

EVIDENCE BRIEF

# Opportunities to engage with men to support 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.

# Contents

<b>Acknowledgement of Country</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Background and purpose of brief</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Overview</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Our Watch evidence on men and masculinities</b>	<b>6</b>
Men in focus – Evidence review (2019)	6
Men in focus – Practice guide (2022)	6
<b>Our Watch activities in relation to masculinities and engaging men and boys</b>	<b>7</b>
Practice example: Our Watch national consultation on men and masculinities	7
Gaps and opportunities: National data on perpetration	8
Gaps and opportunities: National audit of programs targeting men and challenging harmful masculinities	9
Gaps and opportunities: Expand prevention work in male-dominated settings	9
Gaps and opportunities: Other strategies	10
<b>Endnotes</b>	<b>11</b>

# 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

## Overview

Engaging men and boys across the spectrum from prevention to early intervention and response is recognised by the *National Plan*<sup>1</sup> as a critical component of Australia's approach to violence against women. A range of organisations are leading and undertaking relevant work across primary prevention, early intervention, response and recovery, either working directly with men and boys, or engaging men as part of their overall work.

Given violence against women is overwhelmingly perpetrated by men, engaging men and boys is an especially critical and urgent task for prevention. Men have an important and positive role to play as part of the solution, and well-designed programs and initiatives that effectively engage men and boys can contribute to the reduction and prevention of violence against women. This work involves engaging men and boys to challenge the drivers of violence against women, by increasing their awareness and empathy, encouraging reflection, and building their knowledge and capacity to actively challenge gender inequality and harmful forms of masculinity.

Together with many others, Our Watch has contributed to the development of the evidence base on engaging men to support prevention. This includes producing the evidence review *Men in focus: Unpacking masculinities and engaging men in the prevention of violence against women*, and a subsequent practice guide, *Men in focus practice guide: Addressing masculinities and working with men in the prevention of men's violence against women*.

These resources were funded by the Victorian State Government and build on and complement Our Watch's two national frameworks, *Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women in Australia* (2nd ed. 2021), and *Changing the picture: A national resource to support the prevention of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their children* (2018). Together the two *Men in focus* resources provide a comprehensive analysis of the links between masculinities and violence against women and what is needed to work with men and boys to prevent violence against women.

Our Watch also undertakes ongoing work in engaging men and addressing masculinities, which focuses on:

- building and translating the evidence base on addressing masculinities as part of the gendered drivers and supporting the practical work in engaging men and boys in the prevention of violence against women
- contributing to other evidence-building work, including participation in research projects, and stakeholder meetings and advisory groups
- coordinating and facilitating events and networks to support practitioners and other stakeholders who work with men and boys
- developing resources and delivering training for priority settings working with men and boys
- connecting with and supporting sector and sector-related stakeholders, including through participation in stakeholder events and networks
- internal capacity building to ensure effective integration of the men and masculinities work into all of Our Watch's new and existing work.

## **The importance of an intersectional approach**

In developing any prevention initiatives to engage men and boys, an intersectional approach is critical to address the intersections between sexism and gender inequality and racism; colonialism; heteronormativity; cisnormativity; homo-, bi- and transphobia; ageism; ableism and class discrimination and oppression.

An intersectional approach should be integrated in both policy and practice, and at all stages of an activity, from design through to implementation and evaluation. An effective intersectional approach to the prevention of violence against women is one that explicitly addresses the multiple intersecting systems of oppression and discrimination, power and privilege that shape the social context in which this violence occurs, and influence men's perpetration and women's experiences of violence.

Action 6 in *Change the story* outlines a range of activities that need more attention to address the intersections between gender inequality and other forms of systemic and structural oppression and discrimination, and to promote broader social justice. The approach outlined in this brief should be read in conjunction with these actions.

# Our Watch evidence on men and masculinities

There is a range of important research and evidence to help guide work to engage men in the prevention of violence against women, and there are many organisations across Australia that are undertaking a wide variety of valuable initiatives with men and boys in their communities. There are many stakeholders who continue to build this evidence base, including for example the ongoing work of Jesuit Social Services on [\*The Man Box\*](#). As one contribution to this field, Our Watch's evidence is summarised below.

## Men in focus – Evidence review (2019)

*Men in focus: Unpacking masculinities and engaging men in the prevention of violence against women* (*Men in focus evidence review*) synthesises and analyses existing national and international research on masculinities to develop a deeper understanding of the links between socially dominant forms and patterns of masculinity and violence against women. It explores how primary prevention efforts can best address and challenge these patterns and effectively engage men and boys in the prevention of violence against women.

This report was developed in consultation with an expert group of nine peer reviewers and was launched in November 2019 by the Victorian Government.

## Men in focus – Practice guide (2022)

*Men in focus: Addressing masculinities and working with men in the prevention of violence against women* (*Men in focus practice guide*) was developed to support practitioners and other prevention stakeholders to address masculinities and work with men in the prevention of men's violence against women.

Building on the Our Watch *Men in focus evidence review*, this practice guide 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 *Men in focus practice guide* offers practical strategies for engaging men and boys on issues relating to masculinities and male peer relationships, and to assist in building rapport with men to help them challenge the social norms, structures and practices that underpin gender inequality and drive men's violence against women.

This guide was developed in close consultation with 12 prevention practitioners and five expert peer reviewers and was launched in December 2022 by Our Watch.

Moving forward, Our Watch will continue to contribute to the evidence base in this area, including for example through developing new *Men in focus* resources for practitioners that translate key messages and concepts relating to masculinities and working with men to prevent violence against women.

# Our Watch activities in relation to masculinities and engaging men and boys

As noted above, a range of stakeholders engage in work with men and boys. Our Watch works collaboratively with many of these. Our Watch has also undertaken a broad range of activities in this area, including disseminating and translating the evidence on addressing masculinities and engaging men and boys, as well as providing advice and support to governments and stakeholders working in prevention and more broadly. This work includes, for example:

- coordinating a community of practice with prevention practitioners around the country who work with men and boys
- contributing to research projects, including for example providing advice and support on the new [Man Box study](#) led by Respect Victoria and the Men's Project
- contributing to government and policy-related initiatives, including prevention frameworks, government strategies/plans and policy documents
- other evidence building projects, including for example supporting the DSS-funded Community-led and Men as Role Models grants and the Connected Communities project
- campaigns that target men and young men, including [The Line](#) and the [Doing Nothing Does Harm](#) campaigns
- reviewing content and participating in advisory groups and meetings to support the development and delivery of stakeholder's prevention initiatives, for example the VicHealth's [Healthier Masculinities framework](#)
- participation in stakeholder events and networks that focus on working with men and boys in prevention
- delivering training and other capacity building activity to stakeholders working in priority settings
- presenting at national conferences, workshops and events
- other resource development, including for workplaces as part of the DSS-funded Respect@Work (Recommendation 8).

## Practice example:

### Our Watch national consultation on men and masculinities

On 21 May 2024, Our Watch held a national consultation on men and masculinities in primary prevention. Held in Melbourne, this one-day event engaged over 50 stakeholders from around the country who are working in primary prevention, response, intervention and men's health and wellbeing.

The consultation aimed to help tell us what is needed to establish a more consistent, coordinated and evidence-based approach in this area of prevention work. It included a focus on the infrastructure and other mechanisms needed for workforce development and coordination, areas for potential policy and legislative reform, evidence gaps and monitoring.

The event began with a series of presentations, including one by Aboriginal consultant to Our Watch Karina Hogan, who is working on a related project engaging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders who work with men and boys. This was followed by a series of themed discussions on primary prevention (nationally and across jurisdictions), as well as in community-led work, settings-based work, response and intervention and men's health and wellbeing.

Following these initial discussions, participants were mixed up and a series of further facilitated discussions were held, to enable and encourage cross-pollination of ideas. There were also opportunities for participant connection and networking.

This consultation was planned with the assistance of a technical advisory group – comprising key stakeholders in prevention, response, intervention and men's health.

A report of the consultations is currently being developed and will identify and outline the key gaps, challenges, tensions and opportunities for advancing this work and workforce at a national level.

Initial feedback from participants in the consultation included the following key points:

- This work should not be seen as a silo, separate to primary prevention generally. Rather it is work that needs to be part of the broader primary prevention approach.
- This is not just 'men's work'. Both the workforce doing this work, and the audience we seek to reach, need to include people of all genders.
- There is a need to connect the fields of primary prevention, early intervention, response and men's health. Participants at the forum were very keen to see what learnings can be shared between and across these different spheres of work.
- Building coalitions and partnerships is critical.

## **Gaps and opportunities: National data on perpetration**

- To better inform work with men, and work addressing masculinities, there is an ongoing and widely acknowledged need for comprehensive national data on perpetrators and perpetration of violence, including the prevalence, dynamics and drivers of perpetration.
- The lack of national data on perpetrators and perpetration of violence is a significant issue for many parts of the sector, including those working on prevention, because it restricts our capacity to effectively target those people at risk of perpetrating such violence.
- While the recent announcement of ANROWS funding for a NSW perpetrator study is welcome, as is the release of data on sexual violence perpetration by the Australian Institute of Criminology,<sup>2</sup> investment in, and support for, a study that produces comprehensive national data encompassing all forms of violence against women, remains a key opportunity for government.
- A national perpetrator study would address a key missing evidence gap and would contribute a third pillar of research to complement the National Community Attitudes Survey and Personal Safety Survey.
- Comprehensive perpetration data would be particularly valuable to inform prevention work. It would enable us to complement universal strategies with strategies targeted more specifically at those cohorts of the population most likely to perpetrate violence,



and potentially to develop different, tailored strategies to address the specific types of violence used by particular cohorts.

- Improved perpetrator data would also be valuable across other parts of the spectrum, by helping to improve the targeting and efficacy of early intervention and response activities.
- In addition to new perpetrator studies, there are also opportunities to strengthen existing data, including data collection, disaggregation, analysis, linkages and use.

### **Gaps and opportunities: National audit of programs targeting men and challenging harmful masculinities**

- 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 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. Such pilot work should be underpinned by evaluation to ensure it contributes to the evidence building needed to understand what works (and what works less well) in promoting and encouraging positive, more respectful engagement by men and boys.
- In addition to an audit of programs, detailed workforce mapping would also be useful – to understand more about the practitioners and organisations that are currently implementing programs and undertaking other kinds of work to engage men and address masculinities. This should have a focus on understanding the capabilities of this workforce, what supports and resources they may need, and how this workforce can be expanded.

### **Gaps and opportunities: Expand prevention work in male-dominated settings**

- Our Watch's brief on settings-based approaches to prevention (Brief 2) includes a call for expansion of prevention work in male-dominated settings.
- It 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 more generally and presents the evidence for making this a priority.
- See *Brief 2, Settings for prevention* for more information.

## Gaps and opportunities: Other strategies

In addition to the opportunities above, the following are other actions that governments could undertake to strengthen evidence and activities in this area:

- Develop initiatives to engage men that are tailored to specific settings. These should include priority settings like workplaces, education, sport, online/internet (including pornography), and as noted above, should also include a specific focus on male-dominated settings.
- Develop a range of other multifaceted strategies to engage men and boys in gender equality and prevention and address harmful male peer relations and cultures of masculinity across the socioecological model. These would include education-based initiatives, media campaigns, initiatives to engage men as fathers, and strategies to engage and mobilise men at the community level and would include as a core component the promotion and support of positive, respectful forms of masculinity.
- Strengthen and expand efforts to engage men on issues of sexuality, sex and consent, and on sexual violence prevention in particular.
- Develop national practice standards to help ensure that all work in this area is evidence-based, intersectional, gender transformative and accountable to women. These could be informed by Our Watch's *Men in focus practice guide*, and would assist organisations to adopt promising practice principles in their work.

# Endnotes

- 1 Australian Government (2022) *The National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022-2032*. See for example, p. 80-81.
- 2 Doherty L. & Dowling C. 2024. Perpetration of sexual violence in a community sample of adult Australians. Statistical Bulletin no. 45. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology.