

Preventing violence against women from migrant and refugee backgrounds

In April-May 2024, Our Watch worked with Myriad Kofkin Global and held a national consultation on preventing violence against women from migrant and refugee backgrounds. We spoke to 79 participants about new and existing primary prevention work to find out what is needed to ensure prevention across Australia is responsive to the needs of multicultural communities.

Our Watch would like to acknowledge all the participants for their valuable contributions.

Funded by the Australian Government Department of Social Services.



What they said

1.

Address systemic and structural barriers

Primary prevention activity in multicultural communities must address broader power dynamics, including systemic racism and discrimination, as well as the four *gendered drivers* in *Change the story*.

Key structural barriers that exclude and marginalise migrant and refugee women include the challenges associated with visa status, the absence of trusted social networks or families in Australia and linguistic and cultural barriers in seeking help and reporting violence. The intersection of systemic barriers with gendered power dynamics creates a complex web of oppression that can exacerbate violence.

2.

Build trust and accountability

Building relationships with communities takes time and is crucial for effective engagement. Grassroots organisations already have established relationships in multicultural communities, making them effective conduits for delivering prevention messages.

Effective prevention efforts also require robust partnerships with peak multicultural bodies that have deep community connections. Leveraging existing networks can help build trust, enhance existing prevention efforts and ensure accountability.

“ **Prevention messaging is not taking up questions of power, especially repressive points of entry for people and how they manifest. Anecdotal evidence so far shows that the visa system comes up all the time in relation to vulnerability to family violence.** ”

CONSULTATION PARTICIPANT

3.

Capacity building, education and training

Tailoring prevention initiatives to different cohorts, including age groups, is central to achieving long-term impact.

Tailored resources need to be complemented with comprehensive workshops and training to help community organisations and multicultural communities effectively use prevention frameworks.

When developed in collaboration with community organisations, programs and resources can address the unique needs of individuals throughout their lifespan.

4.

Data and evaluation

There is a need for more specific data on multicultural communities and prevention, particularly regarding women's experiences accessing services and prevention programs and men's engagement with such programs.

The multicultural sector has developed and delivered a multitude of unfunded prevention initiatives. Much of this work has not been evaluated to determine impact due to funding and resource constraints.

Focused resourcing is needed for evaluating existing prevention work to tap into learnings with the potential to inform future practice, and to support organisations in measuring the success of their work.

5.

Language, messaging and communication

It is important to provide opportunities for communities to safely reflect on cultural beliefs and attitudes in a strengths-based way.

Discussions around prevention with men and boys are most effective when tailored to their understandings of gender, which are shaped by their experiences in their country of origin and during their migration or settlement journeys.

Approaches that respect their identities and intersectional experiences, rather than directly challenging them, are more likely to be effective.

“ We overlook the idea that people need culturally responsive training. We are talking about a diverse cohort and need to be careful not to group [them] as homogenous. They are far more complex, and terminology fails the nuances and sophistication of communities.

CONSULTATION PARTICIPANT

“ How we use language is critical. People will say traditional forms of masculinity have helped them care for and provide for their family... We need to think about how we use language, because traditional means very different things to people. It can be seen as positive.

CONSULTATION PARTICIPANT

6.

Resources, tools and evidence building

There is a need for greater integration of contributing factors of violence against women from migrant and refugee backgrounds into prevention resources.

These factors include:

- experiences of racism, social isolation and lack of trust in authorities
- visa status and settlement journey
- migration impacts and acculturation
- peer influences and digital media
- access to support and legal literacy
- shame and community pressures
- systemic homophobia and transphobia.

Prevention work based on the gendered drivers should also integrate these contributing factors.

For example, when looking at condoning of violence against women, it is important to consider how racism and visa status systemically reinforce community attitudes and compound the experiences of women.

7.

Collaboration and community engagement

Co-design and co-creation with communities is essential for effective and inclusive prevention work. Rather than imposing pre-existing frameworks on multicultural communities, it is crucial to work collaboratively to embed lived expertise and the unique insights of community members.

Developing adaptable frameworks that can be tailored to different community contexts and needs is also essential. Frameworks should be user-friendly, enable ownership through collaborative development, and provide communities with the tools to address issues that are most relevant to them. Co-creation and flexibility can contribute to more effective and sustainable prevention efforts that genuinely lead to change.

“ Community should be part of co-design from the start. It’s not just about our interactions. We need mutual solutions - each person is an expert in their own lives. What might work in one community might not work in another. Genuine consultation and emphasis on meaningful co-design, so communities are part of the process.

CONSULTATION PARTICIPANT





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*, 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 suffer from violence at a significantly higher rate than non-Aboriginal 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.

Further Information

If you have questions about Our Watch's work on preventing violence against women from migrant and refugee backgrounds, please contact enquiries@ourwatch.org.au and include the subject line: *'Our Watch Enquiry: Preventing violence against women from migrant and refugee backgrounds'*.

ourwatch.org.au