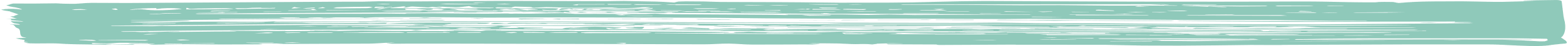
April 2024

Submission in response to the ACT Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Strategy Consultation



Our Watch

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# 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 had 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 isa problem facing 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 experience violence at significantly higher rates than non-Aboriginal women. We acknowledge all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who continue to lead the work of sharing knowledge with non-Aboriginal people and relentlessly advocate for an equitable, violence-free future in Australia.

# About Our Watch

[Our Watch](https://www.ourwatch.org.au/) 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 our ground-breaking national frameworks, [*Change the story* (2nd ed 2021)](https://www.ourwatch.org.au/resource/change-the-story-a-shared-framework-for-the-primary-prevention-of-violence-against-women-in-australia/)[[1]](#endnote-2), [*Changing the picture* (2018)](https://www.ourwatch.org.au/resource/changing-the-picture/)[[2]](#endnote-3) and [*Changing the landscape* (2022)](https://www.ourwatch.org.au/resource/changing-the-landscape/),[[3]](#endnote-4) we work at all levels of our society to address the deeply entrenched, underlying drivers of violence against women. 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.

# Executive Summary

Our Watch welcomes the ACT Government’s draft Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Strategy. The draft Strategy reflects clear alignment with *Change the story* and a strong focus on the prevention of violence against women. Our Watch acknowledges that this Strategy will build on activities that are already underway in the ACT aimed at addressing gender inequality and preventing domestic, family and sexual violence.

Our Watch supports the alignment of the four focus areas with the domains of the National Plan. We also commend the ACT Government’s commitment to develop a standalone prevention of violence against women action plan, in line with advice from Our Watch and the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Prevention Council. We welcome the opportunity to support the development of this plan.

In this submission, we:

* provide feedback in relation to the opportunities to strengthen and build on the foundations for prevention and reflections on the structures and processes across government that can support the Strategy, including in relation to governance, monitoring, evaluation and reporting
* offer suggestions to refine the objectives under the Prevention focus area to emphasise a comprehensive, whole-of-population approach addressing the gendered drivers across all parts of society, with explicit language on intersectionality
* provide feedback in relation to centring the intersecting drivers of violence and the importance of engaging men and boys in this work.

Our Watch welcomes the commitment by the ACT Government to this work and the important initial draft of the Strategy. We are also aware of views expressed by other members of the ACT DFSV Prevention Council in relation to the value of additional consultation and engagement in relation to the Strategy prior to its finalisation.

We welcome the opportunity to provide further advice or assistance in relation to the issues outlined in this submission as an organisation, as well as through membership of the Prevention Council. Please contact Director of Government Relations, Policy and Evidence, Amanda Alford at [amanda.alford@ourwatch.org.au](mailto:amanda.alford@ourwatch.org.au).

**Recommendations**

Our Watch recommends that the ACT Government:

1. Retain the commitment to develop a standalone primary prevention plan.
2. Invest in the essential foundations to support the implementation of the Strategy and enable long-term primary prevention efforts in the ACT, including:
   * Establish and/or build on governance mechanisms to facilitate coordination and collaboration across ACT Government Departments in the design, development, delivery and evaluation of prevention policy and programming.
   * Clarify the purpose and role of the Strategy, including the incorporation of additional actions under the Strategy, or development of a supporting Action Plan.
   * Prioritise the development of a clear monitoring and evaluation plan to support monitoring and reporting on activities in Strategy from the outset, to support accountability and facilitate learning and improvement over time.
   * Develop explicit actions that contribute towards building a specialist, expert primary prevention workforce to ensure the long-term sustainability and effectiveness of prevention across the ACT.
3. Include a standalone principle on intersectionality to focus ACT Government efforts on the intersecting drivers of violence against women such as racism, ableism, ongoing impacts of colonisation, and homo-, bi- and transphobia by developing essential actions that target discrimination, oppression, power and privilege.
4. Consider the development of guidelines to ensure addressing masculinities and engaging men in the prevention of violence against women is addressing the gendered drivers of violence against women, as outlined in the [*Men in focus practice guide*](https://www.ourwatch.org.au/resource/men-in-focus-practice-guide-addressing-masculinities-and-working-with-men-in-the-prevention-of-mens-violence-against-women/)*.*

# Responses to consultation questions

## Question 1: Do you agree with the principles?

Our Watch commends the ACT Government on the selected principles of the draft Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Strategy. There are opportunities to strengthen the following principles by providing more explicit guidance that can inform the design, implementation and evaluation of future actions and activities. This includes:

* **Principle 4: Intersectionality, inclusion and accessibility –** Our Watch suggests separating these elements out. Include one principle on intersectionality and one principle on inclusion and accessibility to avoid conflation. As *Change the story* recognises, systemic and structural forms of racism, colonialism, ableism, homo, bi- and transphobia, ageism, class discrimination – together and separately, and alongside power and privilege – intersect with the gendered drivers of violence against women and the reinforcing factors in a range of different ways. An intersectional approach means addressing the structural forms of discrimination, oppression, power and privilege, focusing actions to address the way these structural dynamics impact the severity and prevalence of violence against women. See under question 4 for further detail.[[4]](#endnote-5)
* **Principle 8: Evidence informed –** We encourage the ACT Government to embed innovation in the Strategy by ensuring the Strategy is both informed by evidence and contributes to building the evidence base. This can be achieved by updating this principle to be both evidence informed and evidence building. Including ‘evidence building’ in this priority highlights the important role of the proposed accompanying monitoring and evaluation plan in understanding and supporting prevention work in the ACT and nationally.

## Question 2: Do you think there are principles missing?

As outlined above, Our Watch suggests separating Principle 4 into two separate principles.

In addition, Our Watch recommends elevating ‘Working across the life course’ to be a distinct principle, to guide further decision-making and ensure no cohort is left behind. This is because we know that for prevention efforts to be effective, we need to reach and engage everyone in sustained and mutually reinforcing ways over the course of their lives.[[5]](#endnote-6) We welcome the priorities and outcomes in the draft Strategy that target different life stages.

## Question 3: Do you agree with the priorities under the following 4 focus areas: prevention, early intervention, response and recovery and healing?

Our Watch supports the draft Strategy’s alignment of the four focus areas to the domains of the National Plan.

Broadly, Our Watch considers that there is an opportunity to either add additional priorities to guide work in the ACT, or more clearly articulate the relationship between the Strategy and any supporting action or implementation plan.

In line with Our Watch’s expertise and evidence base in primary prevention, we have focused our feedback on the priorities under the prevention focus area to highlight opportunities to further strengthen the draft Strategy.

Broadly, under the objective of the prevention focus area, we encourage the ACT Government to refer to prevention requiring a “comprehensive, *whole-of population approach*, addressing the gendered drivers across all parts of society. *Multifaceted action is required to address* how different individuals*, communities, organisations*, institutions *and systems* *reinforce the gendered drivers and social context of gender and other inequalities*.” Inclusion of this additional language (in italics) will provide a more robust and evidence-based approach to prevention and embed the principle of intersectionality.

### Developing a whole of ACT domestic, family and sexual violence prevention plan which builds and improves the ACT’s prevention infrastructure.

Our Watch welcomes the future development of a standalone prevention plan to guide the ACT Government’s action under this priority.

In particular, we welcome the focus on prevention infrastructure. Infrastructure, in the context of primary prevention, is best thought of as the essential foundations required to enable national prevention efforts to be most effective and to ensure that they lead to sustained long term social change. High-quality primary prevention infrastructure is the first step in creating the necessary systems, processes, activities, strategies and leadership to support ongoing, comprehensive and coordinated action to prevent violence against women (see *Change the story* p. 101 for more on prevention infrastructure).

We welcome any opportunities to assist the ACT Government in the design of this prevention plan.

### Engaging men and boys in prevention work including to shift gendered norms and cultures of masculinity.

All men have a role to play, not only in challenging their own attitudes and behaviours, but also to help shift the social structures and norms that maintain gender inequality and drive violence against women. As part of this work, it is important to identify the distinctions between primary prevention initiatives and other work such as broader men’s health and wellbeing programs. These distinctions of what is (and what is not) an evidence-based strategy to engage men and boys in prevention of violence against women should be explicit in the targeted prevention action plan and subsequent investments in primary prevention initiatives that engage men and boys (e.g., as part of funding guidelines).

Our Watch refers the ACT Government to the guiding principles for addressing masculinities and engaging men in the prevention of violence against women outlined in the *Men in focus* *practice guide* (see p. 30).

### Continuing to build the knowledge and skills from early childhood through to young adults on safe, respectful and healthy relationships through the implementation of best practice respectful relationships education.

Our Watch welcomes the sustained focus on delivering a whole-of-school approach to Respectful Relationship Education.

A whole-of-school approach ensures a culture among both staff and students where gender stereotypes are challenged, gender-based discrimination is unacceptable, and gender equality is actively promoted, modelled and embedded across the entire school, not only in the curriculum. There is an opportunity to build on the Gender Equality in Schools initiative to sustain and scale the delivery of Respectful Relationships Education in line with the evidence base.

Our Watch also encourages the ACT Government to consider including primary prevention in higher education as part of the Respectful Relationships Education priority to support commitments under the [Action Plan Addressing Gender-based Violence in Higher Education](https://www.education.gov.au/action-plan-addressing-genderbased-violence-higher-education/resources/action-plan-addressing-genderbased-violence-higher-education). Many institutions in the ACT higher education sector are already doing work towards advancing gender equality, however it is often not integrated into practice that recognises its contribution towards the primary prevention of violence against women. In the context of a national focus on the university sector and high rates of sexual violence on university campuses, there are opportunities for the ACT Government to align, support and scale up primary prevention activities in higher education settings that engage young people.[[6]](#endnote-7)

### Building knowledge and awareness in the community about the characteristics of coercive control.

Our Watch encourages the ACT Government to ensure this priority area is support by multi-faceted, change-oriented strategies. Raising awareness is an important first step in the overall task of addressing violence against women as it can help establish an enabling environment for further primary prevention initiatives. However, *Change the story* outlines that awareness-raising on its own will not produce the social, cultural and behavioural change that is needed to reduce the prevalence of violence against women.

### Implementing culturally appropriate community education programs designed with, and accessible to diverse communities and groups.

Centring the gendered drivers in community education programs on the prevention of violence against women is vital, in addition to highlighting the dynamics, prevalence and impacts of violence. These programs must be accompanied by multifaceted and multipronged prevention initiatives that work across the settings where people live, learn, work, socialise and play. A whole-of-population approach that works across and between individuals, organisations, communities, institutions and systems is important to address the gendered drivers and achieve long-term change. Our Watch encourages the ACT Government to ensure that there are actions in the standalone prevention action plan that target all levels of the socioecological model to achieve this.

## Question 4: Do you think there are any priorities missing?

Our Watch commends the ACT Government on selecting priorities with a clear focus on prevention and a strong alignment with *Change the story*. The Strategy will make an important contribution to the prevention landscape in the ACT.

Importantly however, developing effective coordination mechanisms, a distinct prevention workforce and evaluation and monitoring processes, resourced by sustainable investment, will support its implementation. Our Watch has identified the following opportunities to strengthen the draft Strategy:

### Establishing the essential foundations for prevention

Establishing the essential foundations for prevention (or prevention infrastructure) is a key element of ensuring the Strategy is as effective and meaningful as possible.

Our Watch strongly recommends building and investing in the essential foundations that will ensure actions across the focus areas are coordinated, mutually reinforcing, sustainable and effective in achieving the scale of social change required to stop violence before it starts. Our Watch suggests an initial focus on building the essential foundations to create an enabling environment for prevention goals to be achieved.

Our Watch welcomes the emphasis on a whole-of-government approach to deliver the priorities of the Strategy. Our Watch encourages consideration and a clear articulation of the governance and reporting mechanisms support this approach. We suggest governance infrastructure should include coordination mechanisms across different portfolios utilising existing mechanisms to contribute to collective ownership and to facilitate the necessary collaboration across departments and portfolios. For example, there is an opportunity to more clearly articulate the role of the Coordinator-General and office, and the mechanisms for whole of government engagement across relevant Departments.

There is also an opportunity to provide greater clarity around the interactions between existing territory strategies, action plans and legislation relevant to violence prevention and gender equality to support a cohesive approach to connecting the work under the Strategy with activities across existing and future policies, strategies and plans in the ACT.

Finally, Our Watch also encourages consideration of funded and formal mechanisms to ensure that civil society organisations can participate and collaborate in the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Strategy, such as the ACT Domestic Violence Prevention Council.

### Prioritise building a distinct and specialist prevention workforce

A key part of building the foundations for prevention is ensuring there is a workforce available to support the Strategy and its priorities. As a result, Our Watch recommends the ACT Government include an explicit emphasis on growing the prevention workforce in the final Strategy. The success of the ACT’s efforts to prevent violence against women depends in part on the size of the primary prevention workforce and the capacity of this workforce to plan, implement, scale-up, monitor and evaluate primary prevention initiatives. We understand some of the existing challenges with ensuring a sustainable workforce in the ACT and encourage this to be considered as part of ensuring the Strategy has the appropriate foundations to enable effective implementation.

The draft Strategy does not include explicit measures for workforce development in the prevention priorities, unlike the early intervention and response priorities. While the draft Strategy states the ACT Government is ‘Building the capacity of community-based organisations to deliver prevention of sexual violence activities’, there are opportunities to broaden the scope of workforce development beyond sexual violence prevention to ensure the workforce is equipped to meet the broader prevention objectives of the National Plan. The workforce must also be multidisciplinary and developed in a way that values and reflects diversity, intersectionality and lived experience.

Our Watch’s evidence review [*Growing With change: Developing an expert workforce to prevent violence against women*](https://www.ourwatch.org.au/resource/growing-with-change-developing-an-expert-workforce-to-prevent-violence-against-women/)outlines five key areas governments can focus on and a number of strategies that can be put in place to expand the prevention workforce and support its growth. These focus areas include:

1. **Workforce planning**, such as establishing and strengthening workforce planning mechanisms, conducting periodic censuses of the ACT prevention workforce to understand size, capabilities and skills of the workforce, and maintaining a dedicated prevention capability framework.
2. **Workforce preparation and pathways**, including establishing clear pathways into the workforce through higher education and vocational education and training (VET) courses. It is also critical to ensure these pathways are accessible to diverse communities.
3. **Sector governance and coordination,** such as establishing mechanisms for coordination to bring together key stakeholders to inform and contribute to the development of the ACT’s primary prevention workforce across all levels of government and community organisations.
4. **Working conditions**, such as establishing data mechanisms that collect data around pay and conditions to highlight and focus on improving working conditions for prevention workers.
5. **Professional development**, including investing in organisations that have a dedicated focus on supporting the prevention workforce in their capacity, building, learning and professional development.

Taking action across all five of these areas can inform a holistic approach for workforce development.

### Monitoring, evaluation and reporting to demonstrate progress across the priorities

Our Watch welcomes the ACT Government’s commitment to governance, evaluation and monitoring, including through the proposed development of an evaluation framework and performance measurement plan. The development of a robust structures and mechanisms to allow appropriate data collection, monitoring, reporting on and evaluation of the Strategy and its priorities and activities is a key part of ensuring its effectiveness.

Our Watch supports the alignment of the draft Strategy’s outcomes with the National Plan Outcomes Framework. This ensures that the ACT’s prevention activities can be understood within the national effort to end violence against women.

We welcome the involvement of various stakeholders in the development of the evaluation framework and performance measurement plan to measure holistic progress against the drivers of violence and establish coordination mechanisms around data collection and reporting systems. Our Watch offers its continued support and assistance in this process and encourages it to be prioritised as a critical component of the Strategy.

Our Watch recommends that the evaluation framework is developed in consideration of the proposed standalone prevention plan. This evaluation plan could align with and support a separate performance management plan that sets clear expectations and measures this prevention plan. This comprehensive approach would have the potential to meaningfully guide primary prevention practice within the ACT and contribute to building the primary prevention evidence base as guided by Principle 8 of the Strategy.

Additionally, the ACT Government should ensure alignment with other ACT strategies and plans and where possible, align with other state prevention outcome frameworks and/or performance management plans which will help facilitate a fuller national picture of activities, outcomes and collective impact.

To understand the collective impacts of discrete prevention initiatives Our Watch encourages the Government to set clear expectations regarding data collection obligations (for example, through funding agreements) and provide capacity building support to both the ACT Public Service and funded organisations to meet those obligations. Further to this, Our Watch recommends collaboration and coordination across departments to develop and implement the systems, processes, tools and templates for data collection, reporting, sharing and analysis. More broadly, in light of the data gaps identified, Our Watch encourages the ACT Government to give further consideration to data mapping and gap analysis and improvement as an important part of the foundations for an effective Strategy.

### Integrating the intersecting drivers of violence

When drafting the strategic actions and activities across the prevention focus area, we encourage the ACT Government to consider integrating the essential actions contained in key prevention frameworks (listed below) to address the increased severity and prevalence of violence against women who experience intersecting forms of discrimination and oppression. We offer Our Watch’s expertise and guidance where appropriate to develop aligned actions to address the intersecting drivers of violence.

Our Watch has identified the following intersections as priority areas for our work and have developed, or are in the process of developing, dedicated frameworks and/or innovative projects to address the violence against these particular groups in the community:

* Gender inequality, racism and colonialism – *Changing the picture* (2018) is Our Watch’s dedicated framework for the prevention of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.
* Gender inequality and ableism— *Changing the landscape* (2022) is Our Watch’s dedicated framework for the prevention of violence against women and girls with disabilities.
* Gender inequality, homophobia, transphobia, and heteronormativity— Our Watch is currently working to develop a dedicated framework, in partnership with Rainbow Health Australia, that addresses violence against LGBTIQA+ people and communities.
* Gender inequality and racism— Our Watch is currently working to build a deeper, shared understanding of the nature and drivers of violence against refugee and migrant communities and the actions needed to address this violence**.**

These dedicated frameworks and ongoing projects demonstrate that an intersectional approach to primary prevention should focus on ensuring whole-of-population primary prevention policies and initiatives are implemented to address both the gendered and intersectional drivers of violence. This is in addition to developing culturally safe, tailored, and targeted activities for population groups or people who are considered at-risk.

## Conclusion

The ACT Government is a valued member of Our Watch. We welcome the opportunity to provide further advice or assistance in relation to the issues outlined in this submission as an organisation, as well as through membership of the Prevention Council.

Please contact Director of Government Relations, Policy and Evidence, Amanda Alford at [amanda.alford@ourwatch.org.au](mailto:amanda.alford@ourwatch.org.au) if you would like to discuss this submission or ways in which Our Watch can continue to support the work of the ACT Government.

## References

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2. 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*.](https://www.ourwatch.org.au/resource/changing-the-picture/) Melbourne, Australia: Our Watch. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
3. Our Watch, & Women with Disabilities Victoria. (2022). [*Changing the landscape: A national resource to prevent violence against women and girls with disabilities*](https://media-cdn.ourwatch.org.au/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2022/08/01135647/Changing-the-landscape-AA.pdf). Melbourne, Australia: Our Watch. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
4. Our Watch. (2021). [*Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women in Australia*](https://www.ourwatch.org.au/change-the-story/) (2nd ed.). Melbourne, Australia: Our Watch. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
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6. Heywood, W., Myers, P., Powell, A., Meikle, G., and Nguyen, D. (2022). [*National Student Safety Survey: Report on the prevalence of sexual harassment and sexual assault among university students in 2021*](https://www.nsss.edu.au/results). Melbourne, Australia: The Social Research Centre. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)