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Submission in response to the National Strategy to Achieve Gender Equality Discussion Paper



Our Watch

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Acknowledgement of Country

Our Watch acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land across Australia on which we work and live. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples past and present.

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 by the Commonwealth and Victorian Governments 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 and social structures that drive violence against women.

Guided by our ground-breaking national framework, *Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women in Australia*, we work at all levels of our society to address the deeply entrenched, underlying drivers of violence against women, especially those stemming from gender inequality. We work 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 submission

Our Watch welcomes the commitment of the Commonwealth Government to develop and implement a National Strategy to Achieve Gender Equality and to Australia's role as a global leader in gender equality in both domestic and foreign policy and decision-making. The development of the National Strategy provides an important opportunity to create an ambitious evidence-based Strategy that provides a clear blueprint for reform, with a focus on the structural and cultural change required to achieve gender equality. It also provides an opportunity to focus on preventing violence against women and align the Strategy with other key national frameworks, including the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032.

Our Watch welcomes the opportunity to provide this submission in response to the Discussion Paper released as part of consultations in relation to the National Strategy.

In making this submission, Our Watch emphasises the importance of the Commonwealth Government engaging appropriately with people and organisations which represent with lived experience of gendered violence and other forms of structural oppression and discrimination to inform the development of the National Strategy.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss any aspects of this submission or to provide further, more detailed advice to inform the development or implementation of the Strategy. Please contact Amanda Alford, Director Government Relations, Policy and Evidence, at amanda.alford@ourwatch.org.au to discuss.

The relationship between gender equality and violence prevention

Our Watch's national framework *Change the story* identifies gender inequality as setting the social context in which violence against women occurs and makes clear that the drivers of this violence are gendered.

The factors that *Change the story* terms the 'gendered drivers' of violence arise from gender-discriminatory institutional, social and economic structures, social and cultural norms, and organisational, community, family and relationship practices that together create environments in which women and men are not considered equal, and violence against women is both more likely, and more likely to be tolerated and even condoned. The gendered drivers of violence against women are:

- Driver 1: Condoning of violence against women.
- Driver 2: Men's control of decision-making and limits to women's independence in public and private life.
- Driver 3: Rigid gender stereotyping and dominant forms of masculinity.
- Driver 4: Male peer relations and cultures of masculinity that emphasise aggression, dominance and control

Importantly, in outlining a primary prevention approach to violence against women, *Change the story* makes clear the need to challenge and transform the underlying social conditions and gender inequalities that produce and drive violence against women. As a result, an effective approach to preventing violence against women goes beyond addressing individual behaviours to focus on addressing the broader social, political and economic factors that drive gendered violence.

The evidence also clearly outlines the importance of an intersectional approach to this work, acknowledging the multiple and intersecting systems of sexism, racism, colonialism, classism, heteronormativity, cisnormativity, homo-, bi- and transphobia, ableism and ageism, and the need to challenge and shift the corresponding systems of power and privilege.

As a result, *Change the story* emphasises that tackling gender inequality and advancing and normalising gender equality at every level in society are essential parts of preventing violence against women. There is a clear opportunity for the National Strategy to clearly articulate this relationship between broader gender

inequality and violence against women, including by framing action that that addresses the social context of gender inequality as contributing to the prevention of violence against women.

The development of the National Strategy presents an important opportunity to contribute to the primary prevention of violence against women, both in its own right, and by helping to create the conditions that will enable the success of *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032*.

The National Plan makes clear links between gender equality and prevention efforts, identifying the achievement of gender equality as a critical objective. The prevention pillar of the National Plan draws on Our Watch's *Change the story* evidence-base through its prevention objectives that aim to address the gendered drivers of violence against women (National Plan prevention objectives 1,2,5).

As a result, Our Watch encourages the Commonwealth Government to integrate *Change the story* into the National Strategy, as part of ensuring that the National Strategy's gender equality initiatives create an enabling and reinforcing environment for the National Plan's prevention objectives. There are key opportunities to integrate the primary prevention evidence-base into the National Strategy whilst also maintaining clear linkages to the National Plan. Our Watch suggests this could be done in a number of ways, including:

- Developing a distinct focus area under the National Strategy on violence against women, with specific actions, goals and outcomes relating to the prevention of violence against women in particular. This focus area could include concrete primary prevention actions that complement, enable, reinforce and scale-up the prevention objectives of the National Plan and actions funded under that Plan.
- In considering specific actions under the National Strategy, Our Watch encourages consideration of the essential evidence-based actions outlined in *Change the story* that address the gendered drivers of violence against women and the social context of gender inequality in which violence against women arises.

For further detail on these recommendations in response to **Discussion Question 4.3**.

Structure of the National Strategy

Structuring the National Strategy in a way that provides a clear blueprint for action, including goals and specific concrete actions will be an important part of its success in guiding change. At a high level, Our Watch suggests that the National Strategy include:

- an overarching vision
- clear goals
- specific actions that demonstrate how each goal is going to be achieved and the indicators that will be used to measure progress
- clarity about roles and responsibilities under the Strategy
- an implementation plan
- clarity about the governance framework to support the Strategy
- a robust framework for monitoring and evaluation of activities under the Strategy and the Strategy more broadly.

There are a number of good examples of gender equality frameworks that contain clear goals with indicators to measure progress towards each goal. In the context of prevention, Our Watch's *Counting on change* and *Tracking progress in prevention* provide important examples of national gender equality indicators that could be incorporated into the National Strategy.

Our Watch also suggests that the National Strategy would benefit from a set of cross cutting principles to underpin and guide the National Strategy. These principles could include, for example:

- **Alignment with international human rights frameworks** and a focus on upholding Australia's obligations in full.
- **Commitment to identifying and using available government levers for change** to enable gender equality and the prevention of violence against women.
- **Integrating gender transformative approaches** that challenge and transform harmful gender stereotypes, practices, roles and unequal power relations through changing laws and policies, systems and services, and inequalities in access to and control of resources.
- **Centring intersectionality** to account for the diversity of people's experiences and identities and address the multiple intersecting systems of oppression and discrimination, power and privilege that shape the social context of gender inequality such as sexism, racism, colonialism,

classism, heteronormativity, cisnormativity, homo-, bi- and transphobia, ableism and ageism.

- **Incorporating all levels of the socio-ecological model** including the individual and relationship, the organisational and community, the system and institutional, and the societal levels.
- **Adopting holistic approaches to achieving gender equality** that involve a continuum of interdependent and interlinked strategies over the long term and involves a whole-of setting and whole-of organisation approaches to reach all stakeholders.
- **Ensuring all phases of the Strategy are based** on evidence, research and evaluation, and informed by diverse lived experiences.
- **Addressing gender inequality across the life-course** to reach all Australians to have the greatest impact on the drivers of violence against women and gender inequality.
- **Engaging broadly with governments, the private sector, civil society and the community** to act on gender equality within their spheres of influence, to maximise impact and reach.
- **Acknowledging and account for non-binary understandings of gender** by challenging hierarchical structures, norms and practices underpinned by heteronormativity and cisnormativity, which assume and naturalise a binary understanding of sex and gender, using inclusive language and addressing the barriers to achieving gender equality for people with non-binary identities.
- **Commitment to engaging men** – both as individuals, and in peer groups, organisations, and institutions – to challenge and transform gendered stereotypes and male peer relations and cultures of masculinity that emphasise aggression, dominance and control.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women

Violence against women is a national problem – one that is prevalent and persistent – in all communities, right across Australia. This is why Our Watch is leading a whole-of-population approach to primary prevention. At the same time, we know gender inequality cannot be separated from other forms of oppression and inequality. We recognise that the drivers, perpetration and experience of violence vary significantly for different groups of women. There are many intersecting issues which must be addressed in order to ensure that every woman in Australia can live free from violence.

In particular, we know Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women experience disproportionately high rates of violence, and violence that is often more severe and more complex in its impacts. Preventing this violence must be a national priority. It requires dedicated attention and intensive effort and resourcing. It requires us to address the many complex drivers of this violence, including gender inequality but also the ongoing impacts of colonisation and racism across Australian society.

Our Watch's approach to preventing violence against First Nations women is underpinned by *Changing the picture: A national resource to support the prevention of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their children*. As a non-Indigenous organisation, Our Watch does not claim to have all the solutions and acknowledges that *Changing the picture* is a framework published by a non-Indigenous organisation. However, we are committed to taking responsibility for change and to playing our part in tackling the drivers of violence against First Nations women.

Changing the picture was produced in collaboration and consultation with First Nations people and deliberately prioritised and drew extensively on literature produced and by First Nations authors and organisations. The framework outlines three relevant sets of factors driving violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women:

- ongoing impacts of colonisation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, families and communities
- ongoing impacts of colonisation for non-Indigenous people and society

- gendered factors – both general, and specific to the intersection of racism and sexism and the impacts of ‘colonial patriarchy’.¹

None of these factors operates in isolation; it is the combination, or intersection of these various factors that drives such high rates of violence against First Nations women.

Changing the picture outlines how violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women can be prevented, describing the essential actions that are needed to change and shift the drivers of this violence. It considers not only what needs to be done, but how this prevention work should be undertaken, and by whom. Envisaging a shared national effort, it points to actions that are most appropriately undertaken by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations, and actions that should be the responsibility of non-Indigenous people and organisations, and of governments. It also presents a set of principles that should guide this prevention work. As a result, it provides a useful basis for informing development of the National Strategy.

It is important that there is alignment between the National Strategy, National Plan and the dedicated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan, as well as other key frameworks such as the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, and its four Priority Reforms that focus on changing the way governments work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

In line with the principle of self-determination, Our Watch strongly encourages the Commonwealth Government to engage with, consider and prioritise the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, organisations and communities in the development of the National Strategy.

¹ Each of these sets of factors, is described in significantly more detail in the [Changing the picture background paper](#), and Our Watch refers the Commonwealth Government to pages 50-66 of that publication, for further discussion and evidence on each.

Response to Discussion Paper questions

This submission concentrates on the links between gender equality and the primary prevention of violence against women, Our Watch's priorities for achieving gender equality and on the role of government. This submission does not respond to discussion questions 4.1, 4.2, 4.4 and 4.5.

Change the story makes clear links between expressions and processes of gender inequality relating to economic inequality, caring inequality, women's health, and women's leadership and representation, and outlines a range of essential actions to address them. However, there are a range of specialist organisations and researchers with expert subject matter knowledge who are likely to contribute to the development of the National Strategy in this area. As a result, this submission focuses on key questions of relevance to Our Watch's prevention expertise.

3.1. What would a gender equal Australia mean for you, your family, and community?

A gender equal Australia is one free from violence against women, where people of all genders are treated equally, respected, and valued. In this future Australia, everyone is supported to develop personal identities based on their individual character, not constrained by rigid, hierarchical and binary gender stereotypes. Our children know how to identify and reject sexist and violence-supportive messages they encounter among peers, in popular culture or on social media. Schools and education institutions across the country model and promote respectful relationships, non-violence and gender equality. In our workplaces, all people are valued, and inequalities in decision-making, recruitment and promotion are recognised and addressed. Our public and social spaces are inclusive, safe and accessible to all. Boys and men – both as individuals, and in peer groups, organisations, and institutions – choose to develop, adopt, promote and model healthy, positive forms of masculinity that are safe, respectful and ethical.

In this future Australia, intimate relationships are healthier, happier, more equitable and respectful, with decisions between partners made jointly and labour shared fairly. Sexual relationships are based on the principles of consent, agency and mutual pleasure. Power, resources and decision-making are genuinely shared, not only in relationships but also in public life, where people of

all genders play a respected and valued role and participate equally in our social, political, cultural and economic institutions.

3.2. What should be the role of government, business and the community in achieving gender equality?

An effective national approach to gender equality comprises the coordinated efforts of multiple stakeholders. In the context of prevention, *Change the story* clearly outlines the distinct but complementary responsibilities, expertise and capacities different stakeholders have, as well as their different spheres of influence. *Change the story* is clear that action is likely to be most effective if stakeholders take advantage of the specific opportunities available to them within their spheres of influence, as well as work in collaboration and/or partnership with others to ensure different their efforts are consistent and mutually reinforcing. It is critical that these stakeholders – from the Commonwealth Government right through to locally based organisations communicate effectively and share information to support coordination and mutually reinforcing effort as part of a national approach.

Role of governments

The Strategy should acknowledge the need for a shared approach and the important role to be played by many stakeholders. However, as a National Strategy developed by the Commonwealth Government, Our Watch encourages a focus in the Strategy and any Implementation Plan on outlining the particular role of the Commonwealth Government in advancing gender equality, and the specific commitments it is making. Our Watch encourages consideration of commitments to direct government action, as well as commitments to supporting or enabling complementary efforts, both by other levels of government, and by other stakeholders.

As outlined in *Change the story*, governments have primary responsibility for ensuring the health, safety and equality of women as part of their international human rights obligations. Commonwealth, state/territory and local governments all have critical roles to play. Governments in particular have unique access to policy, legislative and regulatory levers that no other stakeholder in the gender equality and/or prevention field has, and these levers are critical to facilitate social, cultural and structural and systemic change. As such, the focus of governments should be primarily on the work that only they are able to lead as part of a national approach to gender equality.

Policy, legislation and regulation are critical levers for governments, because they can enable systemic and structural change, large-scale change across the population, and change that is long-lasting. Governments can use legislation, policy and regulation to effectively address gender inequalities across Australian society and change the underlying conditions that produce and support violence against women. In using these powerful levers, government can both normalise

gender equality and send a strong signal to the Australian public that gender equality and the prevention of violence against women is a serious and urgent national priority that demands high-level action and leadership.

Governance to support interjurisdictional collaboration

Our Watch encourages the Commonwealth Government to ensure that the National Strategy aligns with and complements the National Plan as well as existing state and territory strategies, action plans and legislation relevant to gender equality. The Strategy and supporting information should provide clarity about these interactions to facilitate effective development and implementation of the Strategy.

In addition, Our Watch encourages consideration and a clear articulation of the governance and reporting mechanisms supporting the Strategy. Any such mechanisms should be guided by the principles related to partnerships and intersectionality described above, provide a link to state and territory government coordination mechanisms and engage other stakeholders including civil society.

Based on Our Watch's experience in working with the Commonwealth and all State and Territory Governments, we suggest governance infrastructure should include coordination mechanisms across different Australian Government portfolios and across different levels of government. Utilising existing interjurisdictional mechanisms may contribute to collective ownership and support the collaboration, coordination, and implementation of National Strategy across the country. This includes monitoring, reporting and accountability mechanisms (see discussion question 5.1. and 5.2.).

Our Watch also encourages consideration of funded and formal mechanisms to ensure that civil society organisations can participate and collaborate in the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the National Strategy.

Gender policy machinery to support gender equality

There is an opportunity to strengthen the gender policy machinery of government to ensure it is sustainable, resourced and institutionalised and able to realise and deliver on the full potential of a National Strategy to achieve gender equality.

The introduction of gender responsive budgeting into a government's budget processes can contribute to the establishment of important foundations for government action to achieve gender equality and prevent violence against women². Together with gender impact analysis of policies and programs more

² Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). (2015). *Toolkit for Mainstreaming and Implementing Gender Equality: Implementing the 2015 OECD Recommendation on Gender Equality in Public Life*, OECD Publishing, Paris, p. 30.

broadly, gender-responsive budgeting is a powerful and practical tool which has the potential to transform the social context of gender inequality. Legislative mechanisms that can maintain the institutionalisation, accountability and sustainability of gender-responsive policymaking and budgeting are critical to creating the long-term structural change necessary to achieve gender equality.

Our Watch acknowledges the Commonwealth Government's commitment to implementation of gender responsive budgeting and gender impact assessments in the last Federal Budget.

Our Watch encourages the Commonwealth Government to further embed this change and lead significant institutional reform of national gender policy machinery. The National Strategy could play an important role in strengthening the government's existing plans by committing to institutionalise gender responsive budgeting and gender impact assessments over the long term, to support sustained procedural and cultural change in government policy making. This could include, for example:

- Articulating the role and importance of gender responsive policymaking and budgeting in achieving the gender equality goals of the National Strategy in the Strategy itself
- Establishing requirements for intersectional gender impact statements in all departmental policy and budget proposals as part of the budget development process.
- Establishing processes to enable intersectional gender analysis of Cabinet submissions, specifically involving the relevant ministers (such as Ministers for Women) and incorporating expert advice from departmental staff with gender expertise.
- Establishing processes to support the public service (across all agencies) to understand their shared responsibility to contribute to gender equality goals and build capacity to implement gender-responsive policymaking and budgeting, including through the provision of ongoing professional development and practical tools and resources.

One option the Commonwealth Government may wish to consider is the enactment of gender equality legislation which mandates and institutionalises whole-of-government gender-responsive policymaking. The *Gender Equality Act 2020* (Vic) provides an example of a legislated approach to embedding gender equality in the core business of government and the public service.

3.3. What are your priorities for achieving gender equality in Australia?

Based on *Change the story*, Our Watch considers there are a number of priorities the National Strategy could include to address the broader social context of

gender inequality and other forms of structural and systemic discrimination and oppression that give rise to violence against women. These include:

- integrating the primary prevention of violence against women as a distinct and crosscutting element to achieving gender equality (see response to discussion question 4.3)
- institutionalising whole-of-government gender responsive policy making, including gender responsive budgeting and gender impact analysis (see response to discussion question 3.2)
- addressing rigid stereotypes and harmful cultures of masculinity, ensuring that this includes initiatives that target adult men (see response to discussion question 4.7)

4.3. Australia has a National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children – how could the strategy contribute to ending violence and supporting the Plan?

The *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032* makes clear links between gender equality and prevention efforts, identifying the achievement of gender equality as a critical objective. The prevention pillar of the National Plan draws on and aligns with *Change the story* and Our Watch's evidence-base through its prevention objectives that aim to address the gendered drivers of violence against women (National Plan prevention objectives 1,2,5).

Utilising *Change the story* as an explicit part of the evidence base to inform the National Strategy would create synergies between two mutually reinforcing policy documents. This would ensure that the National Strategy's gender equality initiatives create an enabling and reinforcing environment for the prevention of violence against women and align with the National Plan's prevention objectives.

Our Watch identifies two key opportunities below to integrate the primary prevention evidence-base into the National Strategy whilst maintaining clear linkages to the National Plan.

Distinct focus area on primary prevention of violence against women

Gender equality cannot be achieved while gendered violence against women persists. As a result, the prevention of violence against women is a focus of many international gender equality (or equivalent) strategies (such as those in Finland, Germany, USA, UK, Sweden) and women's safety is identified as a priority in many Australian state and territory gender equality / women's strategies.

The Australian Government has demonstrated a strong commitment to the prevention of violence against women and children through the National Plan. The National Strategy provides an opportunity to strengthen and reinforce this

commitment and to contribute to the creation of an enabling environment for the primary prevention of violence against women. The National Strategy should avoid duplicating the National Plan's objectives and actions; but should complement and reinforce them.

As a result, Our Watch suggests that the focus in the National Strategy should be on those essential actions identified in *Change the story* that are not already addressed in the National Plan and that will specifically address the gendered drivers of violence against women and contribute to the achievement of gender equality more broadly. These include:

- Essential Action 2 - Promote women's independence and decision-making in public life and relationships
- Essential Action 3 - Build new social norms that foster personal identities not constrained by rigid gender stereotypes

Change the story offers several examples of how to operationalise Essential Actions 2 and 3 (pp. 62-63).

Align the National Strategy with Change the story essential actions to address the underlying social context for violence against women

The National Strategy provides opportunities to address the broader social context of gender inequality and other forms of structural and systemic discrimination and oppression that give rise to violence against women. Progress made toward the below essential actions that address the underlying social context for this violence will create an enabling and reinforcing environment for the more specific violence prevention objectives of the National Plan that directly address the gendered drivers of violence against women.

- Essential Action 5 - Promote and normalise gender equality in private and public life
- Essential Action 6 - Address the intersections between gender inequality and other forms of systemic and structural oppression and discrimination, and promote broader social justice
- Essential Action 7 - Build safe, fair and equitable organisations and institutions by focusing on policy and systems change
- Essential Action 8 - Strengthen positive, equal and respectful relationships between and among women and men, girls and boys, in public and private spheres

Change the story provides examples of initiatives that could be progressed under each of these essential actions.

4.6.1. What are critical factors that exacerbate gendered disadvantage over the life course?

A national approach to gender equality should aim to reach as many people as possible to have the greatest impact on the drivers of violence against women. Prevention and gender equality efforts need to reach and engage everyone, at every age and stage of life. Importantly, to embed, reinforce and sustain change across the population, initiatives must engage people in multiple, mutually reinforcing ways over the course of their lives, not only as a 'one-off'. Our Watch strongly encourages the Commonwealth Government to adopt a life course approach in the National Strategy and use available policy, program or legislative levers to ensure all age groups benefit from gender equality and primary prevention initiatives.

Exposure to gendered violence exacerbates gender disadvantage across the life course. The cumulative effects of violence extend beyond the physical health and wellbeing of women. Women who have experienced gendered violence have an increased likelihood of experiencing lifelong structural inequalities such as poverty, housing instability, and a retirement wealth gap.

In addition to ensuring the population receives appropriate messaging and engagement across all stages of their life, there are particular stages that are important transition points, or which present specific opportunities. These important life stages include:

Early childhood: where gender roles become embedded and personal identities are forming, and where there are near-universal mechanisms to engage with children through kinder, day care and early childhood services.

Primary school years: where students develop and explore understandings about key concepts relevant to gender equality and prevention (for example, safety, puberty, consent, bodies, gender equality, etc.) and where there are universal mechanisms to engage with children, educators and parents through the primary school setting.

Adolescence: where intimate/sexual relationships are beginning to be formed, where some people are exposed to pornography,³ where students in schools explore concepts relevant to gender equality and prevention (for example, media literacy, respectful relationships, consent, gender roles and norms, etc.) and where there are universal mechanisms to engage with adolescents, educators and parents through the secondary school setting.

Young adults: when independence increases and people transition to post-secondary education or the workforce, opportunities arise for teaching of safe and healthy relationship skills including social-emotional learning and

³ Our Watch. (2020). *Pornography, young people, and preventing violence against women: Background paper*. Page 19

relationship skills as well as settings/sector-based approaches to gender equality and prevention in TAFE, higher education or workplaces.

Pregnancy and the early stages of first parenthood: where gendered social practices become more entrenched and where parents can revert to more stereotypical gender roles, with negative implications for long-term equality within their relationship. Prevention and gender equality efforts to address social norms, government policy settings, workforce structures and workplace policies and cultures are critical to enable more equitable norms and practices.

Adults: a time when messaging about prosocial behaviours needs to be reinforced. People are consolidating their personal, family and professional lives and can be engaged as positive role models for younger generations.⁴ There is also an opportunity to influence adult behaviour to encourage their contribution to policy, institutional, organisational and social change.

Older age: Older people may have had limited engagement with gender equality and primary prevention activity due to fact that they are less likely to be engaged in settings where gender equality and prevention activity is becoming common (for example, schools, universities/TAFEs, workplaces, sports clubs, etc.). As part of the life stage approach, it is important that efforts include a focus on influencing older people's attitudes and behaviours and supporting older women's independence.

More broadly, Our Watch encourages the Commonwealth Government to embed gender equality in government policies or strategies designed to address age-based population groups such as the Early Years Strategy, ensuring these policies align with and support the goals of the National Strategy at critical life stages.

4.6.2. Are there issues you (or your organisation or community group) would address first? Are there issues that should be addressed together?

Achieving gender equality is a long-term collaborative effort and real population-level change will only occur over a sustained period of time. As a result, Our Watch supports a phased approach to implementation of the National Strategy.

Our Watch suggests that the first phase, and priority for the Commonwealth Government should be establishing the gender policy machinery or infrastructure outlined in the response to discussion question 3.2, including gender responsive budgeting and gender policy analysis. This will assist in building the capacity of

⁴ Nolon, P. H., & Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2017). *Preventing intimate partner violence across the lifespan: A technical package of programs, policies, and practices*. Government Printing Office. Page 20

the public service, embed gender responsive policy making as business as usual and foster a culture of whole-of-government responsibility and action. Taking steps to ensure the long-term institutionalisation of the gender policy machinery would contribute to ensuring gender equality is securely rooted in public policy development in Australia creating the best chance for sustained social change over time. Prioritising the building of this gender policy foundation will also create an enabling environment for the broad suite of additional reforms necessary to achieve gender equality in Australia, which could form subsequent phases of the National Strategy.

Gender equality infrastructure for a national approach

Achieving gender equality requires effective local, state and national infrastructure in order to ensure long-term success and produce sustained change. Our Watch encourages the Commonwealth Government to consider the foundational infrastructure required to support the long-term success of the Strategy and provide a blueprint for future phases of this work, even if implementation is phased.

Change the story identifies the following key elements required for primary prevention infrastructure, including:

- Sustained political leadership.
- Private sector, civil society and community leadership.
- A well-resourced, independent women's movement.
- Policy, regulatory and legislative reform.
- Mechanisms for coordination, collaboration and quality assurance.
- Mechanisms for workforce and sector development.
- A strong evidence base informed by ongoing research, practice and evaluation.
- National monitoring and reporting mechanisms.

While these are elements of the primary prevention infrastructure, they are transferrable to establish and invest in a distinct but complementary gender equality infrastructure to enable the success of the National Strategy. We have separately addressed some of these elements in other responses to the Discussion Paper questions.

As a result, Our Watch encourages the Commonwealth Government to prioritise the establishment and development of infrastructure necessary to institutionalise and future-proof gender policy machinery and gender-responsive policy making and build the capacity of the Australian public service as part of the National Strategy.

4.7. In what areas are stereotypes a key barrier to achieving gender equality?

Our Watch would welcome a focus on gender stereotypes in the National Strategy, particularly harmful forms of masculinities and cultures of masculinity which aligns with National Plan objective 5, “Support men and boys in developing healthy masculinities and positive, supportive relationships with their male peers.” *Change the story* provides a useful evidence base for considering the impacts of gendered driver 3, Rigid gender stereotyping and dominant forms of masculinity, and gendered driver 4, Male peer relations and cultures of masculinity that emphasise aggression, dominance and control. These drivers of violence against women and gender inequality apply across settings, sectors and systems, especially those dominated by men including the economy, politics, sport, and media.

Gender stereotypes

Gender stereotypes are beliefs and assumptions about the attributes or characteristics that are innate or appropriate for women and men. Importantly, rather than being fixed or inevitable, these stereotypes are actively maintained and reinforced by processes of gender stereotyping – the practice of applying, promoting and reinforcing these assumptions across all levels of the socioecological model. For example, stereotypes about women as naturally nurturing and men as naturally rational underpin norms about women’s caring responsibilities and men’s leadership. These social norms are translated into gendered social structures and practices, that see men overrepresented in positions of power that are highly paid and valued, and women performing the bulk of unpaid domestic labour and concentrated in poorly paid caring professions that are less valued because they are associated with ‘feminine’ characteristics. There are multiple and substantial economic, political and social consequences to this gendered division of labour and power which effect women’s autonomy and access to opportunities and decision-making power throughout the course of their lives. All these impacts can be amplified for women and people who experience other forms of discrimination and oppression based on race, ethnicity, sexuality, gender identity, disability, indigeneity, age, geographical location, and class.

The socially dominant forms of masculinity that are promoted in the process of gender stereotyping are particularly problematic, because they play a direct role reproducing the social conditions of gender inequality and in driving men’s violence against women. Men who hold hierarchical views about gender roles and relationships, or who form a rigid attachment to these socially dominant norms and practices of masculinity (in particular, aggression, dominance, control and hypersexuality), are more likely to demonstrate sexist attitudes and behaviours, hold violence-supportive attitudes, and perpetrate violence against women – especially when their masculinity or male privilege/power is challenged, or when they find it difficult to live up to these norms.

Male peer relations and cultures of masculinity that promote aggression, dominance and control

Gender stereotypes and socially dominant forms of masculinity are often central to male peer relationships and can influence how men relate to each other. As outlined in Our Watch's evidence review, *Men in focus*, research on men and masculinities consistently demonstrates that men seek approval from other men and position themselves in relation to other men. This means men may feel they have to embody dominant norms and stereotypes about masculinity to 'prove' themselves to other men. This can be seen in the way some men and boys use sexist, homophobic or aggressive behaviours to assert their masculinity and gain approval from male peers, and the way that men often bond through the sexual objectification of women. For example, where ideal masculinity is associated with physical prowess, rough physical activity and 'tough' contact sports, this can lead to the assumption that boys and men are naturally aggressive or even violent, and phrases like 'boys will be boys' will be used to downplay or legitimise boy's and men's aggression or violence towards women.⁵ Gender equality will not be achieved unless such gender stereotypes and male peer relations are challenged.

Adherence to these dominant forms of masculinity is likely to increase men's reluctance to take a stand against sexism, homophobia or violence-supportive attitudes, and can increase the use of violence itself. Male peer relations can be based on both an implicit and explicit rejection of women; for example, by engaging in activities and frequenting settings that segregate them from women. This can be seen in masculine peer, organisational and institutional cultures, where a culture of masculinity, and practices and ways of working might be masculinist, are more valued in a workplace or sporting club for example. Evidence indicates that institutions or organisations that are dominated by men, particularly at a leadership or governance level, are more likely to be influenced by negative masculine peer cultures.

Importance of addressing harmful forms of masculinities and engaging men in gender equality and prevention

Significant work is required to transform harmful gendered stereotyping and cultures of masculinities that drive unequal and unsafe environments for women and perpetuate and reinforce gender inequality. Building a picture of current and ongoing programs targeted at engaging men and challenging harmful masculinities would be particularly useful given there is no current comprehensive national audit of such programs. This could guide government action, including for example the development and piloting of programs in communities, organisations and specific male dominated industries and settings such as sport, media and male dominated workplaces. This work should be underpinned by evaluation to ensure it contribute to the evidence building needed

⁵Weiss, K. G. (2009). Boys will be boys and other gendered accounts. *Violence against Women*, 15(7), 810–34.
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to understand what works (and what works less well) in promoting and encouraging positive, more respectful engagement by men and boys.

Evidence suggests it is important is to address harmful gender stereotypes and cultures of masculinity throughout the course of men's lives. Specific initiatives should be developed and targeted across age, location, and settings, to encourage all communities to engage in challenging harmful gender stereotypes and cultures of masculinity that perpetuate gender inequality and drive violence against women.

Building on Our Watch's evidence review, *Men in focus: Unpacking masculinities and engaging men in the prevention of violence against women*, the *Men in Focus practice guide: Addressing masculinities and working with men in the prevention of men's violence against women* we developed outlines the long-term, collective, and intersectional approach needed to dismantle and transform the norms, structures and practices that reinforce gender inequality and lead to men's violence against women. The Practice Guide offers practical strategies to engage with men and boys on masculinities, such as a focus on building empathy and motivation and fostering self-awareness, as and highlights promising practice initiatives the Commonwealth Government could consider when developing actions for the National Strategy. It also makes clear that an intersectional approach is key to ensure initiatives developed are relevant and effective for the particular cohort or community of men they are aimed at.

While the evidence is clear that gender equality cannot be achieved without addressing harmful stereotyping and cultures of masculinities, maintaining accountability to women and victim survivors of gendered violence is important. Programs focused on engaging men must not be at the expense of measures and initiatives aimed at achieving equality for women and other communities experiencing intersecting forms of marginalisation and oppression, including LGBTIQ+ people and groups, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people living with disabilities, and migrants and refugees. The *Men in focus practice guide* outlines principles on how to maintain accountability to women and take an intersectional approach.

In addition to undertaking the national audit suggested above, Our Watch suggests that the Commonwealth Government:

- Develop specific initiatives addressing masculinities and working with men in promoting gender equality and preventing violence against women across settings. These should include priority settings including workplaces, education, sport, online/internet (including pornography).
- Develop strategies to engage men and boys in gender equality and prevention efforts that are multifaceted and include education-based initiatives, media campaigns, engaging men as fathers, engaging and mobilising communities, and offer alternative models to promote more positive, respectful forms of masculinity.

- Commit to and support specific gender transformative initiatives and programs that address harmful male peer relations and cultures of masculinity across the socioecological model. This can be informed by Our Watch's *Men in focus practice guide*, to assist organisations to adopt promising practice principles in this work, including maintaining accountability to women and taking an intersectional approach.

5.1. When building the evidence base and assessing progress, where should we focus?

Building, consolidating and further developing the primary prevention evidence base has been recognised as critical to the effective prevention of violence against women in Australia.

Our Watch's *Tracking progress in prevention* report tracks national progress towards the primary prevention of violence against women and demonstrates how national prevention monitoring and reporting can be done, the data and measures that can be used and the importance of continued monitoring into the future. *Tracking progress in prevention*, released in 2020, outlines a number of elements that should be priorities and the focus of work to help assess progress and build a national evidence base on gender equality and prevention of violence against women. These include, for example:

- Identifying effective legislative, regulatory and policy mechanisms and understanding how these can best be utilised to drive nationwide change.
- Expanding the practice evidence about what works to challenge gender inequality and prevent violence against women in particular settings/sectors and contexts, and with specific population groups, cohorts, audiences and communities.
- Gathering stronger and more nuanced data.

In addition, Our Watch encourages consideration of areas outlined below as part of development and implementation of the National Strategy.

National research agenda for gender equality

Development of a national research agenda for gender equality would contribute to a better understanding of how gender equality efforts are cumulatively driving changes across structures, norms and practices to support population level change. Establishment of a national research agenda would provide a framework to help identify national research priorities that have policy and practice implications, as well as ongoing gaps in the evidence base. The development of any national research agenda should align with work underway by Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety in developing a national research agenda relevant to violence against women and related work under the *National Plan to End Violence against Women 2022-2032*.

Data

Comprehensive quantitative and qualitative data enables the necessary policy, resourcing and service delivery that is targeted for Australia's heterogeneous populations and their needs. Data can assist in establishing a clear picture of women's experiences, the dynamics of gender inequality and violence, and what targeted interventions are required to enable lives that are free from violence, discrimination and inequality.

Collecting and reporting data is an essential part of the infrastructure to support the implementation and progress of a National Strategy. The Commonwealth Government has invested in the development of several data platforms and tools, such as the ABS Gender Indicators; periodic surveys such as National Community Attitudes Survey and the Personal Safety Survey; the Workplace Gender Equality Agency data platform; and the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey.

However, there is an opportunity to strengthen data collection and cohesion to address gaps across departments and agencies, significant limitations in the quality of demographic information on particular population groups (especially those that experience intersecting and multiple forms of discrimination), and isolated projects that often restrict comprehensive utilisation of data.

Our Watch welcomes the recent commitment by the Commonwealth Government to establishing a Gender Data Steering Group to maximise the impact of the Government's major data holdings as an evidence base for gender equality policy. The National Strategy creates an opportunity for the Gender Data Steering Group to consider how data can be collated to support the measurement of progress towards the National Strategy's goals and develop a comprehensive intersectional gender data collection strategy that will support the establishment of critical data infrastructure to support gender-based policy making. This work could also usefully involve establishment of a comprehensive gender equality baseline used to measure progress and identification of data gaps and opportunities.

Our Watch also welcomes work underway to develop a centralised family and domestic violence data set and associated work on data improvement under the National Plan, which should align with work under the National Strategy.

In continuing to build the evidence base and data, Our Watch encourages consideration of issues relating to data sovereignty for particular communities, including the creation, ownership and governance of data by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Evaluation

Evaluation has a key role to play in extending and strengthening evidence and contributing to learning and insight about how change works and for whom/which groups. There is value in both replicating successful techniques,

but also testing, adapting and evaluating them in different contexts and settings to build the evidence base.

In the context of prevention, evaluation requires long-term and sustained investment and processes to engage with and build the capacity and knowledge of stakeholders, and prioritise methodologies, methods and approaches that are ethical, feminist, participatory and decolonising. Importantly, evaluations should assess the impacts of multiple, mutually reinforcing activities that are designed and delivered as part of a coordinated strategy across a setting or sector, or across a group of settings, or within a discrete community.

As a result, Our Watch suggests that the evaluation of specific outputs and activities, including the necessary resourcing for that evaluation, should be accounted for and embedded throughout the Strategy.

5.2. What accountability and reporting mechanisms would you prioritise?

Our Watch strongly encourages the Commonwealth Government to develop strong mechanisms for coordination, monitoring, evaluation, learning and reporting under the Strategy. These mechanisms should provide a clear governance framework, opportunities to track and report on progress under the Strategy and identify gaps and opportunities for improvement.

Governance

Our Watch encourages consideration of the appropriate governance arrangements to support the National Strategy and alignment with governance mechanisms in place to support other relevant national frameworks and strategies, including the National Plan.

In addition to internal and whole of government mechanisms, there is benefit in considering the ways in which the expertise of key organisational stakeholders and diverse perspectives, experiences and skills can contribute to national gender equality monitoring.

Monitoring and reporting

National monitoring is the purposeful and intentional collection and analysis of information (qualitative and quantitative) to track the progress of population-level changes to gender inequality across the socioecological model, and the development of associated infrastructure.

Our Watch supports the development of a strong monitoring and outcomes framework with gender sensitive indicators that considers both quantitative and qualitative data to understand changes to gender inequalities across the socioecological model and over the short, medium and long term.

Our Watch encourages consideration of mechanisms for annual monitoring and reporting under the National Strategy, but also broader monitoring that is undertaken at regular, reasonably spaced intervals to allow enough time for new data to be released and for some population-level change to be registered.

Counting on change provides a framework for national monitoring and is a guide for policymakers, researchers, and advocates on measuring population-level progress towards the prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia. The *Tracking progress in prevention* report translates this into practice, providing both a baseline report on progress, and an example of how national monitoring could be done on an ongoing basis. These documents provide clear examples of indicators that can be used to measure progress in prevention and gender equality more broadly, accompanied by identification of the appropriate data sets for measurement, which can usefully inform the development of the monitoring component of the Strategy.

Monitoring and reporting on progress towards gender equality will contribute to providing important transparency and accountability for the commitments contained in the Strategy and related documents. Any monitoring approach through the Strategy will naturally have a broader focus on gender equality, however, Our Watch suggests that there should be distinct indicators and outcomes related to prevention to provide visibility of prevention and support the National Outcomes Framework currently being developed under the National Plan. This includes a focus on structural reform and changes to systems in relation to gender equality, which is required to support sustained change across institutions, organisations and communities in Australia.

This corresponds to the socioecological model, which Our Watch suggests that the government uses as a basis for identifying the changes required to achieve whole-of-population level change. This is an appropriate framework for developing more specific and relevant outcome indicators related to each level of desired changes in gender inequality.

Counting on change (p. 45) provides potentially useful criteria for outcome indicator selection, that are measurable and relevant for the Australian context, aligned with the drivers and reinforcing factors outlined in *Change the story*, and expected to change over time, producing some initial improvements over the short and medium-term, and substantive change in the long-term.

The development and implementation of monitoring frameworks to measure population-level progress should take an intersectional approach that ensures the design and process of data collection, data analysis, and the communication of the findings are conducted in a way which takes into consideration multiple forms of intersecting discrimination and disadvantage.

Alignment across reporting obligations

Our Watch encourages clearly alignment between and across the various obligations the Commonwealth Government has under its key strategies and frameworks related to gender equality, across departments and portfolios. This includes the National Plan.