

EVIDENCE BRIEF

Settings for primary prevention

2024

**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-Aboriginal organisation, Our Watch understands that violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children is an issue for the whole community. As highlighted in Our Watch's national resource *Changing the picture*, the evidence clearly shows the 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 suffer from violence at a significantly higher rate than non-Aboriginal women. We acknowledge all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations who continue to lead the work of sharing knowledge with non-Indigenous people and relentlessly advocate for an equitable, violence-free future in Australia.

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Background and purpose of brief

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. All Australian governments are members of Our Watch, including the Commonwealth Government.

In 2021, Our Watch developed the second edition of *Change the story*, an evidence-based framework to guide a coordinated and effective national approach to preventing violence against women.

Our Watch has prepared this brief as part of its ongoing work and commitment to provide clear and accessible evidence, information and advice to inform primary prevention work across Australia. The brief was also prepared in the context of the 2024 Commonwealth Rapid Review of Prevention Approaches. It forms part of a series of five briefs, including:

- **Brief 1:** Primary prevention across the life cycle
- **Brief 2:** Settings for primary prevention
- **Brief 3:** Reinforcing factors for gender-based violence
- **Brief 4:** Whole of system opportunities for primary prevention
- **Brief 5:** Opportunities to engage with men to support primary prevention

This brief focuses specifically on opportunities for **settings-based prevention work**. It is strongly related to, and should be read in conjunction with, Brief 1, which discusses prevention across the life course, as reaching people at a particular stage of life often involves working in the specific settings that people at those life stages are most likely to engage with.

Our Watch uses the term ‘settings-based’ rather than ‘place-based’ approaches, to encompass a broader range of ways of engaging a particular audience, because not all ‘settings’ are specific to a single geographical ‘place’. However much of the work described in this brief is, or can be, undertaken in a specific physical or geographical place (such as a school community, a university or a workplace for example), which makes much of this brief relevant to the Rapid Review’s interest in local level work and place-based approaches.

The way in which Our Watch recommends prevention be undertaken within a setting – by engaging all the different audiences that engage with that setting, and by working both ‘on the ground’ and at a policy or regulatory level – is also relevant to the review’s interest in saturation models of prevention.

One of the most relevant projects currently underway in Australia is the Victorian Government’s Ballarat saturation model; a new evidence-based, four-year project to prevent violence against women in Ballarat. Respect Victoria is working with the local community to design a model that will ‘saturate’ Ballarat with initiatives and community action to address the drivers of men’s violence against women and drive down rates of violence.

Settings-based approaches provide potential solutions to other areas outlined by the review, particularly the search for:

- **'Opportunities to engage with men to support prevention'**: the brief points to existing prevention work that is already engaging large numbers of men (especially prevention approaches in workplaces and sports settings) and that could be easily expanded by governments and other stakeholders, using existing frameworks and resources. The brief also makes clear there is a strong need and opportunity to expand settings-based work targeting male dominated settings.
- **'New approaches that governments, the non-government sector and industry can take'**: the brief points to several opportunities to implement prevention approaches in settings that have to date seen little prevention activity.

Our Watch also notes the review's interest in ***the experiences and needs of First Nations people, and people with disability***. In addition to the content of this brief, which emphasises the need for an intersectional approach in all settings-based work, Our Watch suggests that the following key resources are relevant to any consideration of how settings-based approaches to prevention can be specifically tailored:

- *Changing the picture: A national resource to support the prevention of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their children*
- *Changing the picture background paper: Understanding violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their children*
- *Changing the landscape: A national resource to prevent violence against women and girls with disabilities*
- *Changing the landscape background paper*

Importantly however, the priority in any such work should always be to engage, consult and work in partnership with relevant organisations and communities, in particular Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and Disabled Persons Organisations.

A settings-based approach to prevention: An overview

Addressing a complex social problem like violence against women requires a large-scale effort, engaging the largest possible number of people across institutions, organisations and systems with sustained and meaningful interventions that encourage shifts in the way people think and behave in relation to violence against women.

Settings/sectors are the places or social contexts in which environmental, organisational and personal factors interact. Settings/sectors are where policy frameworks (such as tax, industrial relations, health, and social support) come to life, and where social and cultural values are produced and reinforced. Given this, prevention efforts need to engage people across the many settings/sectors where they live, work, learn, socialise and play, and involve the people, professionals and communities who are part of these settings.

It is useful to differentiate between whole-of-organisation and whole-of-setting/sector approaches, although both are important principles of prevention work:

- **A whole-of-organisation approach** works within an individual organisation such as a school, a sporting club or a workplace to develop an organisational approach to prevention. It considers, for example, how prevention activities can target all the individuals and different groups in the organisation; how formal organisational policies and procedures can be used to drive change; how to engage the leadership and shift organisational culture; and how to embed prevention into the day-to-day business of the organisation.
- **A whole-of-setting/sector approach** works at a broader level, with a group of like organisations that are governed by the same state/territory-wide or national policy, regulatory or legislative framework. While it will include organisations implementing organisation-wide actions, a whole-of-setting approach goes beyond this to focus on the connections between these individual organisations and the shared opportunities for change across that setting or sector. It considers how prevention goals can be achieved through consistent approaches, resource sharing, coordination, setting/sector-wide infrastructure and shared approaches to evaluation and learning.

A whole-of-setting approach is critical when developing national, state/territory-wide or municipal responses to address the gendered drivers of violence against women. This holistic approach takes time, resourcing and leadership. Where it is not immediately possible, early-stage prevention activities implemented by an individual organisation within a setting/sector can be an important first step, but should be framed as building blocks towards a longer-term vision that involves a whole-of-setting approach.

Prevention work in settings should be multi-dimensional. It needs to encompass the individuals and groups within that setting, the organisations, institutions and systems that define it, and the laws, policies and regulations that govern it. A whole-of-setting/sector approach requires prevention efforts that:

- include policy, practice and structural change within the setting and should be complemented by the wider policy, regulatory or legislative change that will support and increase the effectiveness of settings-based work
- involve all those who engage with the setting, including leadership, staff, volunteers, the audience the setting serves, and those outside the setting who provide it with services or support
- consider the levers or mechanisms that can support, enable and systematise prevention activity across the setting or sector, beyond those that exist in individual organisations.

A key benefit of whole-of-setting approaches is that they work across all levels of society: from the individual and relationship level, to organisations and communities, to systems and institutions, and ultimately to the societal level. Simultaneous actions at each of these levels can have a mutually reinforcing effect, maximising the impact of prevention efforts.

Settings for prevention

The settings/sectors listed below are those in which prevention activities (systemic and programmatic) are occurring across the country, and where there is a strong evidence base to draw from and existing resources to use. These settings/sectors present immediate opportunities for scale up and have a high potential for widespread impact on social norms, organisational practices and institutional structures. A whole-of-setting/sector approach (as described above) in all these settings is critical to ensure the success of any prevention approach. Importantly, these are not the only settings for primary prevention work, which occurs across Australia and is led and undertaken by a wide range of governments and organisations.

Early childhood education and care, and school and tertiary education settings

*These are all critical settings for prevention, and settings in which significant work is occurring. However, as they seek to reach audiences at **specific life stages**, they are discussed in Brief 1 on prevention across the life course. Please see that brief for a detailed description of prevention in early childhood settings, primary and secondary schools and tertiary education settings.*

Workplaces, corporations and employee organisations

Workplaces, corporations and employee organisations are important settings for primary prevention because they:

- have significant reach into all areas of the Australian population, including people who have more limited connection with other settings or sectors
- are required to adhere to regulations and legislation that support broader gender equality and safety at work, and promote respect
- have a strong normative influence on individuals' views about gender equality and violence against women.

These settings include industry bodies, employers and employer networks, unions, employment agencies, and both public and private sector workplaces.

There are many federal, and state and territory legal, policy and regulatory frameworks that govern workplaces, and these can be used to enable, support and enforce changes implemented through initiatives at the workplace level. Governments can create structural change that is not possible at the organisation or industry level without regulatory intervention, for example by using industrial relations law, anti-discrimination legislation and work health and safety laws. There have been several examples of legislative, regulatory and policy reform that have made significant differences in relation to workplaces, including the introduction of a positive duty for employers to prevent sexual harassment, sex discrimination, hostile work environments and victimisation.

There is a wide range of promising prevention and gender equality work being undertaken by workplaces, employers and employee organisations across Australia.

Prevention in workplaces practice example: Engaging Employers in Preventing Sexual Harassment Project

To support organisations to engage in preventing violence against women (family and domestic violence and sexual harassment), Our Watch developed the Workplace Equality and Respect Standards to guide workplace practice. The five Standards (Commitment, Conditions, Culture, Support and Core business) align with positive duty obligations under the *Anti-Discrimination and Human Rights Legislation Amendment (Respect at Work) Act 2022* (Cth).

The five Workplace Equality and Respect Standards have informed Our Watch's work under the **Engaging Employers in Preventing Sexual Harassment Project**. The project has been working with four medium-to-large Australian corporates since June 2023 across the telecommunications, retail, and construction/property development industries (which together employ approximately 225,000 staff).

The Workplace Equality and Respect Standards support workplaces to address the gendered drivers of violence (including sexual harassment). Using the Standards to benchmark their policies, workplace culture and practices has helped workplaces to:

- recognise the importance of integrating the prevention of violence against women (including sexual harassment) into their well-established workplace health and safety frameworks, rather than just seeing the issue as one related to wellbeing
- understand the risks and costs of not preventing violence against women
- focus on improving workplace culture to call out sexism and inappropriate behaviours in a safe manner (proactive bystander and upstander actions)
- upskilling leadership (senior executives and Boards) to set workplace behavioural standards and culture
- review recruitment and retention procedures to be more inclusive, and to manage (support or remove) perpetrators
- explore trauma-informed and survivor led practices for responding to violence
- review how remuneration frameworks (commission-based roles, casual work) can increase staff vulnerability
- increase training for managers and increase access to anonymous reporting mechanisms.

All of these steps will help make Australian workplaces safer, more inclusive, more equal and therefore more productive.

Gaps and opportunities for prevention in workplaces

Governments can use a range of legal, policy and regulatory levers to support prevention in workplaces, such as:

- The *Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012* (Cth) to strengthen data and public reporting on gender equality in a wide range of workplaces and industries.
- Commonwealth, state and territory industrial relations legislation to facilitate access to, and take-up of, provisions such as domestic and family violence leave entitlements and flexible work arrangements, and to achieve equal pay.
- Continue to strengthen work health and safety frameworks and mechanisms to encompass preventing and responding to gendered violence in the workplace.
- Provide increased paid parental leave for fathers to encourage women's economic independence and help shift social norms regarding gender roles.

Opportunities for a range of other stakeholders include:

- **Increase diversity on Boards:** In general, Australian Boards remain male dominated as well as lacking in other forms of diversity (gender and sex, cultural, sexual orientation, disability, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander directors). This limits the diversity of thought and experiences at the highest decision-making level, and can reinforce gendered stereotypes and norms, which are more likely to foster unequal and unsafe workplaces.
- **Implement employer campaigns:** Such as Our Watch's *Lead the change*, aimed at employers, particularly senior executives.

- **Address risks at the workplace level:** Our Watch’s experience with employers who have used the Workplace Equality and Respect framework, suggests that the following are common gaps and risks in many ‘business as usual’ processes that need to be addressed:
 - ensure staff (especially front line and operational staff) can access appropriate policies and resources and understand them
 - create transparency in reporting processes for gender-based violence
 - establish multiple (including anonymous) avenues to report
 - create a feedback loop across the business that demonstrates the response to complaints. This is needed to improve transparency, accountability, and create a ‘safe to speak’ culture which supports reporting and enables active bystanders
 - address risks in workplace policies, including those related to remuneration structures, workplace health and safety procedures incorporating psychosocial risks (including DFV and sexual harassment), flexibility of work hours and locations, and gender balance and gender pay parity across business teams and leadership.
- **Engage men:** There is a growing momentum for initiatives that practically engage men in preventing gender-based violence in the workplace. In organisations without gender parity (particularly within leadership, Board, and management roles) this lack of gender diversity is an additional risk factor for sexual harassment and other gender-based workplace harms. Men need access to relevant information, frameworks, and skills to address these issues in their organisations, and begin to close gender parity and gender pay gaps.
- **Support organisations to take an intersectional approach:** Organisations need further support to understand and apply an intersectional lens to their policies and practices, to create equal, safe and respectful workplaces.

Sports clubs and institutions

This sector includes local and regional clubs, professional institutions, state and national professional sporting organisations (inclusive of elite leagues, clubs and organisations) and the organisations providing services and facilities to them.

These settings are important because sport:

- is seen by many as significant to Australia’s national identity
- exerts a powerful influence on gender relations, attitudes, behaviours and social norms, and as role models athletes and sporting professionals can have significant influence (either negative or positive)
- provides an opportunity to reach large groups and communities (employees, players and their families, sponsors, supporters, volunteers, etc.)
- provides an opportunity to reach large groups of men.

Practice example: Our Watch/AFL partnership

In 2023/2024, the AFL and Our Watch embarked on a partnership to deliver face-to-face educational training to players. The educational workshops will be rolled out to all AFL and AFLW teams from each of the 18 clubs by the end of the 2024 season.

The training is tailored to the AFL and AFLW playing groups and provides each cohort with an understanding of the link between gender inequality and violence against women; the role of sport in promoting gender equality; and for male athletes, what they can do to be active allies including taking action when they see or hear disrespect and, for AFLW athletes, using their sphere of influence to drive change.

The partnership is based on the assumption that AFL and AFLW players are role models for thousands of people and that players are in a unique position to lead the change in attitudes that both create a fair and inclusive sport and help end violence against women in the broader community.

The training will help ensure players are supported and encouraged to build healthy relationships and understand their role in preventing violence against women within their clubs, their social circles and within the broader community. It has also been designed in recognition that based on statistics alone, there will be AFL and AFLW players in every team that have witnessed or experienced violence against women.

This AFL player training is part of a broader, 'whole-of-sport' approach that seeks to create cultural and environmental change by, as Our Watch CEO Patty Kinnersly puts it: 'extending principles of equality and fairness beyond the field into the boardroom, the coach's box, the stands, the change rooms, and the media'.

Gaps and opportunities for prevention in sports settings

The following are opportunities for sporting organisations, national and state leagues, associations and governing bodies to improve their engagement with primary prevention. Our Watch's [Equality and Respect in Sport](#) resources can provide support and guidance in doing this, and there are also many lessons to be learned from sports organisations that are already undertaking such work.

- Commit to and invest in whole-of-organisation approaches to primary prevention of violence against women in sport. This includes in leadership; in policies and procedures; in developing cultures that reject sexist and other forms of discrimination; by supporting staff, volunteers and players who experience domestic, family and sexual violence; and by integrating gender equality into core business.
- Embed a focus on prevention of violence against women in constitutions and organisational policies.
- Embed behaviours and attitudes that support gender equality and respect for women in codes of conduct (professional sporting codes in particular) and apply national penalties to officials and players who do not adhere to these codes.
- Set quotas for female representation at all levels.

- Develop a coordinated approach to coaching staff on violence prevention education, specifically for use in sporting clubs teaching young men.
- Large sporting organisations or governing bodies can support local sports clubs to engage in primary prevention training and education. The current lack of organisations across the country that offer evidence-based approaches to sporting clubs is a gap. Where relevant work does take place, it often lacks a gendered lens, and training and other initiatives at the community level tend to focus only on awareness raising and lack clear actions to promote change.

While some large organisations have capacity to take actions like those listed above within their existing resources, local sports clubs and smaller organisations are likely to require dedicated funding and support. There are roles for national sporting organisations, governing bodies and governments to play in providing this.

In addition to providing funding to enable prevention initiatives, other examples of policy, regulatory and legislative actions that governments can take to enable and support activity in sporting settings include:

- support all sporting codes to employ, develop and retain more women in coaching roles, in senior leadership and decision-making roles and on the Boards of sports organisations
- in working with sporting organisations to host major sporting events, governments can include a specific focus on gender equality to leverage the legacy of these high-profile events
- develop grant programs to specifically build the capacity of sporting organisations to address the gendered drivers of violence against women
- consider making government funding for sports organisations or events contingent on the recipient meeting certain gender equality requirements (such as including a gendered lens on funded projects, having strategies to increase the proportion of women in leadership roles or having prevention programs in place).

Media

Media as a setting includes the industries and organisations that deliver media in all its forms – print, television, podcasts, digital and radio and includes both traditional, new media and alternative media outlets.

Media as a setting for primary prevention is important because it:

- has wide reach across the entire Australian population
- has significant influence in shaping and maintaining social norms
- includes media workplaces in which there is the potential to shift organisational cultures, attitudes and behaviours
- has a strong influence on public opinion about violence against women and inequality
- helps shape the way women and their children understand their own experiences of violence and influence decisions on whether to speak out, take action, or seek support

- may shape the way perpetrators understand their behaviour and where they can go for support
- includes online sites where women experience high levels of abuse and harassment with limited formal avenues for complaint/redress (unlike other settings/sectors).

Prevention in media settings practice example: Masterclass for journalists new to prevention

Our Watch undertakes a range of work in relation to media as a setting for primary prevention.

In June 2024, Our Watch hosted a no-cost, in-person masterclass designed as an introduction to the prevention of violence against women for journalists and media professionals. Twenty-two reporters and media professionals were selected and attended from a range of commercial and non-commercial news organisations.

Over two days, participants explored the links between violence against women and gender inequality, and the role the media can play in preventing violence against women. The Masterclass aimed to increase participants' knowledge, skills and confidence to report in ways that more accurately represent victims/survivors, perpetrators, and incidents of violence, and that contribute to prevention aims by helping the public understand the cultural, behavioural, and attitudinal factors contributing to violence against women. The Masterclass included prior online learning, guest speaker panels, facilitated discussions, practical exercises and networking opportunities.

Monitoring data collected as part of delivery of the masterclass found:

- 100% of respondents were highly satisfied with the training
- 92% of respondents showed a high increase in knowledge
- 95.9% of respondents showed a high increase in skill
- 89.3% of respondents showed high increase in confidence to act
- 100% of respondents felt that the content was well matched and relevant to their existing level of prevention knowledge.

Prevention in media settings – practical resources

Our Watch has developed a range of practical resources and training modules to guide a prevention approach in the media setting, including:

- university curriculum resources for journalism educators
- training for journalists, both introductory and in-depth
- [*How to report on violence against women and their children*](#), a set of national media guidelines that provide tips and information the media can use to ensure reporting does not further harm victim-survivors and is part of the solution to violence against all women and their children.
- [*Tips for reporting on violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women*](#)
- A guide to improve and support [*Media reporting on violence against transgender and gender diverse communities*](#)

- [Tips for reporting on sexual harassment](#)
- [Tips for media reporting where there are legal restrictions](#)
- [Tips for improving sports reporting on violence against women](#)

Gaps and opportunities for prevention in media settings

Examples of policy, regulatory and legislative actions to enable and support primary prevention activity in media settings include:

- Ensure that advertising guidelines for the media industry – news, entertainment and advertising media – include provisions for the promotion of gender equality and the prevention of violence against women.
- Strengthen current guidelines and editorial policies on the reporting of family and domestic violence and deepen knowledge of these guidelines/policies across the sector. This could include, for example:
 - mandating reporting training on violence against women
 - encouraging media organisations to use Our Watch’s Workplace Equality and Respect Standards in order to meet their positive duty obligations under Commonwealth legislation to prevent sexual harassment, sex discrimination, hostile work environments and victimisation.
- Strengthen the capability of the Australian Press Council and the Australian Communications and Media Authority to support the use of current guidelines and manage any breaches. This could include introducing stronger consequences for reporting that contravenes guidelines.
- Develop a specific standard of practice relating to the issue of violence against women to complement the Statement of General Principles set out by the Australian Press Council.
- Embed education on the drivers of violence against women in pre-service training for journalists.
- Work with global social media platforms to encourage the development and take-up of more effective mechanisms to better moderate and prevent online gendered abuse and ensure Australian headquarters of these companies are meeting their positive duty obligations under Australian law to prevent sexual harassment, sex discrimination, hostile work environments and victimisation.
- Develop guidelines on how the Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance Code of Ethics applies in the context of violence against women.
- Ensure that organisations developing large language models (for AI text generation) incorporate the drivers of violence and Our Watch’s media reporting guidelines.

One way in which many of these opportunities could be pursued in a strategic and coordinated way is through the establishment of a national working group (or similar mechanism) with the aim of developing a unified strategy or approach to improving reporting practices on violence against women. This could include representatives from government, the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance, the Press Council and Our Watch.

Settings in which prevention approaches are new or emerging

While most prevention activity to date across Australia has occurred in the settings listed above, there are other settings where it is crucial to develop and implement prevention activity, but which have received less investment and support. Two settings in which Our Watch and others are currently working to develop approaches and resources are addressed/considered below.

Internet, digital and social media settings

The internet, and digital and social media play a significant role in influencing and reinforcing community norms and attitudes. As a result, online technologies have a crucial role to play in addressing the gendered drivers of violence against women.

Our Watch acknowledges the important role of the eSafety Commissioner through its work in promoting online safety and its focus on prevention through research, education programs and awareness raising.

More broadly, many initiatives to date have focused on early intervention – to keep people safe in online environments – and response – to support victims of technology facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV). These are critical approaches, however from a prevention perspective we need to look beyond an online safety paradigm and explore ways to use digital and online settings to address the factors that drive gendered violence that occurs both online and offline.

Digital and online prevention: practice examples

- **Crushed but OK**, an evidence-based primary prevention intervention developed by the Alannah and Madeline Foundation (AMF) in partnership with Swinburne University of Technology. AMF was funded in 2021 through an eSafety Commissioner grant to develop and implement a program aimed at reducing the rate of tech-facilitated gender-based violence perpetrated by young men aged between 15 and 17 years. Through an extensive co-design process using human-centred design principles, the program evolved into a suite of online interactive tools that promote healthy reactions to rejection in online intimate relationships. The intervention supports young men to talk about rejection without stigma, and build their capacity to self-regulate, reflect, and communicate respectfully.
- **The Line** is an award-winning primary prevention, social marketing, behavioural change campaign delivered by Our Watch. *The Line* effectively uses technology to encourage behaviour change, by helping young people aged 14-20 to negotiate healthy, respectful and consensual relationships. Hosted on a website, as well as Tik Tok, Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook and YouTube, the campaign has hundreds of articles, quizzes,

clips and interviews with and for young people. *The Line* is an initiative under the [National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010 – 2022](#) and is funded by the Commonwealth Government Department of Social Services.

- **The eSafety Commissioner’s Preventing Tech-based Abuse of Women Grants Program** has funded a range of prevention activities. The grants support the delivery of online safety education to children, young people and their communities, and training to those who work with them.

Digital settings provide unique opportunities to promote gender equality and engage in prevention work, however these opportunities are often overlooked as digital settings are primarily seen as spaces where harm occurs.¹ As a result, evidence and primary prevention practice in digital settings is limited, and there is considerable scope for work in this setting to be expanded.²

Our Watch is currently undertaking scoping work to help identify gaps and potential opportunities for prevention in digital settings and build the evidence base in this area. However, given the rate of innovation in digital settings there is a clear need for rigorous evaluations of existing interventions to understand what works in this space.³ There are opportunities to partner with technology companies to support evaluations and share data to build the knowledge base on what works for online prevention.

Opportunities for primary prevention in digital and online settings:

- Online campaigns and programs that directly engage with and address the gendered drivers of violence, including programs that build audience understanding of sexist and gendered norms, attitudes and behaviours, and their skills to address these through ‘bystander actions’.
- Support online influencers, organisations, and communities to help promote gender equality and prevent violence against women, including by developing evidence-based frameworks and guidelines for the design and implementation of online primary prevention programs in a safe, ethical and impactful way.
- Engage parents, including through online parenting communities, to promote gender equality in parenting practices, provide resources to challenge gendered norms, and enhance digital literacy to help parents guide children’s technology use.
- Focus on men and boys across the life course with nuanced, co-designed content that equips them with critical thinking skills to reject misogynistic influencers and content.
- Integrate consent and healthy relationship messaging into online dating platforms, collaborating with providers to develop targeted campaigns and resources for diverse age groups and encourage user safety and well-being policies.
- Create guidelines, training and support systems to equip primary prevention practitioners to manage the unique challenges of online work, including self-care strategies, best practice content moderation, and strategies for responding to backlash, and referring disclosures.

- Establish cross-sector communities of practice that facilitate collaboration between domestic, family and sexual practitioners, tech companies, academic institutions, researchers, and lived experience experts.
- Leverage technology companies to target audiences that are already engaged, develop initiatives to mitigate backlash, and harness the positive potential of digital spaces for accessible, community-led prevention while mitigating risks.

Faith-based settings

Faith-based settings include places, organisations and communities where religious faith and practice holds a central role. They differ from secular non-government organisations as they are motivated by religious faith, beliefs and values. Primary prevention activities in faith-based settings provide opportunities for large-scale influence, and may contribute to the transformation of beliefs, values and cultural norms that condone violence against women. Prevention initiatives currently or previously implemented in faith-based settings include short term projects, programs, training, videos, resources, websites, and events.

Prevention in faith-based settings practice example: Anglican Diocese of Melbourne

The Anglican Diocese of Melbourne's [Preventing Violence against women program](#), piloted a 'whole-of-parish' approach to violence prevention.

The program provides training, resources and support to engage parish leaders in supporting prevention of violence against women and responding safely to violence. It includes toolkits and resources for church communities, as well as best practice policy and governance procedures, and it connects churches with local support.

The University of Melbourne evaluated the program in 2021⁴ and found:

- faith leaders increased in their confidence to respond to violence against women and family violence
- the program was effective in developing a culture of safety and care, where violence against women is openly discussed
- Anglican colleges expressed commitment to enacting change, by educating their staff and students about violence against women.
- faith leaders built relationships and referral pathways with family violence support services
- the program addressed the gendered drivers of violence against women.

The program is now being scaled up to involve more parishes.

Our Watch has recently undertaken exploratory work in this area, including a literature review⁵ to map existing prevention activity in faith-based settings. The review found:

- Diverse religious representation, with programs and activities led by Muslim, Christian, Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu and Sikh organisations. Some programs were led by multi-faith groups.
- In relation to addressing the gendered drivers of violence against women, the review noted differences between the international and Australian context:
 - The review of literature in the international context found that prevention-focused work in faith-based settings is most strongly focused on condemning violence against women.
 - The mapping of prevention programs in faith-based settings in Australia on the other hand, found that they promoted the need to build women’s independence and decision making in public life and relationships, including by promoting women’s financial literacy and career opportunities and the visibility of women in leadership roles and community groups.
- Program mapping also found that building healthy, respectful relationships between men and women was a key component of primary prevention programs in faith-based settings and strengthening relationships between couples was an approach used to promote gender equality in the private sphere.
- There are examples of primary prevention activity in faith-based settings that utilise an intersectional understanding of violence against women and address the intersections between gender inequality and other forms of structural oppression.

Prevention in faith-based settings practice example: MCWH messaging guide and Connecting Communities

The Multicultural Centre for Women’s Health and Safe and Equal’s *Communicating for Connection: Values-Based Messaging Guide for Primary Prevention in Multicultural and Faith-based Communities* presents evidence on how to use a values-based, community-led approach to develop primary prevention messaging in multicultural and faith-based settings.

The Guide demonstrates that when working in such settings, building community engagement and support through tailored, strengths-based messaging is critical, and ensuring that the community’s experiences and values are embedded into any messaging is key to creating cultural safety and effective programs. It shows how effective approaches can engage community, build trust, and address backlash and resistance by creating messages that resonate with communities.

The resource was developed as part of the Victorian Government funded *Connecting Communities* program, which provides learning and support activities to a network of organisations working with multicultural and faith-based communities to prevent violence against women in Victoria since 2022.

Opportunities for expanding primary prevention activity in faith-based settings:

Our Watch's recent scoping work has identified the following opportunities to expand prevention work in faith-based settings:

- **Communities of practice and mechanisms for knowledge exchange and evidence building** – while each faith is unique, there would be value in prevention practitioners coming together to share learnings, challenges, strategies, and successes, both within and across different faiths. This could be facilitated through the creation of knowledge sharing platforms, resource banks and communities of practice.
- **Building access to data to enable conversations** – there is a need to improve data collection and build the evidence base on prevalence and what works in prevention across faith communities. Enabling more evaluations and improved data collection can help us understand what strategies are effective and enable conversations about how to address resistance and backlash.
- **Building capacity of communities and organisations** – improved support for faith-based communities and practitioners undertaking prevention work would be beneficial. This includes help to navigate policy and funding settings, organisational and community capacity building, and support to scale up initiatives and leverage resources through partnerships and collaboration.
- **Leverage community insights and expertise** – to be most effective, prevention efforts need to be co-designed with the community, theologically and culturally appropriate, delivered by trusted leaders, and fit-for-purpose, rather than just translated. They also need to take an intersectional approach that accounts for cultural differences and the impacts of forced migration, among other factors. There are opportunities to apply these principles in future work in faith-based settings around the country.
- **National uptake of Victorian approaches** – building on recent activity in Victorian urban contexts to reach faith settings in other jurisdictions and regional settings.

Additional gaps and opportunities for settings-based prevention

While settings-based prevention work is growing positively, and many settings now have good evidence, frameworks and resources to guide prevention, there remain several gaps and opportunities for further prevention work. In addition to the setting-specific opportunities already highlighted throughout this paper, the below highlights three overarching areas which need attention.

Overarching opportunities for settings-based prevention

Development and implementation of evidence-based prevention approaches in new settings

While most prevention activity to date has occurred in the settings discussed in the section above, there are various other settings where there is potential to develop and implement prevention activity.

There are opportunities for new research, development, trials and evaluations to build the evidence base and practice expertise on ways in which the following settings/sectors might be used as sites for primary prevention, and what approaches would be effective in each:

- popular culture, advertising and entertainment, including the variety of industries, mediums and corporations that contribute to popular culture and shape consumer choices and behaviour
- arts and creative industries, including visual and performing arts, film, literature, designers and game developers, as well as community networks and professional organisations across these fields
- social, community and family engagement and support services
- residential aged care and disability support services
- healthcare services, including mental health, allied health and wellbeing services
- recreation, social and leisure facilities (both public and private)
- public spaces and facilities, public transport, including the wide range of industries and sectors that influence the development and use of public environments, facilities and transport
- legal and justice sectors, including youth justice, corrections, police, courts and legal services – while these are by nature ‘response’ settings, they also present opportunities for prevention work, using for example, a workplace approach.

A stronger focus on prevention in male-dominated settings

There are some settings where men are more likely to engage in groups, or where men’s participation outnumbers women’s, such as corporate boardrooms and other leadership and decision-making forums, and male-dominated spaces and professions, including for example construction sites, men’s sporting clubs or police or military institutions.

Structural factors, such as poor organisational cultures, ineffective policies, a lack of cultural leadership and inadequate penalties, can reinforce, support or excuse violence-supportive, homophobic or sexist attitudes and behaviour in these contexts.⁶

Masculine peer, organisational and institutional cultures often promote men's control of decision-making, which is itself a driver of violence against women. Institutions or organisations dominated by men, particularly at leadership or governance levels, are more likely to display negative masculine peer cultures. These two drivers can interact to create contexts within which violence against women is more likely to occur.

There can also be a lack of respect for women and their rights in male-dominated settings and contexts where male peer relations predominate and work to protect men's power and privilege.⁷ These environments and cultures can weaken and often seriously undermine prosocial behaviour towards women and undermine attempts to prevent gendered violence and uphold gender equality.

When a culture of alcohol consumption is encouraged and embedded in spaces that are male dominated, this can interact in problematic ways with pressures on men to embody dominant forms of masculinity and be aggressive or competitive with other men. As alcohol can weaken prosocial behaviour, respect and empathy for women, the interaction between alcohol, masculine peer cultures and dominant forms of masculinity tends to create cultures where men's violence against women is more likely to occur.⁸

Male dominated settings can also give rise to specific types of organisational and setting-specific resistance and backlash. This includes, for example, resistance to gender equality measures, or to women's career advancement. This can manifest as hostility towards, and harassment of, women; negative judgements about women's competence, based on gender norms and stereotypes; intimidation; sabotage; or excessive scrutiny of women's work. Research suggests these forms of resistance sometimes occur simply because of women's presence, which is seen to be an encroachment into a previously all-male space.⁹

For these reasons, it is critical that male-dominated settings are a priority for prevention. Relevant actions can include the following, as outlined in *Change the story*:

- Action 7: Build safe, fair and equitable organisations and institutions by focusing on policy and systems change, including by:
 - Addressing masculine organisational cultures through prevention **work targeted at settings where groups of men gather and interact, such as specific social venues and sports clubs, as well as through male-dominated organisations and institutions.**¹⁰
- Action 11: Strengthen pro-social behaviour, including by:
 - Dismantling norms and practices within organisations, institutions and systems that protect men's power and privilege at the expense of women's health, safety or wellbeing, **focusing particularly on male-dominated settings and contexts.**
 - Addressing the relationship between harmful alcohol use and social norms relating to both violence and gender, with a particular **focus on groups and settings characterised by harmful masculine drinking cultures.**¹¹

The importance of working across as well as within settings

The beneficial effects of prevention initiatives are significantly amplified when their reach is maximised and their messages are reinforced by simultaneous, complementary initiatives across other settings and sectors.¹² Single techniques employed in a single place may well have positive effects, but these will likely be limited to those participating, and – especially if they are part of a one-off project – may not be sustained, particularly where community and social norms and practices do not support their message.¹³ This amplification of impact at an initiative level will be significantly strengthened when:

- work to address the gendered drivers of violence against women is implemented across multiple settings and sectors as part of a coordinated local, regional, state-wide or national approach
- different techniques are employed simultaneously in any setting- or sector-based work
- there is policy, regulatory or legislative reform that supports the aim of prevention activity taking place within settings or across sectors and systems.

This work requires several higher-level mechanisms for coordination and support, as well as long-term investment.

Endnotes

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