

# Opportunities for prevention of violence

against women and children in the Australian Capital Territory



**Our  
Watch**

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.



# Violence against women is preventable

## Violence against women

Violence against women and girls is a serious and widespread national problem.

In the Australian Capital Territory:

**5.2%**

In 2021-22, 5.2% of women in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) **had experienced some form of violence in the last two years.**<sup>1</sup>

**13.1%**

In the ACT, 13.1% of women reported experiencing sexual harassment in the last 12 months, higher than the national average of 12.6%.<sup>2</sup>

**\$22 billion**

Violence against women takes a profound and long-term toll on **women's health and wellbeing, on families and communities, and on society as a whole.** The estimated cost of violence against women in 2015-16 in Australia was \$22 billion.<sup>3</sup>

1 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). (2023). Personal Safety Survey: 2021-22, Personal Safety, Australia, 2021-22 financial year | Australian Bureau of Statistics ([abs.gov.au](https://abs.gov.au))

2 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). (2023). Personal Safety Survey: 2021-22, Personal Safety, Australia, 2021-22 financial year | Australian Bureau of Statistics ([abs.gov.au](https://abs.gov.au))

3 KPMG. (2016). [The cost of violence against women and their children.](#)

# Policy context in the Australian Capital Territory

## There is important work underway to prevent and respond to domestic, family and sexual violence in the ACT.

This includes a number of key plans, frameworks and partnerships that guide primary prevention work in the ACT.

These include, for example, the ACT Women's Plan 2016-26 that sets out principles for actions and initiatives to enhance the economic status, social inclusion, and safety and wellbeing of ACT women.

Additionally, the *We don't shoot our wounded: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Victims of Family Violence Access to Justice and Access to Services in the ACT (2009)* has led the ACT Government's actions on prevention of violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

There are also a range of existing coordination and governance mechanisms and structures in place in the ACT, including the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Coordinator-General and Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Prevention Council.

In 2024, in part in response to recommendations from the *Listen. Take Action Prevent, Believe and Health Report* (the Report), the ACT Government has committed to the development of the *ACT Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Strategy* (DFSV Strategy). While development of the DFSV Strategy has been delayed, initial indications are that the ACT Government intends to commit to development of a specific primary prevention plan under the DFSV Strategy.

The ACT is relatively early in its primary prevention journey, however there are already a range of primary prevention activities, programs and initiatives occurring across the government, private and community sectors in the ACT that provide a solid foundation for strengthening primary prevention approaches across the ACT.

Importantly, the ACT as a relatively small jurisdiction has opportunities to consider and implement innovative and flexible approaches to ending violence against women.

# Key opportunities for primary prevention in the Australian Capital Territory

## 1.

### Develop a Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Strategy

The development of a Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence (DFSV) Strategy in the ACT provides an important foundation for primary prevention, early intervention, response and recovery in the ACT. It will acknowledge and build on work already being done and outline priorities and focus areas for action. The Strategy is also likely to help support a whole-of-government approach and provide clarity about the steps necessary to build the systems and structures across government and priority areas to ensure work to end domestic, family and sexual violence in the ACT is strategic, coordinated, effective and sustained.

The development of a new DFSV Strategy and associated plans also creates an opportunity to build on, strengthen and/or establish clear governance structures to guide work in the ACT and achieve the outcomes of the Strategy. Effective leadership and implementation of a Strategy and work in this area requires collaboration between government, key stakeholders and organisations across the ACT as well as clear whole-of-government structures within the ACT Government.

The Strategy could include initial actions as part of the Strategy, or be complemented by an Action Plan (or series of Action Plans). There is also an opportunity to consider the development of more specific Plans under the Strategy, including for example a Primary Prevention Plan.

#### KEY OPPORTUNITY

- **Commit to the development and implementation** of a Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Strategy



## 2.

### Build and expand the foundations of primary prevention in the ACT

Primary prevention requires strong foundations or infrastructure, which are the systems and structures that ensure primary prevention is supported, coordinated and sustained over the long term. These foundations are critical to enabling and sustaining changes to the drivers of violence and ensuring the design, implementation and evaluation of prevention efforts occur in a coordinated way.

While the ACT Government have established some of the foundations of primary prevention, there is an opportunity through the development of a DFSV Strategy to continue to establish foundations for prevention and ensure prevention is effective and sustained.

#### KEY OPPORTUNITIES

There are opportunities to include following actions as priority foundational elements within a DFSV Strategy. However, there are also opportunities to focus on and invest in these ahead of the finalisation of a Strategy, including:

- **Build on, strengthen and/or establish clear governance mechanisms and structures** to support this work in the ACT and a DFSV Strategy and associated work both within and across the ACT Government, as well as more broadly. This could include, for example, considering the role of the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Coordinator General and the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Prevention Council.
- **Establish mechanisms for workforce development and sector development**, including investment in organisations and mechanisms to coordinate activities to develop, grow, retain and support primary prevention workforces in the ACT.
- **Establish and/or build on governance mechanisms to facilitate coordination and collaboration** across ACT Government Departments in the **design**, development, delivery and evaluation of prevention policy and programming.
- **Prioritise the development of clear monitoring, evaluation and reporting structures and mechanisms** to support data collection, monitoring and reporting on prevention, including under a DFSV Strategy.

# 3.

## Expand Respectful Relationships Education

Evidence-based respectful relationships education (RRE) is a holistic approach to the prevention of gender-based violence in school settings. It is a whole of school model that goes beyond curriculum delivery using the education system as a catalyst for generational and cultural change by engaging schools, as education institutions and workplaces and community hubs, to comprehensively address the drivers of gender-based violence.

A whole-of-school approach ensures a culture among both staff and students where gender stereotypes are challenged, gender-based discrimination is unacceptable, and gender equality is actively promoted, modelled and embedded across the entire school, not only in the curriculum. There is an opportunity to build on the Gender Equality in Schools initiative to sustain and scale the delivery of Respectful Relationships Education in line with the evidence base.

There are particular opportunities in relation to RRE in 2024 in light of the work of the National RRE Expert Working Group and Commonwealth funding for state and territory governments in relation to RRE.

### KEY OPPORTUNITIES

- **Prioritising and planning for a phased approach** to evidence based RRE as a core business of the education system in ACT.
- **Supporting the development and implementation of RRE** by creating a respectful relationships education workforce within the Department of Education to coordinate and support school level implementation.
- **Ensuring respectful relationships curriculum addresses the drivers of violence, across all year levels** in an ongoing manner, delivered by teachers who are supported to safely and confidently deliver the curriculum.
- **Including primary prevention in higher education as part of the Respectful Relationships Education priority** to support commitments under the [Action Plan Addressing Gender-based Violence in Higher Education](#)

# 4.

## Focus on preventing violence experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women experience disproportionate rates of violence, and violence that is often more severe and more complex in its impacts.<sup>4</sup> Action to prevent violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women needs to take into account not only gender inequality but also the impacts of colonisation and racism.

The development of a DFSV Strategy and potentially a standalone Plan under the Strategy, provides an opportunity to recognise and identify actions to address the unique drivers of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

### KEY OPPORTUNITIES

- Include a dedicated focus area on preventing violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women in the DFSV Strategy. **Initiatives for preventing violence should be culturally-safe and healing-focussed.**
- Continue engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, organisations and communities **to ensure self-determination, ownership and control are at the heart of prevention actions.**

## Further Information

Our Watch welcomes the opportunity to provide further advice or assistance in relation to opportunities for the primary prevention of violence against women and girls in the Australia Capital Territory.

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<sup>4</sup> Our Watch. (2018). Changing the picture: A national resource to support the prevention of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their children. <https://www.ourwatch.org.au/resource/changing-the-picture/>



[ourwatch.org.au](https://ourwatch.org.au)

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