging rigid gender norms.

Opportunities for governments



FOCUS AREA 1:

Leveraging government mechanisms to prevent gender-based violence

1.1 Whole-of-government coordination and employment

COMMONWEALTH GOVERNMENT

STATE + TERRITORY GOVERNMENTS

Why?

Preventing gender-based violence means engaging people everywhere they live, work, learn and socialise - making a whole-of-government approach to this work essential. Across jurisdictions, there are opportunities to strengthen visibility of and responsibility for primary prevention activities that involve work with men and boys as well as activity across government departments focusing on early intervention, response and recovery. There are also opportunities to build on existing governance mechanisms to strengthen coordination of prevention as a whole-of-government responsibility. This could include, for example, greater engagement across portfolios, including in policy areas that influence or engage large numbers of men.

Commonwealth, state and territory governments employ large numbers of people, including men. The Commonwealth public sector is required to comply with the *Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012* (Cth), which plays a key role as part of the legislative and regulatory infrastructure designed to advance gender equality. For example, the Act requires employers over a certain size to report on progress towards targets to improve gender equality in their workplace, selected from 6 gender equality indicators. However, the Act does not apply to state and territory governments.

How?

To strengthen existing governance and coordination mechanisms, there are opportunities to consider the establishment of inter-departmental working groups on the primary prevention of gender-based violence, including with senior representation from both central and line agencies and departments. This would clearly communicate that preventing gender-based violence is a shared, whole-of-government responsibility. There are opportunities for such groups to contribute to greater visibility and coordination of government work, as well as to build members' primary prevention capability and understanding of relevant evidence and effective policy and programming. Such capacity building could involve collaboration with primary prevention experts.

To effectively use the opportunities available to governments as employers, state and territory governments could consider ways in which to commit to or demonstrate progress towards gender equality. This could include, for example, drawing on the requirements of the *Workplace Gender Equality Act* which includes a commitment to reporting annually against the 6 gender equality

indicators and demonstrating that they have met, or can show progress towards, at least 3 indicators. Ideally, this would apply at department/agency level, to ensure that those departments and agencies with male-dominated workforces are required to initiate gender equality improvement processes. There are also opportunities across jurisdictions to build on existing work as part of primary prevention, gender equality and work, health and safety commitments across departments and agencies.

Considerations

- This opportunity sits within the context of the broader development and review of appropriate governance arrangements under the National Plan, as well as state and territory plans and strategies.

Benefits

- ✓ Supports government agencies to embed prevention of gender-based violence work throughout their portfolios
- ✓ Governments lead by example as employers of equal opportunity – which can create a flow-on effect among other employers
- ✓ Inclusion of state and territory public sectors under the *Workplace Gender Equality Act* is estimated to increase the coverage of the Act from around 40% to nearly 60% of Australian employees.¹⁵

1.2 Using government procurement and grants to have an impact in supplier and grantee organisations

COMMONWEALTH GOVERNMENT

STATE + TERRITORY GOVERNMENTS

Why?

Workplaces are key settings for having an impact on gender equality as they can shape and reinforce cultural norms, attitudes and beliefs – and can sometimes be sites of rigid gender stereotyping and dominant forms of masculinity.¹⁶ In organisations dominated by men or where peer relations between men dominate, there can be cultures that do not respect women and their rights, or do not support the inclusion of women from diverse backgrounds to equally participate and contribute.¹⁷ In some instances, such cultures can be unsafe and harmful for women.

State and territory governments spend significant amounts on procurement and grants each year, with the most populous states spending between \$10 and \$40 billion per year on procurement alone.¹⁸ This represents a major existing lever through which governments can positively influence the organisations that tender for these opportunities.

The Commonwealth Government has introduced procurement principles in association with the *Workplace Gender Equality Act*. Under these principles, organisations that fail to comply with the Act may not be eligible to compete for contracts under the Commonwealth Procurement Framework and may not be eligible for grants. The Workplace Gender Equality Procurement Principles outline the steps employers must take to comply with the *Workplace Gender*



Equality Act to participate in Government procurement. They also provide detail on how employers can demonstrate compliance.

How?

State and territory governments could develop procurement and grant principles that align with the Commonwealth principles and introduce mechanisms that result in organisations failing to demonstrate progress towards relevant targets – informed by Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) gender equality indicators – being ineligible to tender for state and territory procurement and grant opportunities. Organisations wishing to be considered for procurement and grant opportunities could be required to submit documentation demonstrating the extent to which they meet the gender equality indicators, and how they are working to improve their performance against these targets. The impact of this strategy is likely to be particularly pronounced for supplier organisations that mostly employ men.¹⁹

Considerations

- Thresholds for applicability – including employer size and grant/procurement amount – may need to be lower for less populous jurisdictions.
- There may need to be exceptions in cases where there are very limited supplier options. These exceptions should be kept to a minimum.
- In 2025 the Commonwealth Procurement Principles are under review, so jurisdictions should be informed by the findings of this review.
- The introduction of these principles and requirements should be undertaken in a holistic and phased way that complements other commitments and actions to prevent gender-based violence.
- To reduce reporting burden, organisations already compliant with the *Workplace Gender Equality Act* should be able to submit any documentation already developed in compliance with that Act.
- A lighter-touch option could involve not making non-compliant organisations automatically ineligible for funding, but instead factoring this into government decisions as one consideration when comparing applicants for grants and procurement opportunities.

Benefits

- ✓ Leverages significant government expenditure to further national goals to improve gender equality
- ✓ Supports alignment across jurisdictions

FOCUS AREA 2:

Positively impacting cultures of masculinity online

COMMONWEALTH GOVERNMENT

SUPPLEMENTARY OPPORTUNITIES FOR
STATE + TERRITORY GOVERNMENTS**Why?**

The growth of online technology has created a proliferation of new forums in which harmful ideas about masculinity and harmful male peer cultures can thrive. Social media in particular is a forum where cultures of gendered aggression, dominance, disrespect and abuse are relatively common, and the amount of misogynistic content online has increased in recent years.²⁰ This phenomenon is perhaps most evident in a number of high-profile 'manfluencers', but is certainly not restricted to them.²¹ Our Watch research indicates the majority of young Australians 14-20 years old have come into contact with 'manosphere' content online.²² The intersection between anti-women sentiment and other forms of hate is important: research points to links between misogynistic, racist and homophobic online content.²³

There is an opportunity to take regulatory and legislative approaches that are complemented by community education as well as broader primary prevention activities across settings and levels of society. In the online space, it is important to develop men's and boys' skills to critically analyse content, and to recognise misogynistic and hateful content more broadly.

To date there has been relatively limited focus on how to regulate online service providers to prevent these kinds of social harms. Where safeguards exist – in legislation, for example – they are focused on how companies respond to, rather than prevent, abuse. For instance, the *Online Safety Act 2021* (Cth) allows the eSafety Commissioner to direct online service providers (including social media companies) to remove harmful and abusive content.²⁴ Further consideration about how to prevent platforms from using recommender algorithms that promote and encourage the development of harmful online cultures characterised by dominant and aggressive forms of masculinity would be useful.

How?

There is an opportunity for the Commonwealth Government to progress its commitment to enact Recommendation 4 of the 2024 Report of the Statutory Review of the Online Safety Act, that 'Australia adopt a singular and overarching duty of care that encompasses due diligence, and is underpinned by safety by design principles, risk assessment, mitigation and measurement.'²⁵

This action would shift the focus from a response-focused approach to one that also encompasses the prevention of harm. It would also shift the burden from individual users having to report individual instances of harm, to the service provider having an overall duty of care and being required to create a safe environment. This approach has parallels with the recent introduction of a national positive duty on employers to prevent sexual harassment in Australian workplaces²⁶ as well as the UK Government requirement that online service providers have a duty of care to prevent foreseeable harms.²⁷

There are also opportunities to consider ways in which to reduce the potential for social media algorithms to cause harm. There is growing evidence that



some social media platforms function to deliver extreme and misogynistic content to boys and men via recommender algorithms, without any need for substantial input from the users themselves.²⁸ There is an opportunity for the Commonwealth Government to work, ideally in collaboration with like-minded nations, on strategies to encourage or require social media companies to give users the option to 'opt out' of algorithmic-sorted feeds. Another approach would be to require social media companies to provide greater transparency about the inner workings of their algorithms, in line with the recommendations from the Commonwealth House of Representatives Select Committee on Social Media and Online Safety.²⁹ Greater transparency and an option for users to 'opt out' of recommender systems are both suggestions that have also been made by the eSafety Commission.³⁰

While the primary focus of this focus area is the Commonwealth Government, there are also significant opportunities for state and territory governments in this area – including, for example, by funding online campaigns and influencers which demonstrate more expansive expressions of masculinity.

In addition to the regulatory options outlined above, there are opportunities to continue to strengthen broader primary prevention activities across key settings – including schools, workplaces, sporting organisations, educational institutions and the media – to ensure that the broader environment contributes to strengthening men's and boys' understanding and that they have the tools necessary to take action.

Considerations

- Regulatory and legislative approaches should be complemented by other measures. The effectiveness of changes to the *Online Safety Act* would be accelerated with appropriate community education, including building the ability of boys and men to think critically about the online content that they are engaging with (through Respectful Relationships Education, for example).
- There should be careful consideration of changes to the *Online Safety Act* to ensure the balancing of competing rights and complying with existing human rights obligations.

Benefits

- ✓ Furthers Australia's world-leading efforts to ensure online communities develop positive cultures, and to prevent online harm. Builds on the important work already being undertaken to prevent harm online, particularly by the eSafety Commission
- ✓ Addresses online spaces as a key setting for the potential proliferation of harmful cultures, with potential flow-on effects for other settings

FOCUS AREA 3:

Ensuring quality of work with men and boys to prevent violence

COMMONWEALTH GOVERNMENT

STATE + TERRITORY GOVERNMENTS

Why?

Ensuring the quality of work to prevent gender-based violence and support men's health is in everyone's interest, and material already exists to support development of quality assurance mechanisms.

Interest in working with men and boys to address masculinities and/or prevent gender-based violence has increased over the last decade, resulting in a proliferation of organisations undertaking such work.³¹ These organisations vary significantly in size, geographical coverage, objectives and the extent to which their work is evidence-based and subject to evaluation.³² Some explicitly aim to prevent gender-based violence, while others are more focused on promoting men's and boys' health, including mental health.

There are opportunities to ensure that work in this area is evidence-based and incorporates an intersectional and gendered approach, including a focus on masculinity. While there can be a reluctance to introduce quality mechanisms into a relatively new field, the number of organisations working in this space has reached a point where there is a need to ensure the work being undertaken is safe, accountable and effective.

How?

Commonwealth, state and territory governments could develop national standards for initiatives working with men and boys in the primary prevention of gendered violence and/or to address masculinities, similar to existing standards for Men's Behaviour Change Programs. Their development should be informed by advice from primary prevention experts and other relevant sectors. The standards could then inform government investment in this work.

There is significant existing work that would support the implementation of this approach. Our Watch's *Men in focus practice guide* provides a series of suggested principles for organisations undertaking such work, including that work is evidence-based, intersectional and accountable to women and women's organisations. There is strong evidence that length and frequency of programs are important in achieving and sustaining attitude and behaviour change,³³ and that a whole-of-organisation approach is best practice (for example, a whole-of-school approach to working in schools).³⁴ The Working with Men and Boys for Social Justice Assessment Tool was designed for the purpose of assessing the quality of work with men and boys to prevent gender-based violence. It is informed by research and practice, and it freely available for use. This tool could be used as a starting point from which to build.



Considerations

- Introduction of quality standards should be accompanied by adequate resourcing for affected workforces, and capacity building to support organisations to reach the standards.
- Any standards will need to recognise and value high-quality work being led in specific communities (including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities) that may not align within a Western, colonial understanding of practice, evidence and/or knowledge. These initiatives often already demonstrate strong accountability to women, which the evidence referenced above finds to be a core indicator of quality.
- The principles contained in the *Men in focus practice guide* provide useful guidance about the minimum content for any new standards. Our Watch is currently undertaking work to understand how the principles are applied within organisations working with men and boys, and would welcome this work feeding into actions taken in response to this opportunity.
- A lighter-touch option, or a transitionary arrangement, could involve governments requiring organisations to conduct a self-assessment against the Working with Men and Boys for Social Justice Assessment Tool (or similar tool), as part of their funding proposals. This would include developing funding guidelines that specify how such reports will be interpreted and weighted in funding decisions.
- This opportunity would ideally be applied not only to primary prevention organisations and initiatives, but also to organisations and programs that focus on men and masculinity in the context of men's health promotion. Practically, it may be appropriate to focus on organisations that purport to prevent gender-based violence first or with more stringent requirements, with a delayed or more principle-based expectation for men's health promotion organisations.
- This opportunity is intended to be focused on primary prevention and men's health initiatives rather than response work, like Men's Behaviour Change Programs for example.
- Robust evaluation is a vital part of understanding what works and why, and could form part of and/or complement quality standards. There are opportunities to ensure greater investment in evaluation of work in this area.

Benefits

- ✓ Ensures governments invest in activities and initiatives of high quality, and that achieve their stated objectives
- ✓ Contributes to the evidence base on effective approaches to working with men and boys to prevent gender-based violence
- ✓ Fosters national coordination of high-quality work that aligns with overarching national plans and frameworks
- ✓ Strengthens Australia's role as a leader in primary prevention work

FOCUS AREA 4:

Using fatherhood as an opportunity to work towards gender equality

COMMONWEALTH GOVERNMENT

STATE + TERRITORY GOVERNMENTS

Why?

Prevention efforts must engage men and boys at all points of their lives, in multiple, mutually reinforcing ways.

There are particular stages which represent important transition points, where engagement can have a substantial impact in addressing the gendered drivers. **As a potentially transformative life event, fatherhood is a key opportunity in the primary prevention of gender-based violence.**

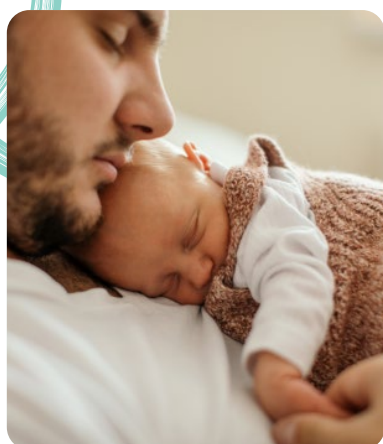
Becoming a father gives men the opportunity to see themselves differently, and can create an opportunity to reflect on the role of gender in parenting and model more equitable parenting than they may have experienced in their own childhood.³⁵ When men take an active role in parenting, this can challenge gender stereotypes that parenting is 'women's work'.³⁶ It can also be a means to move towards gender equality – a key objective for preventing gendered violence.³⁷ Fathers who take an active role not only model gender-equal parenting to their children but also support more equitable gender dynamics in the distribution of unpaid work in the family. Fathers who take parental leave in their child's first year are more likely to continue to share more caring responsibilities as the child grows.³⁸

Evidence indicates fathers are more likely to take up paid parental leave if it is: non-transferable ('use it or lose it'), labelled directly at them (e.g. 'daddy leave'), provided at or near wage-replacement rates, accompanied with incentives such as bonus leave when both parents take their full non-transferable amount and accompanied by support from their workplace.³⁹ Fathers are more likely to take an active role in parenting when they have periods where they can parent by themselves, allowing them to develop their own capacity as primary caregivers.⁴⁰ Policy changes such as these are supported by recommendations from, among others, Equimundo, the Grattan Institute, the Work and Family Policy Roundtable and WGEA.⁴¹ A key piece of research showed a 250% increase in fathers' participation in parental leave in Canada, driven by an increase in benefits and the labelling of a portion of leave as 'daddy only'. The research also provides causal evidence that the changes in policy had a large and persistent impact on gendered dynamics within households.⁴²

How?

Commonwealth, state and territory governments could review paid parental leave policies for their respective public sectors, with a view to achieving the following changes:

- Increasing the amount provided to 'secondary caregivers' (usually fathers);
- Changing their policies so that the default expectation is that an employee will take their full entitlement of parental leave, unless the employee seeks an exemption (i.e. introducing an 'opt out' rather than 'opt in' requirement); and





- Where both parents work in the public sector, providing incentives to encourage parental leave take-up by the secondary caregiver, for example by providing bonus leave to both parents where they each take their maximum non-transferable leave.

Additionally, the Commonwealth Government could work towards providing more generous paid parental leave for secondary caregivers, including those outside the public sector. This should be in addition to, not drawn from, primary caregivers' leave.

There is also a role for the Commonwealth in working with businesses to improve employer-funded paid parental leave offerings, encouraging them to work towards total or near wage-replacement rates.

Considerations

- While the focus of this opportunity is men (including trans men), and there is evidence supporting labelling fathers' parental leave as specifically for them, families that are not made up of a woman and a man should not be excluded from the same supports. It is for this reason the phrases 'primary' and 'secondary' caregiver are used. The benefits of any policy that applies to a couple should be available to a single parent by default – including any bonus leave.
- While evidence notes the benefits of leave labelled to target men specifically, this should be weighed against consideration of avoiding language that excludes some families, for example where there are two mothers.
- Any consideration of parental leave policy should ensure people who are on temporary visas, who work part-time or in precarious work (for example, in the gig economy) are not excluded. These jobs often are undertaken by a higher proportion of refugee and migrant workers.⁴³
- Parental leave policy should be inclusive of alternative care structures – for example Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kinship arrangements, which are central to the wellbeing, cultural identity, and safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.
- Changes to parental leave policy should be accompanied by programs that support new parents to develop healthy and equitable dynamics into parenthood. [Baby Makes 3](#) in Victoria is a good practice example that could be replicated elsewhere.

Benefits

- ✓ Engages a large number of men, through the common experience of fatherhood, to foster more equal gender relations in their personal relationships

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Further Information

Our Watch welcomes the opportunity to continue to provide advice or assistance in relation to potential opportunities for the primary prevention of violence against women and girls.



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