

JUNE 2025

# Policy brief: Developing a primary prevention workforce

Prepared by Our Watch



## Acknowledgement of Country

Our Watch acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land across Australia on which we work and live. We pay respects to Elders past and present and recognise the continuing connection Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have to land, culture, knowledge and language for over 65,000 years.

As a non-Aboriginal organisation, Our Watch understands that violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children is an issue for the whole community. As highlighted in Our Watch's national resource *Changing the picture*, the evidence clearly shows the intersection between racism, sexism and violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

Our Watch has an ongoing commitment to the prevention of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children, who continue to suffer from violence at a significantly higher rate than non-Aboriginal women. We acknowledge all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations who continue to lead the work of sharing knowledge with non-Indigenous people and relentlessly advocate for an equitable, violence-free future in Australia.



## About Our Watch

*Our Watch* is a national leader in the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia. We are an independent, not for profit organisation established by the Commonwealth and Victorian Governments in 2013. All Australian governments are members of Our Watch.

Our vision is an Australia where women and their children live free from all forms of violence. We aim to drive nation-wide change in the culture, behaviours, attitudes and social structures that drive violence against women.

Guided by *Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women in Australia*, we work at all levels of our society to address the deeply entrenched, underlying drivers of violence against women, especially those stemming from gender inequality. We work with governments, practitioners and the community, at all levels of Australian society, to address these drivers of violence in all settings where people live, learn, work and socialise, both in person and online.

# About this brief

Violence against women in Australia is a national crisis, but it is preventable.

**The *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032 (National Plan)* sets out a shared vision for a future where women and children live free from violence.**

Prevention is the first domain of the *National Plan* framework. Primary prevention is an evidence-based approach to stop violence before it starts by addressing its underlying drivers.

As outlined in *Change the story*, primary prevention aims to:

Change the underlying social conditions that produce violence against women and that excuse or justify it

Address the underlying gendered drivers of this violence

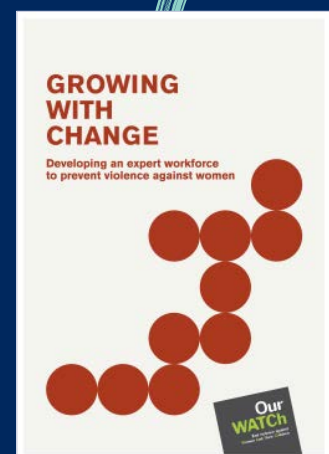
Address the factors that reinforce or contribute to this violence

**This policy brief, drawn from *Growing with change: Developing an expert workforce to prevent violence against women*, provides policymakers with guidance on how to build, strengthen and support the primary prevention workforce.**

The prevention workforce refers to the diverse range of professionals and practitioners whose roles contribute to the primary prevention of violence against women.

This brief:

- provides a model for understanding the prevention workforce in Australia
- outlines the benefits of resourcing workforce development
- identifies the building blocks governments can put in place to support the growth of primary prevention as a distinct and skilled field.



# Contents

---

<b>About this brief</b>	<b>3</b>
-------------------------	----------

---

<b>Building a workforce for change</b>	<b>5</b>
--	----------

---

<b>Understanding the prevention workforce in Australia</b>	<b>6</b>
--	----------

---

<b>Core elements of developing a prevention workforce</b>	<b>9</b>
Workforce planning	9
Workforce preparation and pathways	10
Sector governance and coordination	11
Working conditions	11
Professional development	12

---

<b>Benefits of investing in and coordinating primary prevention workforce development</b>	<b>13</b>
Commonwealth Government	14
Shared responsibility: Commonwealth, state and territory governments	17
State and territory governments	17

---

<b>Endnotes</b>	<b>18</b>
-----------------	-----------

# Building a workforce for change

The success of Australia's efforts to prevent violence against women depends in part on the size and skills of the primary prevention workforce.

**Growing with change identifies the 5 key elements of workforce development as:**



Given the society-wide nature of prevention work, the prevention workforce needs to be multidisciplinary and diverse. Achieving this will require a strategic and coordinated approach to workforce planning and development.

Without efforts across all 5 of these elements, workforce development is likely to be limited to a focus on skills and growth. Investment across all 5 elements will help create a high-quality, sustainable sector. More broadly, workforce development plays an important role in strengthening the foundations for primary prevention.



Figure 1. The interconnected elements involved in workforce development.

# Understanding the prevention workforce in Australia

The prevention workforce refers to the diverse range of professionals and practitioners whose roles contribute to the primary prevention of violence against women. This includes those in dedicated prevention roles, individuals delivering prevention initiatives as part of broader responsibilities, and others with the potential to engage in this work.

Primary prevention work requires expertise in social and structural change, gender norms and systemic forms of discrimination and inequality. This is distinct from the deep skills, knowledge and trauma-informed approaches needed for early intervention, risk assessment, crisis response and recovery services.

Rather than only expecting the already overburdened response sector to undertake prevention work, there are opportunities to strengthen primary prevention as a professional field in its own right, while also recognising, building and supporting primary prevention work being undertaken by organisations and individuals who also focus on early intervention, response and recovery work.

In *Growing with change*, Our Watch developed a model for understanding the national prevention workforce. This model describes 4 distinct groups of professionals who currently work in primary prevention or could do so in the future.

The model includes those who focus on or specialise in prevention, as well as a wide range of people working in varied contexts whose roles are not *primarily* focused on prevention, but who undertake some prevention activities as part of their work.

Workforce development activities need to encompass all 4 groups to ensure the prevention workforce grows sustainably and has the capacity to undertake the diverse range of prevention activities that are needed.



Figure 2. A model for understanding the prevention workforce in Australia.



The table below provides a description of each group and examples of the types of roles within each group. The examples are not exhaustive.



#### GROUP 1

### Technical and content experts

These professionals are focused solely on prevention, and they hold significant depth of knowledge and experience in prevention. They are often focused on systems change or scaling up of prevention initiatives, play a leadership role in strategy, programming, policy, advocacy, research, evaluation or practice and set strategic agendas. They comprise the smallest proportion of the workforce but are fundamental to the success of this work.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS

PRINCIPAL ADVISORS

STRATEGIC ADVISORS

SENIOR ADVISORS

ACADEMICS

RESEARCHERS

PROGRAM MANAGERS



#### GROUP 2

### Specialist primary prevention professionals

These roles are significantly or entirely focused on prevention, and these professionals often have substantial experience in the design and delivery of prevention activities. They have a sound understanding of the evidence base, but tend to be skilled in, and focus on, applying it at program or project levels, or in a specific local context, rather than at sector, state or system levels.

PROJECT MANAGERS

PROJECT OFFICERS

POLICY ADVISORS

RESEARCH ADVISORS

PRACTICE ADVISORS

EVALUATORS



#### GROUP 3:

### Settings or sector-based professionals

These professionals tailor and deliver prevention activity as part of their broader role, but their primary or specialist expertise or qualifications are in a different field (for example, teaching, human resources, sports administration, journalism) and their job may not be wholly focused on prevention. These workers comprise the largest proportion of the prevention workforce.

TEACHERS

UNIVERSITY STAFF

HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGERS

SPORTS ADMINISTRATORS

JOURNALISTS

HEALTH PROMOTION OFFICERS

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT WORKERS



#### GROUP 4:

### Potential primary prevention professionals

These are people who may be interested in addressing violence against women but need further opportunity, support, motivation and guidance to start their journey as a prevention professional.

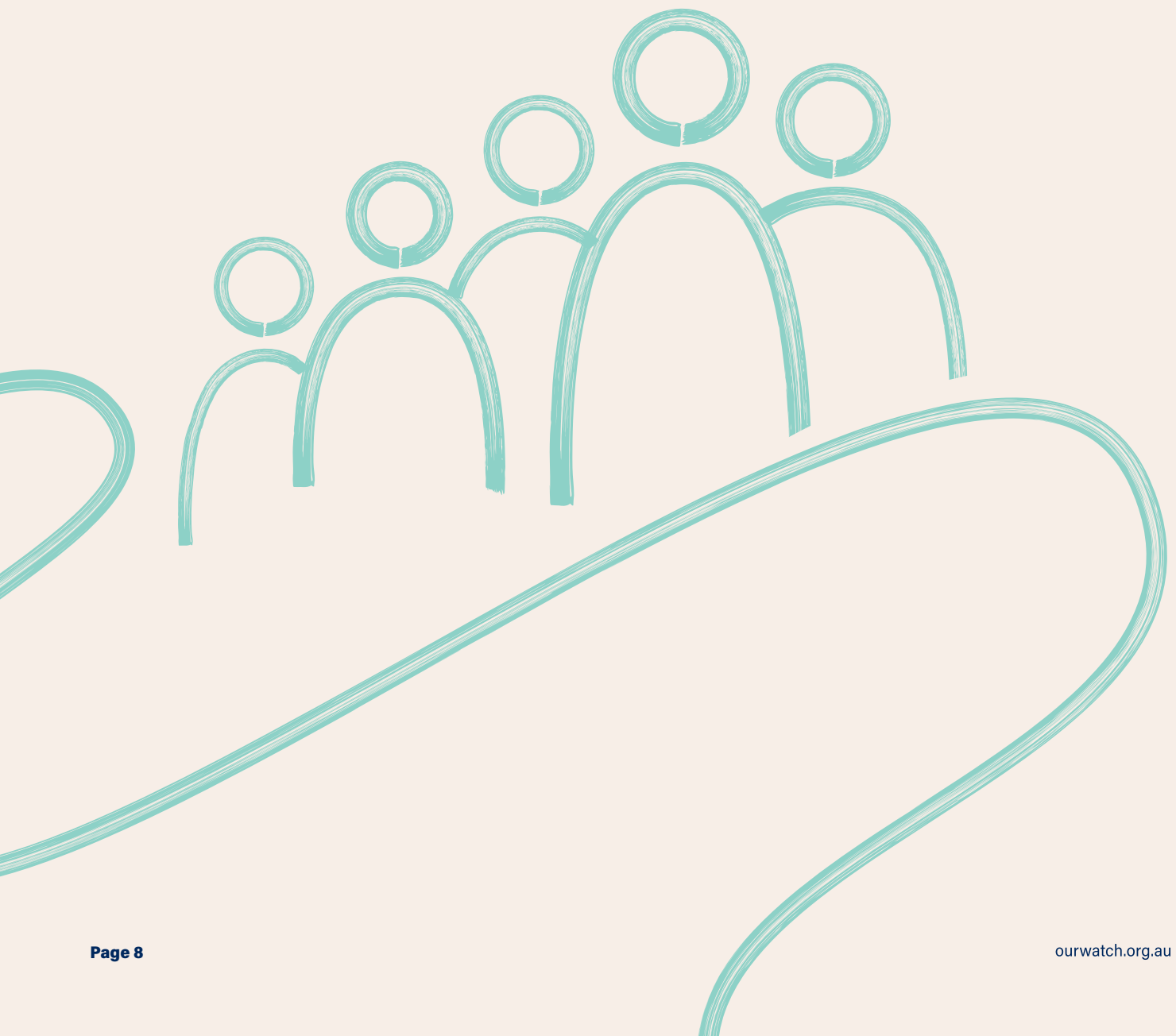
Table 1: The primary prevention workforce groups and descriptions.

While this model focuses on groups that make up, or could enter, the professional prevention workforce, there are many others in the wider community who play a critical role in progressing the prevention of violence against women. These include volunteers and victim survivors. Although not part of the formal workforce, their contributions are vital and may also benefit from government support through recognition, capacity building and partnership opportunities.

**It is also important to acknowledge that individuals may hold overlapping roles or move between groups over time.** This is particularly true of regional and rural areas, where professionals may work across multiple settings and hold several responsibilities in the community.

Safe and Equal's resource, *Foundations for Action*, provides additional clarity on how workforce roles intersect with prevention responsibilities by mapping and describing the sectors, organisations and practitioners involved in primary prevention.

The *Foundations for Action* model reinforces the need to differentiate between those whose work is prevention-focused and those who contribute to prevention efforts through related roles and settings. This clarity is important for effective workforce planning and development.<sup>1</sup>





# Core elements of developing a prevention workforce

This section describes each core element of workforce development from *Growing with change* in more detail. The core elements are key to workforce development broadly, as well as being particularly relevant for the prevention workforce.



## Workforce planning

Workforce planning is the process of analysing, forecasting and planning workforce supply and demand; assessing gaps; and determining workforce development strategies.

The purpose of workforce planning is to ensure that a sector or industry has **the right people - with the right skills, in the right places, at the right time** - to meet its objectives now and into the future. Planning also needs to consider potential future risks and mitigation strategies.

Understanding workforce supply and demand is essential to forecast the future skills and scale required of the prevention workforce; nationally, in different states and territories and in intersecting sectors.

Workforce supply can be defined in terms of the headcount, skills and capabilities required for the prevention workforce to be effective in preventing violence against women.

Understanding workforce supply needs to include those currently employed in the prevention workforce, as well as the potential prevention workforce, and should encompass both those who work as specialists and those in settings- or sector-based roles.

There is currently **limited data about the prevention workforce** because there is no national survey or data collection tool to measure the number of people who work in prevention, nor to estimate how that number might change over time. Work designed to address this gap could usefully focus on establishing a coordinated approach for conducting comprehensive workforce planning across the country.

**Capability frameworks** can also support workforce planning by articulating the specific skills, knowledge and attributes required to plan, implement and evaluate initiatives for the prevention of violence against women.

While it is unlikely that a one-size-fits-all approach will work for every jurisdiction, capability frameworks can still play an essential role in setting a strategic direction for workplace planning and can enable greater consistency and coordination across the national prevention workforce.



## Workforce preparation and pathways

Creating and maintaining pathways to education and employment is an important aspect of increasing the supply of skilled workers.

Some of these pathways start in the school years, where curriculum and career advice support the development of required employability skills and career awareness to guide the transition from school to work.<sup>2</sup>

**More formally, pathways can be created through the vocational education and training (VET) and higher education (university) systems.** These include pre-service, undergraduate and postgraduate accredited training and education that support the entry or transition of new workers into the workforce, as well as the upskilling or career progression of existing workers. These pathways should be well-resourced and promoted to build community awareness of careers in primary prevention and reduce barriers to participation.

**There are currently very few standalone, formal qualifications focused specifically on the primary prevention of violence against women.** Some universities across the country have introduced specific courses about family and sexual violence prevention and response. However, the majority of these are only offered at a postgraduate level.

**The diverse pathways into prevention work has been shown to be a strength of the sector.**<sup>3</sup> Common pathways into primary prevention include qualifications in humanities, law, health promotion and public health, gender studies, education, community development, youth work and public policy.<sup>4</sup> Rather than establishing a single degree or specialist qualification, there are opportunities to embed prevention practice more strongly into these existing undergraduate courses to support the growth of a capable, diverse and sustainable prevention workforce.

As more opportunities for upskilling learners in prevention become available, consideration also needs to be given to ensuring there is an **appropriate supply of suitably qualified university and VET educators.** Investment in educator and training capability is essential to ensure that primary prevention education and training is high-quality, relevant, adheres to the evidence base and draws from current good practice in prevention.

Survivor advocacy is also an important, at times overlooked entry point into the prevention workforce. Many individuals come to this work through lived experiences of violence, using their expertise to inform community engagement and advocacy for systems change. **Workforce development efforts should recognise and value lived experience alongside formal qualifications to create accessible and inclusive pathways into prevention roles.**



## Sector governance and coordination

Governments can play a critical role in scoping, establishing and strengthening governance and coordination mechanisms for the primary prevention workforce.

For example, governments can support the establishment of peak bodies and professional associations that help to create a common identity for prevention professionals, establish shared standards of practice, support professional development and drive advocacy to represent the professional interests of the sector.

Most professional associations have a national leadership body that undertakes national advocacy

and establishes professional standards, and state and territory branches that provide professional development tailored to meet the specific needs of their jurisdiction.

In working to improve sector governance and coordination, there are opportunities for governments to work in collaboration with the prevention sector and other key stakeholders and commit to sustainably investing in governance and coordination bodies.



## Working conditions

Pay, conditions, job satisfaction and health and wellbeing all play an important role in the attraction and retention of people to the prevention workforce.

**Several challenges currently affecting the broader community services sector also impact the prevention workforce.** These include limited access to professional development, limited career development opportunities, low remuneration and contract insecurity.<sup>5</sup> The gendered nature of the community sector workforce also contributes to the undervaluing of the prevention workforce.

**There are other issues that are more unique to the violence workforce - both in prevention and response.** These include the risk of burnout due to vicarious trauma; the need to deal with misogyny, as well as high levels of resistance and backlash to prevention and gender equality; stress due to workload; and limited supervision and support.<sup>6</sup>

**The gendered nature of the workforce and the prevalence of violence against women means that many people working in this sector will have their own lived experience of violence.** Without adequate systems in place to support employees with lived experience, there is a risk that current working conditions could compound negative impacts on their health, safety and wellbeing.<sup>7</sup>

**These issues are particularly relevant for those in the workforce who experience gender inequality alongside other forms of structural discrimination,** such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people with disabilities and LGBTIQ+ people. While these workers may experience additional health and wellbeing issues due to discrimination, isolation in the workplace and/or lack of cultural safety, many also draw strength and resilience from their communities, identities and experiences.<sup>8</sup> Building on these strengths and supporting community-led initiatives is essential for achieving positive outcomes in prevention.

Addressing these working conditions should be led by sector-led approaches to improve pay, job security, supervision, wellbeing supports and cultural safety, all of which are **essential to attracting and retaining a skilled, diverse and effective prevention workforce.**



## Professional development

**Professional development refers to informal and formal mechanisms for building skills and knowledge outside the formal pathways of vocational and tertiary education. Ideally these would include non-accredited training, in-service professional development and on-the-job learning.**

Appropriate and tailored professional development and capability building initiatives such as training, mentoring and learning networks help to deepen the skills of the existing workforce and support leadership development. They also help grow the prevention workforce by engaging emerging prevention professionals and potential partner organisations nationwide.

Across Australia there is currently limited and inconsistent access to quality professional development focused on primary prevention, as well as limited career development opportunities in the prevention workforce. These issues limit the development of those currently in the workforce, undermine recruitment and retention efforts and create barriers to expanding the prevention workforce into the future.



# Benefits of investing in and coordinating primary prevention workforce development

Building a strong and diverse primary prevention workforce strengthens the foundations for effective prevention, supports broader social and economic outcomes and enables a more sustainable, system-wide approach to ending violence against women.

For those already working in prevention, workforce development can improve working conditions, progress professional development and strengthen the professional identity of the workforce. The table below outlines some of the short- and long-term benefits of a strategic approach to workforce development.

## Short-term benefits

- ✓ Accelerated delivery of the prevention actions under the *National Plan*.
- ✓ Greater return on investment through more efficient scaling of existing, evidence-informed prevention initiatives.
- ✓ Increased workforce participation and employment opportunities, particularly for women given the over-representation of women in the prevention workforce.
- ✓ Stronger alignment with existing national, state and territory workforce strategies.

## Long-term benefits

- ✓ A sustainable, coordinated prevention sector and workforce.
- ✓ Reduced demand on response and recovery services to undertake prevention activities without additional support or investment.
- ✓ Progress toward gender equality targets, including women's economic participation and leadership in key sectors.
- ✓ Greater impact from government prevention investments, with improved outcomes and measurable progress across jurisdictions.

# Opportunities for governments

There are significant opportunities to support and invest in developing the skills, size and coordination of the prevention workforce across all states and territories.

There is a clear opportunity for commitments to end violence against women, including through the delivery of the *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032*, to be accompanied by increased investment in and support for developing the prevention workforce. Long-term and sustainable investment, including for workforce development initiatives, is most likely to allow for strategic workforce planning.

To contribute to visibility and understanding of the impacts of these initiatives and identify learnings to inform ongoing work, increased workforce development efforts should be supported by appropriate monitoring and evaluation.

Opportunities to establish the foundations for strategic workforce development include:

## Commonwealth Government

### 1. Establish a national governance mechanism to coordinate workforce development across the country.

Effective workforce development requires strong governance, cross-jurisdictional coordination and sustained investment in sector infrastructure.

There are opportunities for the Commonwealth Government to establish a formal mechanism, such as a national workforce advisory group, to bring together state and territory governments, peak bodies and prevention sector leaders. This body could guide consistent, evidence-based workforce development efforts, support collaboration, and enable the sharing of data, learnings and resources across jurisdictions.

To encourage greater alignment and coordination in the delivery of the *National Plan*, the group could retain a prevention focus but engage organisations working across the other domains of early intervention, response, recovery and healing. This kind of collaboration and coordination is essential to create an enabling environment for the success of other workforce development initiatives, including those described below.



## 2. Develop a National Workforce Development Strategy, which includes a focus on the prevention workforce.

The *National Plan* recognises the importance of building and strengthening the workforce. However, one of the key missing elements of current approaches to ending violence against women is a strategic and coordinated approach to having a skilled and appropriately resourced workforce available across primary prevention, early intervention, response and recovery nationally.

A National Workforce Development Strategy could encompass primary prevention, early intervention, response and recovery workforces, noting the connected but also unique needs and employment conditions of each workforce. A Strategy could map and assess the existing workforce, and identify needs, gaps and opportunities to expand and strengthen the workforce. The Strategy could be designed in a way to support and connect state and territory workforce development initiatives across Australia, to ensure consistency while respecting the diverse needs of the workforce in each jurisdiction.

Development and co-design of the Strategy alongside prevention sector leaders will help ensure it is relevant and meaningful. This could be done through a national governance mechanism which could encompass the national workforce advisory group suggested above.

### What this could look like

In 2017, the Victorian Government launched *Building from strength: 10-year industry plan for family violence prevention and response*. This Plan outlines a long-term, strategic approach to workforce development for the prevention and response sectors. It prioritises growth, capability-building and coordination. The Commonwealth government can build on this approach by developing a National Workforce Development Strategy to support workforce development at scale.

## 3. Collect national and jurisdictional data on the prevention workforce to inform workforce planning and development.

Building a national picture of the prevention workforce is essential to identify priorities for workforce development.

The National Family Domestic and Sexual Violence Workforce Survey should support the establishment of a baseline dataset for the broader domestic, family and sexual violence workforce. While the Survey is set to provide valuable information on job types, qualifications, recruitment and retention, work conditions and remuneration, and workforce shortages, it may not capture sufficient detail on the primary prevention workforce.

Future data collection efforts should be co-designed with prevention stakeholders and refined to include specific and measurable data on prevention roles. National data efforts could also be aligned with any state and territory data collection programs to ensure consistency, comparability and a more complete understanding of the workforce across jurisdictions.

#### **4. Develop tools that establish a shared understanding and expectation of the skills and capabilities required for prevention work – for example, a capability framework or practice standards.**

*Growing with change* outlines various different tools that could establish a shared understanding and expectation of the unique skills and capabilities required for prevention work. A national capability framework would outline the skills, knowledge and behaviours required now, and into the future, to build a strong and effective primary prevention workforce. Practice standards would set the minimum requirements for high-quality prevention work.

The Commonwealth Government could develop such tools in collaboration with the existing prevention workforce, to ensure they are suitable for the intended audience, relevant to the context of different jurisdictions, and have the capacity to help create a more consistent and coordinated approach to prevention workforce development across the country.

##### **What this could look like**

In Queensland, the Department of Justice and Attorney-General developed the *Practice Principles, Standards and Guidance* for domestic and family violence services. These standards outline the key expectations for professionals working in the domestic and family violence response sector, ensuring consistency, quality, and accountability in service delivery across the state. While these standards were developed for the response workforce, they offer a strong foundation that could be adapted or replicated for the primary prevention workforce. Establishing similar practice standards for prevention work could help define expectations, build professional capability and drive greater consistency in prevention practice nationwide.

#### **5. Convene a working group of relevant accreditation authorities to embed primary prevention skills across key industries.**

The Commonwealth Government can play a leading role in workforce development by bringing together professional bodies and regulators from sectors such as health, education and community services to explore opportunities for embedding primary prevention skills in accredited training and education programs. These discussions, for example in the form of a working group, could identify opportunities to embed prevention content in national accreditation standards, ensuring future professionals are equipped with the knowledge and skills to contribute to the prevention of violence against women.

##### **What this could look like**

The Australian Nursing and Midwifery Accreditation Council provides a set of agreed and contemporary practice standards for the profession, to ensure graduates can practice safely and competently with the required attitudes, knowledge and skills. Since 2017, its standards require the teaching of a unit 'specifically addressing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' history, health, wellness, culture and culturally safe practice'.<sup>9</sup> A similar requirement could be added to ensure a unit on the prevention of violence against women is included in all nursing programs.

## Shared responsibility: Commonwealth, state and territory governments

### 1. Invest in long-term primary prevention programs and services.

Short-term funding (less than 3 years) makes it harder to support and retain the current workforce and attract new people to undertake prevention work. There are opportunities for government grant programs and service contracts to be designed in ways that support long-term primary prevention initiatives, providing for job security and appropriate remuneration, and taking into consideration the gendered dynamics of the workforce and the specific wellbeing challenges of prevention work discussed above.

### 2. Expand the Fee-Free TAFE program to cover courses in domestic, family and sexual violence as a national area of priority.

The Fee-Free TAFE program was designed to deliver a coordinated national response to workforce shortages in industries and occupations of local and national priority.<sup>10</sup> The *National Plan* clearly identifies women's safety as a matter of national urgency.

Including domestic, family and sexual violence courses in the Fee-Free TAFE program would remove financial barriers to education and training and raise the visibility of this field of work as a career opportunity. A standalone primary prevention course is already registered and accredited until 2028 with the national training register for VET institutions.<sup>11</sup> Including this course in the Fee-Free TAFE program would leverage this readily available opportunity to grow and strengthen the prevention workforce through accessible, nationally coordinated training.

## State and territory governments

### 1. Ensure all states and territories have a funded peak body for the domestic, family and sexual violence sector with resourcing to support workforce development.

Peak bodies play a critical role in workforce development by providing training, professional development, sector coordination and advocacy.

In some jurisdictions, however, peak bodies are either not yet established or are not resourced to support the full spectrum of workforce development activities, particularly in primary prevention. Establishing and adequately funding peak bodies in every state and territory will ensure consistent, locally informed support for workforce initiatives, including capability building, peer learning and professional development.

#### What this could look like

The *Fast Track intensive leadership program*, funded by Family Safety Victoria, has been designed by *Safe and Equal* to increase the supply of knowledgeable and skilled mid- and senior level practitioners to take up urgently needed leadership roles in specialist family violence response and primary prevention in Victoria. Fast Track Prevention translates capabilities from the *Victorian Government's Preventing Family Violence and Violence against Women Capability Framework* into relevant, practical learning materials that can be applied to real-life professional settings.

# Endnotes

- 1 Safe and Equal. (2024). *Foundations for action: A resource for workforce development in the prevention family and gender-based violence*. Safe and Equal.
- 2 Employment, Workplace Relations and Education References Senate Committee. (2003). *Bridging the skills divide*. Australian Government.
- 3 Safe and Equal. (2024). *Foundations for action: A resource for workforce development in the prevention family and gender-based violence*. Safe and Equal.
- 4 Our Watch. (2020). *Tracking progress in prevention*. Our Watch.
- 5 See, e.g., Wendt, S., Natalier, K., Seymour, K., King, D., & Macaitis, K. (2020). Strengthening the domestic and family violence workforce: Key questions. *Australian Social Work*, 73(2).
- 6 Family Safety Victoria. (2017). *Building from strength*. Victorian Government.
- 7 Family Safety Victoria. (2019). *Strengthening the foundations*. Victorian Government.
- 8 Wendt et al. (2020). Strengthening the domestic and family violence workforce.
- 9 ANMAC. (2017). *Enrolled nurse accreditation standards*. Australian Nursing and Midwifery Accreditation Council (ANMAC).
- 10 Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (2025, February 3). [\*Fee-Free TAFE – Skills Reform\*](#). Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, Australian Government; Accessed 17 June 2025.
- 11 Training.gov.au. (2024). [\*22621VIC Course in Contributing to Primary Prevention of Family Violence and Violence Against Women\*](#). Australian Government; Accessed 26 March 2025.



