# Submission to the Inquiry into the nature and drivers of radicalisation in Australia

Prepared by Our Watch

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Our Watch

Preventing violence against women

## Acknowledgement

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.

## About Our Watch

Our Watch is a national leader in the primary prevention of violence against women and their children. All Australian governments are members of Our Watch, including the Commonwealth Government. Our Watch values its ongoing partnership with the Commonwealth Government to support primary prevention policy and delivery. We undertake a broad range of primary prevention work, including under the *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032*.

Our Watch aims to drive nationwide change in the culture, behaviours, attitudes, institutions, systems and social structures that drive violence against women. Guided by our national evidence-based frameworks, *Change the story* (2nd ed 2021)[1], *Changing the picture* (2018)[2], *Changing the landscape* (2022)[3], and *Changing with pride* (2026)[4], we work with governments, practitioners and communities across Australia to address the drivers of violence in all settings where people live, learn, work and socialise.

Primary prevention applies an upstream model to stop violence before it starts by taking a whole-of-population approach that targets the social conditions that allow violence against women to occur.

Our definition of violence against women is any act of gender-based violence that causes, or is likely to cause, physical, sexual, psychological, emotional, social, cultural, spiritual or economic harm or suffering. It includes sexual violence, coercive control, threats, coercion and technology-facilitated abuse. Violence against women can occur in public or private settings and may involve a single incident or a pattern of behaviour over time.

We recognise that violence against women is part of a broader landscape of gender-based violence. This includes violence against LGBTIQA+ people and communities, which shares many of the same underlying drivers, including gender inequality, rigid gender norms and intersecting forms of discrimination.

## Overview and purpose

Our Watch welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Parliamentary Joint Committee Intelligence and Security's *inquiry into the nature and drivers of radicalisation in Australia* (the Inquiry).Our Watch's submission focusses on the intersection between misogyny, online environments and attitudes associated with violent extremism, the gendered drivers of violence against women, and primary prevention of violence against women as a critical component of addressing the drivers of radicalisation.

Our Watch recognises that radicalisation is complex, with multiple and intersecting contributing factors. Evidence on the relationship between harmful gender norms, misogyny and violent extremism highlights the importance of looking beyond individual pathways to radicalisation to consider the broader social conditions that shape and reinforce harmful attitudes and behaviours.

*Change the story*, Australia's shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women demonstrates how violence against women is driven by gender inequalities. *Change the story* identifies the following four gendered drivers of violence as particularly significant:

1. Condoning of violence against women.
2. Men's control over decision-making and women's independence.
3. Rigid gender stereotyping and dominant forms of masculinity.
4. Male peer relations and cultures of masculinity that emphasise aggression, dominance and control.[5]

While across Australia gender inequality is the primary and consistent driver of violence against women, it does not operate in isolation. It intersects with other forms of inequality including impacts of colonisation, systemic racism, intergenerational trauma, ableism, homophobia, transphobia and ageism, to shape the perpetration of violence against women.

Addressing these gendered drivers across our society is critical for preventing violence against women before it occurs. Recent research has identified strong associations between attitudes that support or excuse violence against women and support for violent extremism.[6] These intersections provide an important opportunity to consider how the evidence base underpinning whole-of-population approaches to primary prevention of violence against women can also inform, broader efforts to both understand and prevent radicalisation.

The *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032* (the National Plan) provides an established framework for coordinated action on primary prevention, offering an important foundation from which to consider how existing evidence and approaches can inform broader efforts to prevent radicalisation.

**Recommendation 1:** The Committee recommends the Commonwealth Government:

a. Recognise primary prevention of violence against women and efforts to prevent radicalisation as mutually reinforcing priorities, particularly in addressing intersecting social and structural factors associated with misogyny, violence against women and violent extremism.
b. Strengthen coordination and alignment between prevention initiatives undertaken through the National Plan Second Action Plan and national efforts to prevent radicalisation, including by identifying opportunities for complementary and mutually reinforcing prevention activities across relevant government portfolios and jurisdictions.

**Recommendation 2:** The Committee recommends strengthening investment in primary prevention alongside targeted intervention and response, including through the settings and services that reach people where they live, learn, work, rest and play.

**Recommendation 3:** The Committee considers opportunities to strengthen and scale evidence-based primary prevention approaches in online settings. This could include recommending that the Commonwealth Government:

- Strengthen the *Online Safety Amendment* (*Digital Duty of Care) Bill* to recognise serious harm to the whole Australian population caused by material or conduct that encourages, promotes or incites gender inequality and hostile attitudes to women.
- Scale primary prevention action efforts across both online and other settings to change the underlying social conditions that produce and drive gender inequality, disrespect and sexism, including for example increased investment in *The Line*.

**Recommendation 4:** The Committee considers opportunities to strengthen and scale evidence-based primary prevention approaches that engage men and boys in challenging harmful gender attitudes and norms and promoting gender equality. As detailed in Attachment A, these include workforce development strategies, community-led programs, working with role models and influencers to challenge harmful stereotypes, driving cultural

change in male-dominated settings – such as sports, TAFEs and certain workplaces and industries – and investment to support further Man Box studies[7].

## The relationship between misogyny, online amplification, radicalisation and violence against women

Recent Australian research (in line with over a decade of international research) has identified important and strong connections between misogyny, harmful gender attitudes and norms and violent extremism. Meger et al. measured the relationship between attitudes towards gender, race, religiosity and political authority and support for seven forms of violent extremism through a survey of 1020 people across Australia.[8] The seven forms of violent extremism included religious, ethically motivated, white supremacist, economic reactionary, incel and anti-feminist violent extremism.[9] Hostile sexist attitudes and attitudes permissive of violence against women were *strongly associated with most forms of violent extremism*.[10] Significantly, the research identified that anti-feminist violent extremism was the most prevalent form of violent extremist attitudes in Australia.[11]

Australian research has further highlighted the importance of considering misogyny and attitudes supportive of violence against women within discussions of online environments, radicalisation and violent extremism.[12] Sara Meger's research report, *Misogyny, Online Radicalisation, and Youth Extremism in Australia*, suggests that misogynistic attitudes are a strong predictor of support for a range of extremist beliefs. The research shows that certain online environments, including engagement with 'manfluencer'[1] content, online dating platforms and online pornography, are potentially contributing to the normalisation of misogynistic and violence-permitting attitudes.[13]

At the same time, it is important to recognise that while currently amplified by these new and rapidly developing online environments, misogynistic attitudes are not new. International researchers have been highlighting the relationship between misogyny and violent extremism for over a decade.[14] Importantly, the harmful gender stereotypes and attitudes of power, control and entitlement that underpin misogyny exist both online and offline, reinforcing the need for a whole-of-society approach to prevention.

Misogyny was also found to be a *significant predictor* of extremist orientations across a range of ideological movements, including incel ideology, religious extremism, white supremacy and right-wing politics.[2, 15] Specifically, **attitudes that normalise or excuse violence against women were identified as the strongest predictor of extremist attitudes**, demonstrating a stronger association with extremist beliefs than any of the online behaviours examined in the study.[16]

Critically, the research further found that the relationship between gender attitudes and extremism remained after accounting for ethnicity, religion and religiosity and was not explained by ethnic or religious background.[17] This finding is particularly relevant to the primary prevention of violence against women, as it directly relates to the first gendered driver

[1] 'Manfluencers' promote extreme or misogynistic views and harmful masculine ideals associated with a status that accrued through the sexualisation and objectification of women, as well as other status markers such as wealth accumulation. 'Manfluencers' are part of a broader misogynistic backlash against women's rights and gender equality. See Pfitzner, N., McCook, S., Phelan, A., Wescott, S., Roberts, S. & Scott, B. (2026). *An Introductory Guide to the Manosphere and the Impacts for Young People, Teachers and Schools*. ANROWS. https://www.anrows.org.au/resources/guide-to-the-manosphere/ and Our Watch and Youth Research Collective (2026); Roberts, S., & Wescott, S. (2024). To quell the problem, we must name the problem: The role of social media 'manfluencers' in boys' sexist behaviours in school settings. *Educational and Developmental Psychologist*, *41*(2), 125–128; Wescott, S., Roberts, S., & Zhao, X. (2024). The problem of anti-feminist 'manfluencer' Andrew Tate in Australian schools: Women teachers' experiences of resurgent male supremacy. *Gender and Education*, *36*(2), 167–182.

[2] Based on a national survey of 2,307 adults (aged 18 years and over) and 1,122 young people (aged 13-17 years), the study examined the prevalence of misogynistic attitudes, attitudes permissive of violence against women, and violent extremist attitudes across the Australian population.

identified in *Change the story* – condoning of violence against women. It highlights the critical role that primary prevention has in addressing and preventing violent extremism and radicalisation.

### The role of attitudes and social norms

While in Australia there is currently a strong focus on young people's attitude, Meger's findings suggest that these attitudes are not confined to young people. While the study found that young people, particularly boys, recorded the highest levels of hostile gender attitudes, concerning attitudes were also evident among adults.[18] Across boys *and* men, 31-35% agreed that attempts to provide equal opportunities for women had gone too far, while 24-29% agreed that feminism is a hate movement.[19] Further, analysis across generations revealed that Generation Z and Millennial men recorded broadly similar rates of extremist attitudes, suggesting these attitudes are not limited to adolescence.[20]These findings reinforce that efforts to address misogyny and radicalisation must include boys and men across the life course.

Important links between online engagement, misogyny and extremist attitudes were also identified. Among boys and men, engagement with 'manfluencer' content was identified as the online behaviour most strongly associated with general misogyny and attitudes that normalise or excuse violence against women. [21] The findings highlighted the importance of looking beyond social media use generally to consider specific forms of online engagement, including online dating, pornography and 'manfluencer' content, and their associations with harmful gender attitudes and behaviours towards women. [22]

Given the strong relationship identified between attitudes that normalise or excuse violence against women and support for violent extremism and the role that online amplification plays, there is understandable focus on the harms associated with the online environment. However, it is also important to understand that for the same reasons, the online environment can play a positive role in prevention. **Harnessed appropriately, online and digital spaces can play an effective role in disrupting and combating the spread of misogynistic messages and narratives, as discussed later in this submission.**

Collectively, this evidence demonstrates the need to understand misogyny as a relevant and overlapping concern for both efforts to prevent radicalisation and the primary prevention of violence against women. While the relationship between misogyny and radicalisation is complex, the findings highlight the relevance of the four gendered drivers and primary prevention of violence against women to understanding and preventing some forms of extremism. It also underscores the need to look beyond particular ideologies or platforms and consider the broader social conditions in which misogynistic attitudes develop, circulate and may be reinforced.

The Committee's inquiry is taking place at a critical juncture, with the concurrent development of the Second Action plan under the National Plan.[3] This provides the Committee with an opportunity to consider how primary prevention action under the Second Action Plan can also contribute to efforts to prevent radicalisation. Meger's research report similarly recommends treating misogyny, violence against women and violent extremism as connected national priorities requiring a coordinated, whole-of-government approach. [23]

[3] Noting that work is also under way to develop actions under *Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices: National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Plan to End Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence 2026–2036* (Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices), and *Safe and Supported: the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021-2031* (Safe and Supported).

**Recommendation 1:** The Committee recommends the Commonwealth Government:

a. Recognise primary prevention of violence against women and efforts to prevent radicalisation as mutually reinforcing priorities, particularly in addressing intersecting social and structural factors associated with misogyny, violence against women and violent extremism.
b. Strengthen coordination and alignment between prevention initiatives undertaken through the National Plan Second Action Plan and national efforts to prevent radicalisation, including by identifying opportunities for complementary and mutually reinforcing prevention activities across relevant government portfolios and jurisdictions.

## Primary prevention of violence against women approaches

Primary prevention succeeds when all governments use the full range of policy, legislative, regulatory, funding and governance levers available to them. In Our Watch's submission to the *National Plan* Second Action Plan (see **Attachment A**, p. 20), we noted that the most significant opportunity to prevent and ultimately end gender-based violence is to scale primary prevention nationally, as a universal, whole-of-population approach. This requires deliberate action across three dimensions – scaling out to reach more people, scaling up to shift structural and institutional drivers, and scaling deep to shift cultural norms – always balanced with, and grounded in, community leadership.

Primary prevention is not the sole responsibility of domestic, family and sexual violence or child protection portfolios. Health, education, justice, disability services and other systems all have a role in creating the social conditions that support safety, equality and respectful relationships. Primary prevention works at the population level to shift the underlying drivers of violence across the whole of society. It involves coordinated action through policy, legislative, institutional and organisational levers, to drive structural change across a range of systems. It is also specifically focussed on addressing the underlying gendered drivers, to stop violence before it occurs. This includes challenging gender inequality and harmful attitudes toward women as social conditions that enable violence to occur.

By focusing on these underlying gendered drivers, primary prevention, has the potential to support efforts to prevent radicalisation, particularly given the relationship between misogyny, harmful gender attitudes and violent extremism. It is only when a broad range of everyday settings and sectors– including schools, workplaces, business, leisure venues, early childhood services, sports clubs, civil society organisations, human and social service organisations, advertising, public transport and the arts – are leading their own, tailored prevention activities, supported and strengthened by complementary government actions through policy, legislation and regulation that we will start to see attitudinal and behavioural change on a social scale. Building on the evidence linking misogyny and harmful gender attitudes with violent extremism and the need for coordinated action, there is an opportunity to consider how established primary prevention approaches across settings can contribute to broader efforts to prevent radicalisation.

In Our Watch's submission to the *National Plan* Second Action Plan, we highlight the importance of primary prevention approaches that reach people across the life course and in the settings where they live, learn, work, rest and play. This includes recommendations specifically related to:

- Early childhood education and care settings (see **Attachment A**, pp. 30-32)
- Whole-of-school-community settings including Respectful Relationships Education (RRE) (see **Attachment A**, pp. 22; 30-32)
- Tertiary education settings (see **Attachment A**, pp. 30-32), and
- National prevention campaigns e.g., *The Line* (see **Attachment A**, pp. 29-32).

**Recommendation 2:** The Committee recommends strengthening investment in primary prevention alongside targeted intervention and response, including through the settings and services that reach people where they live, learn, work, rest and play as a pathway broader efforts to prevent radicalisation.

### *Online settings*

While online and digital settings are increasingly recognised as spaces where harm occurs, and misogynistic messages are spread, they can also be used to disrupt and combat these narratives.

The evidence on the relationship between misogyny and violent extremist attitudes highlights the importance of considering how online platforms and their design features may contribute to the circulation and amplification of harmful gender narratives.

Our Watch welcomes the Commonwealth Government's continued focus on online safety through the proposed *Online Safety Amendment* (*Digital Duty of Care) Bill* which seeks to strengthen the responsibilities of online services to prevent and mitigate foreseeable harms.

Online environments also present an important setting to influence gender norms, attitudes and behaviours in support of gender equality and respectful relationships.

For example, *The Line*, is a national online social marketing initiative that supports young people to navigate sex, consent, relationships and respect. The Line's 2025 Comfort Zone campaign reached 134.5 million impressions and 59 million video views. Young people who saw the campaign reported greater understanding of healthy boundaries (47% vs 38%), greater understanding of controlling behaviours (52% vs 43%), and 88% took at least one action after exposure, including reflecting on relationships or starting conversations about boundaries.[24]

For Australia's ongoing efforts to prevent violence against women and to prevent violent extremism, approaches to online and digital environments should *both* address the harms associated with misogynistic content and strengthen opportunities to promote gender equality, challenge harmful masculinities and support respectful relationships. While regulation can make online spaces safer, it is important to recognise online harm is a sociotechnical problem, shaped by the interaction between digital systems and broader social structures, norms and behaviours. Platform design and governance have a role to play in shaping and amplifying risk. However, technical and regulatory solutions alone cannot fully address gender inequality, harmful gender and social norms, unequal power relations and other drivers that underpin violence against women.

**Recommendation 3:** The Committee considers opportunities to strengthen and scale evidence-based primary prevention approaches in online settings. This could include recommending the Commonwealth Government:

- Strengthen the *Online Safety Amendment* (*Digital Duty of Care) Bill* to recognise serious harm to the whole Australian population caused by material or conduct that encourages, promotes or incites gender inequality and hostile attitudes to women.
- Scale primary prevention action across both online and other settings to change the underlying social conditions that produce and drive gender inequality, disrespect and sexism, including for example increased investment in *The Line*.

### *Engaging men and boys in positive forms of masculinities*

All men have a role to play in challenging the stereotypes and cultures that underpin the gendered drivers of violence against women. This means men and boys being supported to think about their actions and to actively question and resist harmful gender norms and stereotypes where they live, learn, work, play and socialise.

Engaging men and boys to counter misogynist narratives and promote positive, more expansive forms of masculinities, male peer relationships and gender-equitable norms is a critical component of primary prevention.

The Committee's inquiry sits within broader efforts to address harmful forms of masculinities. This provides the Committee with an opportunity to consider how these established approaches to engaging men and boys can complement broader efforts to prevent radicalisation.

Australia requires a significant increase in quality work designed specifically for this purpose — work that addresses power, control, entitlement and gender relations, that is gender transformative, intersectional and accountable, and that operates across individual, organisational, community and structural levels. In Our Watch's submission to the *National Plan* Second Action Plan, we highlight the importance of primary prevention approaches that engage men and boys and point to specific opportunities to scale these approaches (see **Attachment A**, p. 29-30; and Our Watch's *Policy brief: Men and Masculinities in the Primary Prevention of Gender-based Violence*).

Our Watch's national consultation report on men and masculinities in primary prevention, *Strengthening national approaches to addressing masculinities and working with men and boys*, explored what is needed to build more coordinated and evidence-informed approaches to working with men and boys. Efforts to prevent radicalisation should draw on these findings to inform approaches to engaging with men and boys, given the relationship between misogyny, violent extremism and radicalisation.

**Recommendation 4:** The Committee considers opportunities to strengthen and scale evidence-based primary prevention approaches that engage men and boys in challenging harmful gender attitudes and norms and promoting gender equality. As detailed in Attachment A, these include workforce development strategies, community-led programs, working with role models and influencers to challenge harmful stereotypes, driving cultural change in male-dominated settings – such as sports, TAFEs and certain workplaces and industries – and investment to support further Man Box studies[25].

## Conclusion

The Committee's inquiry provides an opportunity to strengthen coordination and alignment between efforts to prevent violence against women and efforts to prevent radicalisation.

The evidence highlights the importance of addressing misogyny and harmful gender attitudes as part of broader efforts to understand and prevent radicalisation. Australia's established commitment and approach to primary prevention, as outlined in the National Plan, offers an opportunity to leverage existing national infrastructure to inform and strengthen broader efforts to prevent radicalisation.

Primary prevention has a critical role to play in in addressing and preventing forms of extremism and radicalisation that are linked to misogyny by challenging harmful gender attitudes and norms before they become entrenched.

Our Watch welcomes the opportunity to provide further advice or assistance, please contact **Dr Sanjugta Vas Dev, Director of Government Relations, Policy and Evidence** at sanjugta.vasdev@ourwatch.org.au.

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