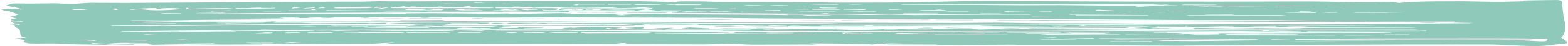
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Preventing violence against women from migrant and refugee backgrounds: Consultation findings report



Prepared by Our Watch and Myriad Kofkin Global

Contents

[Acknowledgement of country 3](#_Toc187252915)

[Introduction 4](#_Toc187252916)

[About Our Watch 4](#_Toc187252917)

[Project background 4](#_Toc187252918)

[Why the attention to preventing violence against women from migrant and refugee backgrounds? 5](#_Toc187252919)

[About this report 6](#_Toc187252920)

[Methodology 7](#_Toc187252921)

[A note on participant response to the project 8](#_Toc187252922)

[A note on terminology 9](#_Toc187252923)

[Full list of recommendations 10](#_Toc187252924)

[1. Thematic overview – Key needs for prevention of violence against women from migrant and refugee backgrounds 16](#_Toc187252925)

[1.1 Resources and engagement 16](#_Toc187252926)

[1.2 Language and framing 19](#_Toc187252927)

[1.3 Data and evaluation 21](#_Toc187252928)

[1.4 Capacity building for practitioners 23](#_Toc187252929)

[1.5 Advocacy 25](#_Toc187252930)

[2. Thematic overview – Relevance of the drivers of violence in *Change the story* to working with multicultural communities 27](#_Toc187252931)

[2.1 Contributing factors 27](#_Toc187252932)

[2.2 Language of the drivers of violence 34](#_Toc187252933)

[2.3 Culturally responsive learning approaches 34](#_Toc187252934)

[3. Thematic overview – The role of Our Watch in supporting meaningful co-design and community-led work 37](#_Toc187252935)

[3.1 Taking inclusive and collaborative approaches to engagement 37](#_Toc187252936)

[3.2 Tailored prevention strategies for working with men and boys 40](#_Toc187252937)

[4. Thematic overview – Other proposed actions for Our Watch 42](#_Toc187252938)

[Long-term planning and integration 42](#_Toc187252939)

[Intersectionality and inclusivity 42](#_Toc187252940)

[Connecting services and institutions across Our Watch’s work 43](#_Toc187252941)

[Glossary of terms 44](#_Toc187252942)

[Appendix 1: List of participating organisations 47](#_Toc187252943)

Our Watch would like to acknowledge all the participants for their contributions. A list of participating organisations is included in Appendix 1.

# 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.

# Introduction

## About Our Watch

Our Watch is a national leader in the primary prevention of violence against women[[1]](#footnote-2) and their children in Australia. We have a clear vision: an Australia where women and their children live free from all forms of violence.

Our Watch works to embed gender equality and address the drivers of violence wherever people in Australia live, learn, work and socialise. Everything we do at Our Watch is based on robust national and international research and evidence.

We work in partnership with governments, communities, the prevention workforce, and leaders across a wide range of sectors to create change across Australia.

## Project background

Our Watch’s project on preventing violence against women from migrant and refugee backgrounds is funded by the Department of Social Services as part of the *National Plan* *to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032*. The project runs from 2023 to 2027.

The *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032* states that there are significant and unique barriers faced by women and children from diverse cultural, ethnic, religious and linguistic backgrounds and migrant and refugee women and children.[[2]](#footnote-3)

This project builds on existing primary prevention[[3]](#footnote-4) approaches to ensure they are responsive and reflect the needs of multicultural communities.

This includes developing a better understanding of the compounding forms of oppression faced by women from migrant and refugee backgrounds, including racism, sexism and other forms of oppression. These layers of discrimination intersect to drive increased levels of violence that is both gendered and racialised.

The objectives of this project are

1. To build a deeper, shared understanding of the nature and drivers of violence against women from migrant and refugee backgrounds.
2. To undertake evidence translation to better meet the needs of organisations working with people from migrant and refugee backgrounds and/or communities to undertake primary prevention work.
3. To explore opportunities to collaborate with organisations and/or communities working with people from migrant and refugee backgrounds to undertake this work in a mutually reinforcing and coordinated way.

This project builds upon previous work at Our Watch such as the Connected Communities project, the From Understanding to Action project and the Safer and Stronger Communities project. This work has been guided by the principles for prevention practice outlined in *Changing the picture: A national resource to support the prevention of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their children* (2018), *Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women in Australia* (second edition 2021), *Primary prevention of family violence against people from LGBTI communities* (2017), *Changing the landscape: A national resource to prevent violence against women and girls with disabilities* (2022), *Men in Focus practice guide: Addressing masculinities and working with men in the prevention of men’s violence against women* (2022), *Men in Focus* *evidence review: Unpacking masculinities and engaging men in the prevention of violence against women* and *Intersectionality Matters: A guide to engaging immigrant and refugee communities to prevent violence against women* (Multicultural Centre for Women’s Health, 2017).

Using an intersectional approach, the project seeks to work in ‘culturally safe ways’ with aims of ‘two-way working’ to ensure that prevention efforts are safe, appropriate, effective and informed by evidence about good practice when working with multicultural communities.[[4]](#footnote-5)

## Why the attention to preventing violence against women from migrant and refugee backgrounds?

*Change the Story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women in Australia*[[5]](#footnote-6) describes that gender inequality sets the social context for violence against women. It also acknowledges the role of discrimination and marginalisation as compounding factors.

The framework sets out four key expressions or drivers of gender inequality:

1. Condoning of violence against women.
2. Men’s control of decision-making and limits to women’s independence in public and private life.
3. Rigid gender stereotyping and dominant forms of masculinity.
4. Male peer relations and cultures of masculinity that emphasise aggression, dominance and control.

The framework also documents a range of ‘reinforcing factors’ that have potential to increase and influence the gendered drivers in given contexts, inclusive of broader systems and structures. *Change the Story* indicates that factors which limit women’s access to resources, independence, or social and economic power, or reduce their perceived worth or social status, increase the probability of violence against them. Women from migrant and refugee backgrounds are often subjected to forms of violence that relate to their uncertain citizenship status, such as perpetrators using threats of deportation as a means of control. Additionally, women who arrive in Australia with insecure visa status may experience increased risks of violence and poverty, along with challenges related to their minority status and disruptions to family and community support networks.

Importantly, the intersectional approach embedded throughout *Change the story* recognises that violence and gender inequality exist in relation to multiple and intersecting systems of sexism, racism, colonialism, classism, heteronormativity, cisnormativity, homo-, bi- and transphobia, ableism and ageism, and their corresponding systems of power, privilege and structured inequality.

The gendered drivers set out in the framework have been identified through rigorous research indicating they are the most consistent predictors of men’s violence against women. However, these drivers do not occur in isolation from other forms of discrimination that women in multicultural communities may experience. Prevention approaches need to integrate a greater understanding of intersecting forms of oppression, including the systemic forms of social injustice experienced by women from migrant and refugee backgrounds in Australia. This can only be effectively achieved by working collaboratively with the multicultural sector, who have the expertise and grassroots connections to inform context-specific prevention responses.

The following sections of this report contribute to Our Watch’s knowledge base of intersecting forms of oppression and opportunities for collaborative efforts and approaches. If adopted, these insights have the potential to significantly strengthen the impact of prevention efforts in multicultural communities.

## About this report

This report documents the findings from a national consultation which involved a breadth of multicultural sector stakeholder groups.

The aim of the national consultation was to raise awareness of the project, test Our Watch’s emerging ideas, further define the project’s purpose and scope, and build important connections that will support project delivery.

## Methodology

### Who was involved?

The report will refer to those who participated in consultations as ‘participants’. There was a total of 79 participants, representing a wide range of organisations working with multicultural communities.

* 38 participants held executive positions, including CEOs, directors, board members and senior leaders.
* 41 participants were practitioners, including team leaders, educators, coordinators, case managers, lawyers and community workers.

#### A list of participating organisations is included in Appendix 1.

### The consultation process

To undertake this consultation, the project team worked with consultants from Myriad Kofkin Global on the following pre-consultation activities:

* development of a national multicultural stakeholder map
* design of consultation areas of inquiry
* development of invitations and a consultation information sheet for distribution.

The consultations included four face-to-face sessions in Melbourne, Brisbane, Sydney and Adelaide and two online sessions, one with peak multicultural sector bodies and one for invitees unable to attend the face-to-face sessions. Additionally, the team conducted nine individual interviews with participants who were unable to attend any of the consultation sessions and received two written responses.

All consultations included two note-takers, to ensure all feedback was captured. Qualitative data was then analysed to identify recurring themes consistently raised throughout the sessions.

Upholding the safety and confidentiality of participants was a primary objective at all consultations. Participants could withdraw their consent to participate at any time during the session and the team communicated that the report would not attribute anything said by participants in consultations to them or their organisation.

### Consultation structure and questions

Each consultation included a presentation by Our Watch about the organisation’s function, the scope of the project, and findings to date from early scoping activities and project socialisation meetings with stakeholders. This was then followed by group discussions focused on four key questions:

1. What do you see as the key needs to be addressed in terms of evidence building on prevention in migrant and refugee communities? What do you want to see from Our Watch in trying to build better supports around the evidence and the work you’re doing?
2. During one of our early conversations, we were told that the four drivers of violence (as articulated in *Change the story*) are the same across different ethnic and linguistic groups, but the ways they manifest are different. In your experience working with migrant and refugee communities, does this resonate?
3. How can Our Watch ensure that this project gives ownership and leadership to meaningful co-design and community-led work?
4. What is one thing that you would really like to see come out of today in terms of what should happen next for primary prevention work with migrant and refugee communities?

This report is set out in four sections, documenting feedback and recurring themes in response to the consultation questions.

## A note on participant response to the project

There was an overwhelmingly positive response to the project within the multicultural sector, with participants impressed and hopeful around future prevention initiatives inclusive of the contextual realities for multicultural communities. For many, this was the first ever direct contact with Our Watch and the first sign of recognition that informed responses are needed for prevention work within multicultural communities. This was evidenced by feedback provided during consultations, the diversity of community-based organisations represented, and the mix of senior leaders and practitioners present at consultations.

The credibility of the project was also significantly strengthened by the presence and interactions of the Our Watch team at all consultations. This provided an important opportunity for connection and relationship building.

The consultations highlighted that a plethora of prevention initiatives are already being delivered by the multicultural sector. Many of these have emerged in response to critical issues being identified at grassroots levels, are unfunded and rely on stretching already limited resources. The consultations created a sense of hope around partnerships and collaborations to build on the work and learnings already taking place.

## A note on terminology

‘Multicultural communities’ and ‘people from migrant and refugee backgrounds’ are terms used interchangeably in this report. These terms are inclusive of, but not limited to, newly arrived, established and Australian born people. All references are inclusive of, and recognise the breadth of diversity represented by, these terms.

This report uses the terminology of ‘violence against women’. *Change the story* acknowledges the inherent limitations of binary language and recognises that the category of ‘women’ is a socially constructed one, and part of a binary system of sex and gender categories that does not represent the gender diversity of the population. The framework’s definition of a woman includes anyone who identifies and lives as a woman, which includes cisgender and trans women.

This summary also uses the terminology of ‘co-design’ and ‘co-creation’, which both refer to approaches where stakeholders are treated as equal collaborators during the design stage in the development of a specified resource.

Our Watch acknowledges that while the focus of the themes and recommendations in this report are on primary prevention, these findings may be applicable across the range of work being done in early intervention, response and recovery.

# Full list of recommendations

The tables below outline the key recommendations from consultations on engaging multicultural communities in preventing violence against women. Each recommendation includes various suggested actions for consideration, though not all will be actioned through this project. Implementation of recommendations will depend on feasibility within the scope of this project. **All recommendations link to specific sections of the report, which contain more detail about each recommendation**.

Theme: Addressing systemic and structural barriers

| Recommendation | Suggested actions |
| --- | --- |
| Strengthen advocacy and systemic change | Strengthen advocacy efforts to address systemic barriers in health, legal and service systems.  Advocate for reasonable timeframes and sustainable, ongoing funding for prevention programs and ethno-specific services.  Address the government’s focus on quantitative success metrics and emphasise the importance of qualitative data and relationship building. |
| Amplify the impacts of racism and power in prevention frameworks | Acknowledge how racism can intensify the conditions under which violence occurs and can contribute to exclusion from prevention efforts. Structural racism and the compounding impact of gender and racial bias in prevention frameworks must be addressed.  The current framing of the four gendered drivers of violence should encompass broader power dynamics, including systemic and institutional power structures that perpetuate racism and discrimination. |
| Strengthen advocacy efforts towards the inclusion of experiences of multicultural LGBTIQA+ communities | Advocate for greater visibility of the experiences of multicultural LGBTIQA+ communities in the literature base and in multicultural prevention work.  Address gaps in the sector around conversations of power and critical ways violence is normalised for LGBTIQA+ multicultural communities when we focus on binaries of men and women alone. |

Theme: Building trust and accountability

| Recommendation | Suggested actions |
| --- | --- |
| Increase representation of experiences of migrant and refugee communities | Increase representation of the impacts of the migration and settlement journey in prevention messaging. Generational categories need to be considered in tailored approaches, including younger people who may have arrived at a young age or were born in Australia.  Existing resources, such as the *Change the story* video suite, need to better represent the experiences of multicultural communities to resonate with a more diverse audience. |
| Engage grassroots organisations | Collaborate with and support grassroots organisations to ensure community voices are heard, represented and actively involved from the outset. |
| Promote community-led approaches to prevention | Empower communities to lead prevention initiatives by ensuring they receive adequate support and funding. It is important to work across the lifespan to drive improvements in culturally safe and trauma-informed practices within institutions and settings. |
| Foster sustainable multicultural sector relationships | Invest in long-term relationship building with communities and community organisations through partnerships with peak bodies to ensure sustained impact and continuous support. |
| Recognise the value of supporting grassroots organisations in prevention | Recognise that grassroots organisations already have established relationships with multicultural communities, making them effective conduits for delivering prevention messages and initiatives. It is crucial to ensure they receive the necessary support and funding to sustain and amplify their impactful work. |
| Ensure transparency and clear communication | Ensure transparency about what this project can contribute to prevention work in multicultural communities and how community organisations will be involved. |
| Prepare a detailed, multi-year plan for the project | Develop a plan that clearly outlines the various initiatives this project will undertake in relation to multicultural communities and specify how communities will be integrated into these efforts. |

Theme: Capacity building, education and training

| Recommendation | Suggested actions |
| --- | --- |
| Provide training to support practitioners’ understanding and utilisation of prevention resources | Design resources to support practitioners at community organisations and in communities in understanding and utilising prevention frameworks effectively.  Provide culturally responsive training for mainstream service providers, such as in schools, universities, health clinics, legal centres, workplaces, sports clubs and other community settings, and ensure prevention work is co-delivered with the multicultural sector. |
| Improve support to increase legal literacy | Ensure legal literacy is embedded in pre-arrival and on-arrival programs. Identify pathways for this education to be delivered to all groups entering under different migration pathways and visa arrangements. Legal literacy should establish a common understanding of violence, individual rights under different entry pathways, and access to services. This education must be delivered in accessible formats and community languages. |
| Adopt culturally responsive learning approaches in prevention education | Develop tailored prevention strategies that account for the diverse and complex nature of multicultural communities.  Encourage and facilitate open community discussions about gendered violence, its various manifestations, and the importance of prevention. |
| Embed whole-of-community prevention initiatives in community settings | Embed prevention work in places and programs that multicultural communities already access, such as schools, youth settings, workplaces and community centres. For example, implement comprehensive healthy relationships education with bilingual health educators who provide culturally responsive education. Consistent, long-term educational efforts are essential to shift attitudes and behaviours. |

Theme: Data and evaluation

| Recommendation | Suggested actions |
| --- | --- |
| Enhance data collection and evaluation | Improve data collection and evaluation methods to ensure they are culturally responsive, able to measure access to prevention programs and capture learnings on effective approaches. Provide training and support for organisations to measure the success of their prevention work.  Develop standardised data collection templates to ensure consistency across organisations.  Address research gaps regarding the migration journey and pre-arrival factors.  Make information on good practices and successful prevention strategies accessible to practitioners and communities.  Evaluate and share what works in preventing violence against women and fostering healthy family relationships in multicultural communities. |

Theme: Language, messaging and communication

| Recommendation | Suggested actions |
| --- | --- |
| Adopt consistent and strengths-based language | Use consistent, conceptually accurate language that resonates with multicultural communities, moving away from purely Western models and frameworks.  Foster strengths-based approaches that focus on healthy relationships and successful settlement, rather than solely on violence prevention. |
| Shift media narratives | Work to change the narrative around multicultural communities in the media by highlighting positive examples and avoiding negative stereotypes.  Use community voices and culturally appropriate language to communicate prevention messages effectively. |
| Establish shared language and terminology | Establish shared understandings of language at the foundational stage of prevention work with multicultural communities, including language around the drivers that resonate with their unique experiences. This language must also address concepts of rigid gender roles and gender equality. As gendered roles have shaped community functioning in collectivist cultures pre-arrival, it is important to frame these discussions in ways that are culturally sensitive. |
| Embed protective factors in prevention messaging | Embed protective factors related to faith and culture in prevention messaging, using positive language to promote healthy relationships. Delivering this messaging requires the ability to recognise faith as a strength-based element in people’s lives, with messaging that can be tailored in ways that differ from mainstream prevention approaches. This is especially crucial when working with men, as approaches that directly challenge ingrained identities can be counterproductive. |
| Tailor prevention messaging to the experiences of migrant men and boys | Engage men and boys through prevention approaches that are tailored to their understandings of gender, within the context of past experiences in their country of origin and/or during their migration or settlement journey. |
| Showcase effective intersectional practice | Demonstrate what effective intersectionality in practice looks like, by integrating the perspectives and experiences of multicultural communities. |

Theme: Resources, tools and evidence building

| Recommendation | Suggested actions |
| --- | --- |
| Develop comprehensive resources to support understanding and use of prevention frameworks | Build a comprehensive evidence base that includes the impacts of the migration journey and integrates existing data to enhance prevention strategies. |
| Create a centralised knowledge hub | Create a central source of information on effective and ineffective prevention approaches. This should include practical guidance on engaging with different stakeholder groups (such as religious leaders, community leaders, bicultural workers, etc.) and the potential strengths and challenges of each approach. |
| Integrate contributing factors into prevention approaches and messaging | Develop resources that acknowledge the role of contributing factors including racism, social isolation, lack of trust in authorities, visa status, migration and settlement challenges, acculturation stresses, digital media, legal and service barriers, shame and community pressure, while drawing links between these and primary prevention approaches. |

Theme: Collaboration and community engagement

| Recommendation | Suggested actions |
| --- | --- |
| Take approaches that account for family and community dynamics | Recognise the distinction between intimate partner violence and violence within family-based settings. Collectivist cultures require tailored intervention strategies. Families and community dynamics play significant roles in both perpetuating and addressing violence. |
| Utilise co-creation models when working with communities | Embed lived expertise and acknowledge the unique insights of community members in prevention frameworks and approaches.  Recognise that communities are tired of being consulted and focus on actionable and impactful engagement. |
| Ensure flexible timelines and impact-focused design and delivery | Ensure timelines are flexible to allow for meaningful co-design and community engagement.  Design responses with a clear focus on how they will positively impact communities. |
| Provide holistic support for migrant and refugee men and boys | Promote holistic support through programs that engage men and boys in various aspects of life, including parenting, education and recreational activities.  Engage men in discussions about financial control and other forms of non-physical violence. |
| Explore opportunities to engage men from migrant and refugee backgrounds as influential agents of change | Recognise and explore opportunities to engage men from migrant and refugee backgrounds as influential agents of change. This can challenge existing narratives and create more inclusive prevention strategies that resonate with multicultural communities. |
| Connect services and institutions working across all areas of Our Watch’s work | Promote a holistic approach to community engagement and primary prevention with multicultural communities.  Foster connections between government departments and grassroots organisations to create an integrated and supportive network that better serves the diverse needs of all community members. |

# 1. Thematic overview – Key needs for prevention of violence against women from migrant and refugee backgrounds

This section sets out the key themes raised in relation to the first question that participants were asked at consultations.

**Question 1:** What do you see as the key needs to be addressed in terms of evidence building on prevention in migrant and refugee communities? What do you want to see from Our Watch in trying to build better supports around the evidence and the work you’re doing?

## 1.1 Resources and engagement

To effectively address prevention in multicultural communities, it is essential to build a robust evidence base that captures the unique challenges and experiences within the diversity of different groups. There are several key areas where this evidence needs to be developed to inform future efforts.

### Tailored resources and ongoing support for organisations

To maximise the effectiveness of prevention initiatives, tailored resources need to be complemented with comprehensive workshops and training sessions. Resources should be designed to support community organisations and communities in understanding and utilising prevention frameworks effectively. Training should also be tailored to address the specific needs and contexts of multicultural communities, ensuring that all participants can fully benefit from the resources provided.

Ongoing communication and support for organisations can enhance the impact of resources. Establishing clear channels for feedback and assistance will help address any challenges that arise and ensure continuous improvement. Regular check-ins and follow-up sessions can help maintain engagement and reinforce capability development, leading to better outcomes.

A resounding message from the consultations was the importance of framing prevention conversations and messaging within broader aspects of education on adjusting to life in Australia. Multicultural community services deliver a plethora of programs on fostering a sense of belonging and healthy family relationships, which can indirectly contribute to prevention efforts. Communities are drawn to initiatives that have potential to help them adapt and settle effectively, but are likely to avoid subjects such as family violence.

**“We need to work with all the community. The family and all the community need to be involved. Just focusing on women isn’t going to make a change. Language such as family violence prevention will not engage them. Spaces need to feel safe and framed in ways that support settlement.*”***

Consultation participant

### Consolidation of existing evidence and knowledge base

Participants highlighted the need to identify opportunities for consolidating existing evidence and data. Rather than differentiated approaches for people from migrant and refugee backgrounds, the sector is keen to see the integration of learnings from prevention initiatives within multicultural communities into existing evidence structures and frameworks. Such an approach would support inclusive prevention approaches that resonate with all communities.

Creating a central source of information on effective and ineffective prevention approaches is essential. This should include practical guidance on engaging with different stakeholder groups (such as religious leaders, community leaders, bicultural workers, etc.) and the potential strengths and challenges of each approach.

Highlighting existing good practices can provide successful strategies and valuable insights for prevention initiatives. By centralising this knowledge, effective approaches can be shared and drive the adoption of proven methods across different communities. Ensuring these initiatives are informed by the experiences and needs of multicultural communities is essential.

### Representation of multicultural communities

Multicultural sector participants cautioned that a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach is ineffective in reaching the diversity of multicultural communities. While the impacts of the migration and settlement journey is a critical consideration in approaches to prevention messaging, it will not resonate with younger people who may have arrived at a young age or were born in Australia. Generational categories need to be considered in tailored approaches.

“We are grouping refugees and migrants without considering the distinction between each – they are very different groups.”

Consultation participant

Additionally, existing resources, such as the *Change the story* video suite, need to better visually represent the experiences of multicultural communities to resonate with a more diverse audience.

### Engaging grassroots organisations

Participants highlighted the importance of working collaboratively to enable grassroots organisations to design engagement strategies that are most appropriate for their specific client groups and communities. They also emphasised the need to provide training and support for this work. Recognising and addressing power imbalances is crucial to prevention work in multicultural communities, particularly in advocating for smaller organisations that may otherwise be overlooked.

Building relationships with communities takes time and is crucial for effective engagement. Mainstream organisations and service providers must be realistic about the time and effort required to develop trust, while also considering the willingness of communities to engage. Grassroots organisations already have established relationships with multicultural communities, making them effective conduits for delivering prevention messages and initiatives. Ensuring proper remuneration when engaging grassroots organisations is critical to this process.

## 1.2 Language and framing

Language and framing of prevention messages emerged as a significant gap in current approaches.

### Strengths-based language

There is a need to consider language when talking about prevention in multicultural communities. Translating concepts, not just words, is essential to communicate messages within multicultural communities.

“They must be strengths-based responses. Prevention must redirect opportunities. If you don’t provide education and information, you can’t expect them to behave any differently.”

Consultation participant

It is crucial to use positive, strengths-based language when working with communities. Emphasising language such as ‘healthy relationships’ and ‘living a good life’, instead of ‘domestic violence’, can foster more effective engagement. Providing opportunities for communities to safely reflect on cultural beliefs and attitudes in a strengths-based way is also essential.

Further,it is important to acknowledge that defined gender roles are often regarded as vital to community functioning in collectivist cultures, rather than a factor contributing to gender inequality. Education should be tailored to resonate with communities and build understanding of concepts such as masculinity and femininity in non-confrontational and culturally sensitive ways.

“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

### Moving away from Western models

Engaging multicultural communities requires moving away from Western, individualistic models and better understanding community collectivist thinking. This is crucial since collectivist cultures are often a part of people’s identity and can serve as protective factors against violence, which mainstream approaches might overlook.

Participants perceived that mainstream prevention messages often focus on intimate partner violence and overlook the prevalence of violence perpetrated by extended family members. Recognition of violence beyond intimate partner relationships within multicultural communities is necessary and is articulated in *Change the Story*. This feedback suggests that prevention initiatives designed for multicultural communities need to include an equal emphasis on violence perpetrated beyond intimate partner relationships. This broader understanding of violence helps in developing more comprehensive prevention strategies.

“The mainstream is individual; women will disclose to workers. Multicultural is collectivist. It plays out differently because it’s also about power and control by extended family and community. We need to understand this, we are overlooking obvious types of violence.”

Consultation participant

### Framing of culture

Multicultural communities remain sensitive to the assumption that some cultures are inherently more violent than others. Reinforcing the gendered drivers of violence against women remains vital, while also ensuring that no unintended messages are conveyed regarding culture, particularly in relation to ethnic or faith-based practices. Avoiding assumptions that multicultural men are inherently more violent is crucial for accurate representation and understanding.

Participants suggested using the term ‘people from migrant and refugee backgrounds’ when referring to multicultural communities. While acknowledging people’s migration history is important, they may no longer identify as a refugee once they have settled in Australia. Using the term ‘people from migrant and refugee backgrounds’ is also inclusive of Australian-born children with migrant and refugee parents.

“We group people into homogenous groups without recognition of complexity – nuances have not been considered.”

Consultation participant

It is also crucial to ensure that language and terminology are consistent and accurately reflect the diverse experiences of multicultural communities. This includes acknowledging the deep impact of structural racism and the importance of cultural safety.

## 1.3 Data and evaluation

### Data collection specific to multicultural communities

There is a need for more data specific to multicultural communities. This includes insights into women’s experiences with accessing services and prevention programs, as well as data on the engagement of men from migrant and refugee backgrounds with these programs. Currently, when multicultural community organisations are funded to deliver prevention work, data collection is largely demographic, with occasional pre- and post-program learning outcomes. Participants were not aware of any data collection portal that enables comparison between numbers of arrivals from different communities and their access to national programs focused on prevention, nor any consistent national approach to sharing learnings on effective approaches.

“There is a lack of data on prevention work. We are not coming together to paint a different picture and see what’s working well.”

Consultation participant

Developing a standardised template for data collection would help establish an evidence base and a comprehensive picture of what works in prevention. Participants suggested exploring how technological tools can support data collection, analysis and dissemination to enhance prevention efforts and evidence building.

Additionally, there is a significant need for greater evidence that explores the impacts of the migration journey, with a recognition that migration experiences are diverse. It is crucial to acknowledge pre-arrival trauma and to consider how visa categories influence the migration experience.

Examples shared by consultation participants included experiences of humanitarian entrants, women on non-permanent visas and those arriving under family reunion pathways. Particular emphasis was given to intergenerational trauma and mental health issues, highlighting the need for deeper understanding and attention in these areas.

### Bias and gaps in current evidence

Recognising and addressing biases in existing evidence is essential, along with a willingness to understand and reconstruct it. This includes identifying and filling gaps in research, particularly regarding the migration journey and pre-arrival factors. There is a need to collect data on ethnicity and migration status to provide a clearer understanding of community challenges, while ensuring that this data is used responsibly and sensitively.

Existing data gaps mentioned in consultations included:

* Limited disaggregated data on specific groups such as refugees and temporary visa holders.
* No data on visa abuse.
* No data on the prevalence of family violence in multicultural communities, including same-sex relationships.
* No data on the ethnic backgrounds of homicide victims or perpetrators.
* No data on intervention orders taken out by women from migrant and refugee backgrounds.
* No data on women from migrant and refugee backgrounds accessing services.

Where data is collected, it often refers to country of origin, which limits insight into ethnic diversity. Additionally, broader national surveys used for data collection often lack representation from communities facing language barriers. These data limitations hinder the development of an evidence base to support the allocation of resources and effective engagement in prevention work.

### Strengthening evidence on prevention

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. Current evaluation frameworks do not always cater to the unique contexts of multicultural communities, and organisations need further support on how to measure the success of their work. Inclusive evidence buildingthat enables nuanced insights and avoids fitting evidence into existing restrictive frames will support a more effective prevention response.

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. Where such work has been evaluated, there is also a need for better utilisation of existing evaluation data to share learnings. Much of this work continues to sit with community service organisations despite its potential usefulness across the sector.

Practitioners need visibility of good practices, with information made accessible more broadly for continuous learning on primary prevention effectiveness. Training is also needed to support organisations to measure the success of their work effectively.

## 1.4 Capacity building for practitioners

### Tailored approaches for diverse communities

“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

The lack of strategies that account for the diverse and complex nature of multicultural communities remains a significant gap in mainstream efforts. Prevention-focused educators and practitioners should avoid making assumptions and homogenising multicultural communities, including the perception that a person’s ethnicity infers cultural intelligence or credibility in representing the voices of all members of their community.

Tailoring prevention initiatives to different cohorts, including age groups, is central to long-term impact. If designed in collaboration with community organisations, these programs can address the context-specific needs of all community members across their lifespan. A lifespan mapping approach ensures that education and support are relevant and effective at every stage of life.

### Trauma-informed practice

“Recognise the role of trauma, conflict, and cultural misunderstandings in contributing to violence. Shift the focus from solely discussing gender inequality to understanding the broader context of violence.”

Consultation participant

The consultation process highlighted that often prevention initiatives target gender-specific groups within multicultural communities. Women from migrant and refugee backgrounds regularly implore that men, and all members of their communities, should be included in prevention initiatives in safe and inclusive ways.

Sector representatives urged for improved cultural awareness skills for education practitioners, including improved understanding of the importance of cultural connection and the impact of racism when engaging with services.

Participants also raised the importance of trauma-informed approaches to working with men and boys. This involves creating safe spaces for men and boys to engage in conversations about violence, starting with a foundation of safety and trust. These messages are most effectively delivered by individuals who have already established such trusting relationships.

### Community-led approaches

“There is incredible complexity in our sector that gets watered down. How do you strengthen the collective? There are lots of people at different levels with different needs. How do you advocate to get the system to respond to needs? There are resources but we need communities to build capacity to take these up.”

Consultation participant

Upskilling communities to lead prevention initiatives remains a highly effective way to achieve impact. There were numerous examples of prevention work already occurring at grassroots levels, but this is often happening without resourcing, funding or oversight. Participants wanted to see the prevention sector and government engaging more with grassroots organisations and providing more opportunities for funded collaboration and co-design of interventions with the community to ensure relevance and effectiveness.

The importance of working across the lifespan was further highlighted, with participants urging for improved efforts to reach children and youth so that messages are instilled early. They also wanted to see improvements around culturally safe and trauma-informed practice with institutions and settings such as the media, schools, universities, sports clubs, community parenting sessions, and other first responders like doctors, teachers, police, legal services and community leaders.

## 1.5 Advocacy

### Advocacy to government

A recurring issue raised throughout the national consultation was the resourcing and funding challenges experienced by multicultural community organisations in implementing prevention initiatives, often without any funding for the work.

“There needs to be a shift in focus from crisis response to prevention. Primary prevention should receive the recognition and resources it deserves, with continuous funding and support for evaluation and sharing of best practices.”

Consultation participant

Consultation participants highlighted the need for greater advocacy, particularly to government agencies, to enable access to sustainable, ongoing funding that supports critical work in primary prevention to continue alongside initiatives in early intervention, response and recovery. They also urged for increased emphasis on qualitative data and relationship building, rather than a focus on quantitative success metrics which fail to acknowledge the ‘hidden’ work required to meaningfully engage communities.

### Media narratives

Mainstream media representation has had negative impacts in building community trust. Participants suggested that media coverage represents multicultural communities unfairly and that there is disparity in how violence is reported for different communities. There remains work to be done to change the media narrative and highlight positive examples of multicultural communities that avoid negative stereotypes.

“The language media is using continues to drive the narrative. For example, terrorism versus violence. Does media representation influence family violence? The community is saying media narrative is a contributing issue.”

Consultation participant

Focusing on and promoting positive stories within communities can significantly impact community morale and engagement, counterbalancing negative narratives. By highlighting and platforming good news and role models, this can shift the narrative from a deficit-based approach to one that celebrates successes and strengths. A strengths-based focus can inspire and motivate community members and provide valuable examples of resilience and achievement.

# 2. Thematic overview – Relevance of the drivers of violence in *Change the story* to working with multicultural communities

This section sets out the key themes raised in relation to the second question that participants were asked at consultations.

**Question 2:** During one of our early conversations, we were told that the four drivers of violence (as articulated in *Change the Story*) are the same across different ethnic and linguistic groups, but the ways they manifest are different. In your experience working with migrant and refugee communities, does this resonate?

## 2.1 Contributing factors

“Without removing the primacy of gender issues, there needs to be broader framing around power and immigration systems.”

Consultation participant

Consultation participants largely agreed that the four drivers of violence, as articulated in *Change the story*, resonate within multicultural communities. However, the ways they manifest in communities involves contributing factors that have yet to be fully addressed in prevention efforts.

The intersection of gender inequality with these contributing factors creates a complex and nuanced reality in multicultural communities. Settlement stress, changes in power dynamics, and the impacts of racism play pivotal roles.

Participants called for greater integration of contributing factors of violence against women from migrant and refugee backgrounds into prevention resources. The contributing factors raised by participants 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.

Primary prevention strategies aimed at multicultural communities should prioritise addressing these contributing factors and the systems of power, privilege and oppression beyond family relationships. However, participants noted that focusing on contributing factors alone, without the gendered drivers, will not be effective.

Participants said that prevention work based on the gendered drivers should also integrate these contributing factors. For example, when looking at the 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.

“If you overemphasise the drivers rather than the manifestations, communities are not getting the message. We need to talk about how these manifest in different communities in different ways.”

Consultation participant

Contributing factors have a significant impact in a society where the gendered drivers of violence are present and can increase the influence of the gendered drivers, the prevalence of violence, and experiences of systemic discrimination.

### Experiences of racism, social isolation and lack of trust in authorities

Racism significantly impacts multicultural communities, adding stress and exacerbating feelings of exclusion and powerlessness. This can intensify the conditions under which violence occurs. Some participants argued that racism should be considered a driver of violence on its own, given its profound effects.

“Racism is so interwoven in gender experience that you can’t differentiate. We haven’t gotten the balance between drivers and racism and impacts of settlement right. They are not causal but powerful.”

Consultation participant

Racism operates both as a direct and indirect driver of violence:

* Direct impact: Racism contributes to marginalisation and alienation, which then plays out in the family environment, leading to increased tensions and conflicts within families.
* Indirect impact: Systemic racism affects access to services, employment and social support, creating environments of isolation.

Social isolation is intensified by fear of racism and intimidation in mainstream settings, particularly when individuals lack family, friends or connections to community support networks in Australia. This isolation is further compounded by factors such as limited English literacy, pre-arrival trauma, insecure residency status, confinement to the home, or living in remote and regional areas.

A lack of trust in authorities and fear of children being removed often prevent individuals from seeking help or disclosing experiences of family violence. Trust in authorities is also influenced by pre-arrival experiences, especially where interactions with authorities were experienced as unsafe and dangerous.

This lack of trust also plays out in education efforts around violence prevention. Women may also avoid engaging in community programs which appear unsafe or confronting when coming from outside of community or trusted sources.

### Visa status and settlement journey

The visa system and settlement journey contribute to stress and unequal power dynamics. Differences in visa status and the associated rights can create significant power imbalances in relationships, often resulting in women being reliant on partners for residency. This issue was especially concerning to participants, given it places women in vulnerable situations.

“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

Women who are not Australian citizens or permanent residents, particularly those on tourist visas or partner visas (temporary), and those with children who are Australian citizens, face unique vulnerabilities due to immigration policy. Their insecure residency can be used as a form of violence, usually played out as threats of deportation. Some visas also prevent access to employment, housing, healthcare and support services. While immigration laws provide some protections, these are limited to cases of intimate partner violence and rely on tangible evidence, making it difficult to access support.

The migration journey and settlement experience vary for individuals and families, requiring a more nuanced approach that goes beyond the broad categories of migrant and humanitarian entrants. Examples of how the drivers of violence manifest through the migration journey and settlement experience include:

* Dowry abuse, often involving demands for a larger dowry once a woman has arrived in Australia.
* Forced marriage, often pursued with the intent of ‘protecting’ girls from exposure to Western influences or to suppress sexual orientation.
* Financial abuse, which manifests in numerous ways. For example, working in a family business without pay, control of income, refusing to allow remittances to family overseas, etc.
* Exit trafficking, often involving women being taken back to their country of origin without a return ticket.

### Migration impacts and acculturation

Migration and acculturation pressures significantly affect family dynamics, adding layers of complexity to how violence manifests. The cultural and psychological stresses of settling in a new country, adapting to different cultural norms, and navigating systemic barriers can lead to feelings of powerlessness, particularly among men who perceive the system as prioritising women’s and children’s rights, which may challenge patriarchal beliefs.

These pressures, along with the associated trauma, impact family dynamics and often result in significant adaptations around gender roles and family hierarchies. Migration-related trauma, including pre-arrival experiences, loss of social identity, language barriers, racism and employment challenges, can all have a profound impact.

Economic hardship and financial insecurity can also lead to power struggles and control issues within families, which can contribute to violence.

“We need to be careful about how we address the migration journey. There are lots of examples of women saying he wasn’t violent before coming to Australia, but it’s also dangerous to assume that stress of settlement contributes to family violence.”

Consultation participant

Consultation participants further highlighted that the existing evidence base fails to address the impact of ‘frozen culture’, where newly arrived communities remain determined to retain beliefs, values and attitudes from their country of origin. This can result in intergenerational conflict, but may also be a contributing factor in family violence, where coercive efforts are made to retain pre-arrival hierarchies within the family.

### The impact of peer influences and digital media

A recurring issue raised throughout consultation sessions was the impact social media and digital content have on younger generations of multicultural communities. This is having a profound impact on family dynamics and presenting a growing area of concern in the attitudes of boys and young men.

“Traditional systems respect the mother and sister, but the definition of respect has changed. Peer influence that is happening has had [a] big impact and social media has had [a] big impact. Social media influencers are impacting respect as it’s understood in cultural contexts.”

Consultation participant

### Access to support and legal literacy

Legal literacy was identified as a critical factor in prevention efforts. Multicultural communities often have limited understandings of the Australian legal and policy framework, making education essential to help them interpret concepts of violence and understand their rights. Without access to education on legal rights, people often assume that legal systems in Australia are the same as in their country of origin. As a result, they may believe that men have greater rights, particularly when it comes to matters relating to children.

“People should know what to expect about Australian laws before they arrive.”

Consultation participant

Limited or lack of access to support services, coupled with low legal literacy, exacerbates the vulnerabilities of multicultural families. Support services that are not culturally responsive can result in negative experiences that prevent women from seeking other options. Participants also mentioned numerous examples of mainstream violence prevention education that have been dismissive of the contextual reality facing many women in multicultural communities. As an inadvertent consequence, women may feel dismissed and disengage from further discussions on the issue.

Issues relating to the Australian Cultural Orientation (AUSCO) Program[[6]](#footnote-7) were consistently identified. The AUSCO program is offered to refugee background and Special Humanitarian Program entrants over the age of five, prior to their departure for Australia. It provides practical advice about the journey to Australia and the settlement process. There was strong consensus that this program offers a critical pre-arrival opportunity to impart important messages around gender equality expectations in Australia, and information about the law, serving as a precursor to on-arrival prevention efforts.

### Shame and community pressures relating to faith and culture.

Faith and cultural beliefs play significant roles in shaping family dynamics. Perceptions of shame (whether implicit or expressed through cultural beliefs, values and attitudes) along with pressures from religious leaders, family and society, can hinder individuals from seeking help or addressing violence within the home. Patriarchal attitudes place responsibility on women to keep the family together, and many women feel a deep sense of shame when betraying this responsibility. Messaging from community sources can also contradict violence prevention messages.

“We need to be careful about how we express the relationship between faith and culture. It’s not any faith that says you can’t divorce, but culture. Cultural interpretations of faith are patriarchal.”

Consultation participant

It is important to distinguish between religion and culture, recognising faith as a strengths-based factor in peoples’ lives and a significant part of identity in many multicultural communities. The meaning of faith-based messages can change depending on the intent and cultural influences of those delivering them. For example, if literacy issues prevent an individual directly accessing faith-based texts or scripts, they rely on the interpretation of these scripts from family and community members and faith leaders.

### Systemic homophobia and transphobia

Systemic barriers such as homophobia and transphobia can further complicate the landscape of violence for multicultural communities. Participants highlighted that it is crucial to address systemic issues. Multicultural LGBTIQA+ communities perceive they are excluded from services because the concept of LGBTIQA+ is viewed as Western and often left out in multicultural service initiatives.

The experiences of multicultural LGBTIQA+ communities with family violence remain largely invisible in both the literature and multicultural prevention efforts. These communities are often excluded from data collection and awareness initiatives, even within multicultural settings. Systemic homophobia, compounded by racism within the justice system, health services and support networks, results in unique experiences of marginalisation.

LGBTIQA+ individuals from multicultural communities fear disclosing family violence even within LGBTIQA+ settings, due to concerns of racism. Conversations around power are missing in the sector and result in exclusion. Participants identified that racism is structurally embedded, as multicultural LGBTIQA+ communities consider themselves to be full of strength, vitality and hope, but have difficulty gaining access to funding for prevention work when they adopt strengths-based approaches.

Participants explained that discussions about women need to be more inclusive and address issues such as social class, gender identity and sexual orientation. For example, the gendered drivers of violence often overlook trans women, who are at risk of experiencing violence, but are often left out of the conversation.

“We need to be careful about how we discuss homophobia. It’s a colonial concept that has been weaponised against our communities. White LGBTIQA+ people are racist against people of colour. We don’t feel welcome in LGBTIQA+ communities.”

Consultation participant

Further, the conversation misses critical insights into how violence is normalised when we focus solely on binaries of men and women alone and ignore conversations about power. Forced marriage to ‘fix’ sexuality remains an ongoing issue in some multicultural communities.

Primary prevention activity in multicultural communities should address broader power dynamics, including systemic and institutional power that perpetuates racism and discrimination, in addition to the four gendered drivers of violence. This includes structural barriers that serve to exclude and marginalise, such as the impact of visa status (for example, having restricted eligibility criteria for access to government support and services); the absence of trusted social networks or families in Australia; and linguistic and cultural barriers in seeking help and reporting violence.[[7]](#footnote-8) The intersection of systemic barriers and gendered power dynamics creates a complex web of oppression that can exacerbate violence.

“We need to think about the bigger picture of gender. We should be focusing on what is needed to stop the violence altogether. We don’t talk about power and what it is. Who does it sit with? Who holds it?”

Consultation participant

## 2.2 Language of the drivers of violence

The gendered drivers of violence against women outlined in *Change the story* resonate with multicultural communities. However, the language used to express these drivers does not always align with community understandings. Terminology such as ‘traditional’ and ‘dominant forms of masculinity’ can be misunderstood and resisted as an affront to culture, thereby discouraging engagement in prevention initiatives.

Concepts like ‘rigid gender roles’ and ‘gender equality’ can be confusing, as gender roles contribute to community functioning, especially in collectivist cultures. Many men often do not recognise their behaviours as oppressive, highlighting the need for enhanced education on communication and violence prevention.

In *Change the story*, the second driver focuses on ‘men’s control of decision-making’, failing to acknowledge the role that extended family members can play in this dynamic. Decision-making can also extend beyond family and can be influenced by community and faith-based expectations.

Some participants suggested that the Duluth Power and Control Wheel[[8]](#footnote-9) resonated more closely with communities than the gendered drivers.

Participants also wanted to see issues such as homophobia, transphobia and the broader context of colonisation and systemic racism integrated into responses around contributing factors.

## 2.3 Culturally responsive learning approaches

There are gaps around understanding and recognising non-physical forms of violence within multicultural communities, such as coercive control, emotional abuse and financial abuse. Cultural norms can also influence attitudes on what is and is not considered violence. Unpacking language should sit at the foundational stage of prevention work with multicultural communities.

“Some communities interpret family violence as killing. They don’t understand it as anything else. Education becomes a massive part of this. Lots of community skills are needed to educate on what family violence is and what different forms of family violence are.”

Consultation participant

Encouraging and facilitating open community discussions about gendered violence, its various manifestations, and the importance of prevention, sit at the core of prevention efforts. These conversations should be inclusive, allowing all community members to voice their experiences and perspectives in safe and respectful ways. Through effective facilitation of these discussions, awareness is raised, myths are dispelled, and a collective commitment to preventing violence can be fostered.

Further, there is a need toacknowledge the unrealistic expectations placed on migrant and refugee people to quickly adapt to new cultural norms and unlearn deeply ingrained pre-arrival beliefs and attitudes through ad hoc prevention efforts. Rather than beginning with discussions around gendered drivers, it is more useful to start the prevention conversation from a human rights lens. Education should also be ongoing and embedded in various settings including schools, workplaces, and community spaces.

Community leaders often play an important role in shaping community attitudes, but this can also pose challenges in the violence prevention space.[[9]](#footnote-10) Leadership in multicultural communities is often male dominated, which can impact the influence and reach of women. Community leaders also often face immense pressure from community needs and may not have the capacity or resources to effectively address these issues.

### Understanding the complexity of community structures

Recognising and responding to the complexity of community structures is essential for effective engagement and intervention. Many communities are characterised by intricate relationships, including the significant role of extended families, faith communities and ethnically affiliated community connections. Understanding these dynamics allows for more culturally responsive approaches to addressing violence and promoting prevention.

Further, it is important to acknowledge that violence within multicultural communities can take various forms and may involve extended family members, not just intimate partners. This broader understanding of violence helps in developing more comprehensive prevention strategies.

### Focus on protective factors

Protective factors within multicultural communities refer to those factors that are strengths-based and enable resilience when faced with challenges. Embedding protective factors related to culture and faith, and using positive language to promote healthy relationships, are important when engaging communities. This is crucial when working with men, as approaches that directly challenge ingrained identities can be counterproductive. Highlighting protective factors and positive relationship dynamics can foster collaborative engagement.

By integrating protective factors into prevention work, we can create a space for men and boys from migrant and refugee backgrounds that is respectful, culturally sensitive, and tailored to their intersectional experiences. This approach ensures they are actively engaged in creating safer, healthier communities.

# 3. Thematic overview – The role of Our Watch in supporting meaningful co-design and community-led work

This section sets out the key themes raised in relation to the third question that participants were asked at consultations. The strategies that have been proposed will help facilitate authentic engagement, sustained collaboration, and impactful outcomes that resonate with multicultural communities.

**Question 3:** How can Our Watch ensure that this project gives ownership and leadership to meaningful co-design and community-led work?

## 3.1 Taking inclusive and collaborative approaches to engagement

### Investing in sustainable multicultural sector relationships

Effective prevention efforts require robust partnership arrangements with peak multicultural bodies that already have deep-rooted connections within multicultural communities. To achieve sustainable and impactful outcomes, it is essential to invest in long-term engagement rather than short-term interactions.

Leveraging existing networks and direct connections to community can help build trust, enhance existing prevention efforts and build on existing support mechanisms to ensure accountability in prevention work. It is important to respect and acknowledge the efforts of those who have built strong community networks, ensuring their contributions are recognised and valued. This approach strengthens and fosters a more inclusive, supportive and trusting environment for all participants.

Different levels of engagement, such as advisory groups and round tables, should be established to facilitate comprehensive and inclusive collaboration. Our Watch plays a critical role in coordinating these efforts, addressing the current issue of siloed roles and responsibilities among organisations.

### Co-creation and flexibility

Co-design and co-creation with communities is essential for effective and inclusive prevention work. It is crucial to avoid imposing pre-existing frameworks on multicultural communities. Instead, approaches should be developed in collaborative ways to ensure they resonate with the unique experiences of multicultural communities.

“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

Currently, there is an expectation for multicultural communities to fit into mainstream frameworks, which can be limiting and ineffective. Embedding lived expertise and acknowledging the unique insights of community members is vital. Time needs to be invested in working closely with communities to ensure that prevention strategies are relevant and impactful.

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.

Participants also recommended embedding lived experience into the design and development of prevention responses from the outset, as it brings invaluable insights to the process. Additionally, compensating community members for their time and knowledge demonstrates respect and value for their contributions, fostering a more equitable and effective approach to community engagement and prevention work.

### Transparency and communication

Clear communication and continuous feedback are essential components of successful community engagement. Keeping community stakeholders informed about how their input is being used and the progress of work in this space helps foster a sense of contribution and shared purpose.

Ensuring visibility of the process builds trust and encourages ongoing participation. Providing regular updates and final reports to community members demonstrates that their voices have been heard and valued, reinforcing the importance of their contributions and maintaining their engagement beyond the project’s lifecycle.

### Whole-of-community prevention initiatives in community settings

Comprehensive, whole-of-community prevention initiatives are needed to address contributing factors along with the drivers of violence. Communities are particularly concerned about the fragmented and contradictory information they receive from various sources, including social media. They urged for stakeholders to work together to share resources and provide accurate and consistent information and education.

“Capacity building of the workforce is crucial. We risk excusing behaviour as culture, which is a negative assumption that can reinforce harmful ideas and attitudes.”

Consultation participant

Community leaders want to see comprehensive healthy relationships education implemented in schools and youth settings, with bilingual health educators providing culturally responsive education. They also suggested increasing public awareness through prevention initiatives in workplaces, schools and community settings such as English classes.

## 3.2 Tailored prevention strategies for working with men and boys

### Adapt prevention messages to experiences of men and boys from migrant and refugee backgrounds

There is a growing call from community women for greater involvement of men and boys in discussions, to enable whole-family engagement and holistic approaches to prevention.

“We don’t use the word ‘gender’ when working with men anymore. They just shut down. We talk about building skills for people to manage healthy relationships in different life stages.”

Consultation participant

A critical concern is the emerging view that gives legitimacy and credibility to the voices of men who claim that the settlement journey is a cause of violence against women. Buying into this could be detrimental to prevention efforts within multicultural communities.

Conversations with men and boys are more effective when prevention messaging connects ideas about gender to their experiences of other forms of oppression, such as racism. Participants emphasised that 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.

“What is not visible is the level of work involved in engaging communities and men. There are thousands upon thousands of invisible hours involved in even encouraging them to come along and engage.”

Consultation participant

### Holistic support for men and boys from migrant and refugee backgrounds

Participants also raised that programs should provide holistic support and engage men and boys in various aspects of life, including parenting, education and recreational activities. A driving factor for migration is often related to improved futures for children. This factor offers an effective pathway towards engaging multicultural men in initiatives on positive futures for the next generation. Integrating prevention messaging into these initiatives can highlight the collective benefit for communities.

### Men from migrant and refugee backgrounds as influential agents of change

Men from migrant and refugee backgrounds can be influential agents of change, yet they are rarely depicted in personal testimonies as influencers of change the way we see happen with non-migrant and -refugee men. Instead of reinforcing narratives that depict migrant and refugee men as victims of circumstance, opportunities should be explored to engage men as strong advocates for change.

# 4. Thematic overview – Other proposed actions for Our Watch

This section sets out the key themes raised in relation to the fourth question that participants were asked at consultations. Their responses indicated that it is crucial to establish a comprehensive and sustainable approach.

**Question 4:** What is one thing that you would really like to see come out of today in terms of what should happen next for primary prevention work with migrant and refugee communities?

## 4.1 Long-term planning and integration

To effectively integrate the experiences and expertise of multicultural communities into Our Watch’s work, a detailed, multi-year plan is essential. This plan should clearly outline the various initiatives Our Watch will undertake, and specify how communities will be integrated into these efforts.

“People will be more likely to get involved if they can see the steps of progress. What is this contributing to? When? Where is it leading? [They] need to see that they are contributing to a cause.”

Consultation participant

## 4.2 Intersectionality and inclusivity

This project presents a unique opportunity to demonstrate effective intersectionality in practice. By integrating the perspectives and experiences of multicultural communities, this can highlight how inclusive approaches lead to more effective and equitable outcomes. Showcasing such practices will set a benchmark for future initiatives, emphasising the importance of intersectional practice in prevention work.

Adopting an intersectional lens in prevention work is fundamental for developing messaging that effectively resonates with diverse perspectives within communities. Migration pathways, settlement experiences, and generational positioning are just a few examples that must be considered in this work. Developing prevention initiatives tailored to different cohorts, including age groups, is central to long-term impact. Collaboratively designed with community organisations, these programs can address the context-specific needs of all community members.

## 4.3 Connecting services and institutions across Our Watch’s work

Connecting services and institutions across Our Watch’s work, including sport, media and other sectors, is essential for a holistic approach to community engagement and violence prevention. Strengthening the connection between government departments and grassroots organisations can enhance the effectiveness of interventions. This requires challenging and reshaping the assumptions that governments hold about multicultural communities, promoting a more accurate and respectful understanding. By fostering these connections, we can create a more integrated and supportive network that better addresses the diverse needs of all community members.

# Glossary of terms

The following definitions apply to terms as they have been used throughout this report.

We acknowledge that terminology is highly contested in the sector, and we have adopted these definitions for the purpose of this project and report.

| Term | Definition |
| --- | --- |
| Australian Cultural Orientation (AUSCO) program | The AUSCO program is offered to refugee background and Special Humanitarian Program entrants over the age of five years prior to their departure for Australia and gives practical advice about the journey to Australia. |
| co-create | For the purpose of this project, co-creation is an approach where stakeholders are treated as equal collaborators at all project stages in the development of a specified resource. |
| co-design | For the purpose of this project, co-design is an approach where stakeholders are treated as equal collaborators during the design stage in the development of a specified resource. |
| community organisations | Community organisations refer to state/territory and local organisations established by local communities. These are usually ethno- or faith-specific and run by community leaders. |
| contributing factors | Significant factors that play a role in influencing the occurrence or dynamics of violence against women. These factors can both intersect with the gendered drivers and/or have their own influence on the prevalence and patterns of violence against women. |
| dowry abuse | Dowry is a practice referring to money, property or gifts that are typically transferred by a woman’s family to her husband upon marriage. The use of dowry in itself is not a form of abuse.  Any act of coercion, violence or harassment associated with the giving or receiving of dowry at any time before, during or after marriage is a form of abuse. Dowry-related abuse commonly involves claims that dowry was not paid and coercive demands for further money or gifts from a woman and her extended family. |
| gendered drivers of violence | The underlying causes that create the necessary conditions in which violence against women occurs. They relate to particular structures, norms and practices arising from gender inequality in public and private life, but which must always be considered in the context of other forms of social discrimination and disadvantage. |
| Duluth Power and Control Wheel | The Duluth Power and Control Wheel is a tool to understand the experiences of women who live with men who use violence. It is characterised by the pattern of actions that an individual uses to intentionally control or dominate their intimate partner. |
| LGBTIQA+ | LGBTIQA+ is an evolving acronym that stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer and asexual communities. We acknowledge that LGBTIQA+ has Western origins and may not resonate universally. Alternatively, the term sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or sex characteristics (SOGIESC) can be used to better reflect the global diversity of communities. |
| multicultural communities | Multicultural communities refer to a diversity of cultural groups identified through differences in country of origin, language, ethnicity and culture and whose ancestry is other than Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander or Anglo-Celtic. |
| migrant and refugee backgrounds | Migrant and refugee backgrounds are inclusive of, but not limited to, newly arrived, established and first generation Australian-born individuals. It includes people who have arrived under migration, humanitarian and other visa programs.  All references are inclusive of, and recognise the breadth of diversity and migration experiences represented by these terms. |
| multicultural sector | Multicultural sector refers to organisations with a primary focus on working with multicultural communities. It includes, but is not limited to, peak bodies, settlement services, ethno-specific community organisations, faith-based community organisations, advocacy bodies, ethnic community councils, and service providers. |
| peak multicultural sector bodies | Peak multicultural sector bodies refer to organisations representing the interests of multicultural communities. Peak bodies usually have a membership base made up of state/territory and local multicultural sector organisations. |
| protective factors | Protective factors within multicultural communities refer to those factors that are strengths-based and enable resilience when faced with challenges. These factors include strong family and community support networks, connection with culture and faith, social and cultural inclusion, access to education and meaningful employment, and access to culturally responsive services. |

# Appendix 1: List of participating organisations

Albury-Wodonga Ethnic Communities Council

AMES Australia

Anglican Diocese of Melbourne

Arabic Welfare

AustralAsian Centre for Human Rights and Health Inc.

Australian GLBTIQ Multicultural Council

Australian Migrant Resource Centre

Australian Refugee Association

Boronia Multicultural Services

Brisbane Rape and Incest Survivors Support Centre

Brotherhood of St Laurence

Canberra Multicultural Community Forum

CatholicCare Diocese of Broken Bay

Chinese Australian Services Society

CORE Community Services

Cultura

Eastern Community Legal Centre

Ethnic Communities’ Council of NSW

Ethnic Council of Shepparton and District Inc.

Fijian Community Association Victoria

Forcibly Displaced People Network

Harmony Alliance

Immigrant Advice and Rights Centre

Kulturbrille

MiCare

Migrant and Refugee Settlement Services

Multicultural Australia

Multicultural Centre for Women’s Health

Multicultural Communities Council of SA

Muslim Women Australia

NSW Health Education Centre Against Violence

PEACE Multicultural Services (program of Relationships Australia SA)

Polaron

Queanbeyan Multilingual Centre

Refugee and Immigration Legal Service (RAILS)

Safe and Equal

Settlement Council of Australia

Settlement Services International

Sharmila, Primary Prevention Practitioner

Sir Zelman Cowen Centre

South East Community Links

South Community Hub

Sydney Multicultural Community Services

The Bangle Foundation

The Buddhist Council of Victoria

The Social Policy Group

True Relationships and Reproductive Health

United Muslims of the NT

Wellsprings for Women

Women’s Health East

Women’s Safety Services SA

Wyndham Community & Education Centre

1. The term ‘women’ that is used throughout the report refers to anyone who is a woman, which includes cisgender and trans women. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Commonwealth of Australia. (2022). *The National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032*, pp. 42–44. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. From here, this report will predominantly use the language of ‘prevention’ to refer to ‘primary prevention’, for simplicity. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. 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*. Our Watch, Melbourne, p. 44. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. [Our Watch. Change the story and key frameworks](https://www.ourwatch.org.au/change-the-story). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. [Ausco (homeaffairs.gov.au)](https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/settling-in-australia/ausco#:~:text=Australian%20Cultural%20Orientation%20(AUSCO)%20Program&text=%E2%80%8BPractical%20advice%20about%20the,to%20their%20departure%20for%20Australia.). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. Commonwealth of Australia. (2022). *The National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032.* [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. Domestic Abuse Intervention Programs (theduluthmodel.org). [Wheel Information Center.](https://www.theduluthmodel.org/wheels/)  [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. Note: there is no agreed definition on what constitutes a community leader within multicultural communities. Community leaders can range from presidents of incorporated ethno-specific organisations to individuals who have informally adopted community leadership roles. They are usually volunteers who are visible in the community and ‘go to’ people for services wishing to engage with communities. Faith leaders are also recognised as community leaders. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)