

# **Submission to the Draft National Plan to End the Abuse and Mistreatment of Older People 2024-2034**



Prepared by 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 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 a whole of community issue. 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 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, systems, attitudes and social structures that drive violence against women.

Guided by our national framework, *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.

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## Executive Summary

Our Watch welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the draft of the National Plan to End the Abuse and Mistreatment of Older People 2024-2034 (the draft National Plan).

In line with Our Watch's role and expertise, the significance of the issue and prevalence rates of violence against women, the submission will primarily focus on the prevention of violence against older women. However, Our Watch acknowledges that older men, non-binary and gender diverse people can be victims of violence in all its forms, and that any violence is unacceptable regardless of the gender of the victim or perpetrator.

This submission is provided in addition to the responses Our Watch provided to the online survey in February 2025.

The National Plan provides an important opportunity to provide a clear national framework, outline specific actions that address the root causes of violence, and contribute to establishing or strengthening the necessary systems and structures of prevention, early intervention, response and recovery are well-supported, effective, and sustained.

In Our Watch's view, there are some opportunities to more clearly embed a primary prevention approach to addressing abuse against older people, which is critical to the National Plan's vision for older people to live a life free from abuse and mistreatment. In particular, there are a range of opportunities to strengthen prevention of violence and abuse outcomes under the draft National Plan. These include to:

1. Clarify the relationship, intersection and differences between primary prevention and early intervention.
2. Strengthen implementation, monitoring and evaluation.
3. Address the intersection of gender inequality and ageism.
4. Build capacity and capability of the workforce in primary prevention.
5. Engage men in primary prevention initiatives.
6. Governance.

This submission outlines aspects of a primary prevention approach that could usefully be considered in the finalisation of the National Plan as well as more broadly in policy and decision-making in relation to violence and abuse against older people.

Our Watch welcomes the opportunity to provide further advice or assistance in relation to the information and recommendations outlined in this submission.

## Opportunities and recommendations

The draft National Plan includes an important primary prevention focus as part of ending elder abuse and mistreatment, which is consistent with the [National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022-2032](#).

The draft National Plan includes a welcome intention to inspire government, sector, business and broader community efforts to work towards lasting reform, and to provide a pathway for how success should look, feel and be measured.

Our Watch welcomes the inclusion of a principle relating to primary prevention. Primary prevention aims to stop violence against women before it starts, by addressing the structural causes and underlying drivers of violence.<sup>1</sup> This includes addressing the intersections of ageism and gender inequality.

Our Watch is interested in understanding more about the proposed development of a national evidence-based prevention framework in the context of ending the abuse and mistreatment of older people. Our Watch encourages the consideration of ways in which such a framework will align with the existing National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children and other primary prevention frameworks such as Change the Story.

Preventing violence against women is not only about changing individuals – it is also about changing systems, institutions, social norms and culture in which individuals develop and maintain their attitudes towards violence. Our Watch welcomes the inclusion of focus areas and actions in the draft National Plan that are intended to strengthen government, community and broader sector collaboration, develop awareness and education campaigns that target whole of communities and populations, as well as efforts to identify, develop and promote abuse prevention measures targeted at system levels.

As a 10-year National Plan, Our Watch recognises the significant potential outcomes that can be achieved for united action and focus by governments, the sector and community to prevent, respond and ultimately end the abuse and mistreatment of older people. We commend the systems focused approach embedded across the four Focus Areas and note the strategic architecture's alignment with Our Watch's brief [Building strong foundations for primary prevention infrastructure](#).<sup>2</sup>

As outlined above, Our Watch considers that there are a number of opportunities to further strengthen the Plan and provides the following recommendations for consideration:

### **1. Clarify the relationship, intersection and differences between primary prevention and early intervention**

Our Watch commends the inclusion of primary prevention and early intervention as a key principle underpinning the draft National Plan.

Primary prevention is one part of what is needed to embed a comprehensive and holistic approach to violence against older women. To be most effective there is a need for a continuum of interdependent and interlinked strategies, with efforts across the 'stream' or spectrum of prevention, early intervention, response, and recovery, across the life course.

Prevention efforts need to reach and engage everyone, at every age and stage of life. Importantly, in order to embed, reinforce and sustain change across the population, prevention must engage people not just on a one-off basis, but in multiple, mutually reinforcing ways over the course of their lives.

Older people may have had limited engagement with primary prevention activity, given the relative newness of the field and they are less likely to be engaged in settings where prevention activity is becoming common (for example, schools, universities/TAFEs, workplaces, sports clubs). As part of the life stage approach, it is important that prevention efforts include a focus on influencing older people's attitudes and behaviours and supporting older women's independence.

Primary prevention aims to stop violence against women from occurring in the first place. It works to change the deep-seated gendered drivers of this violence, and the underlying social condition of gender inequality in which it arises. While early intervention approaches work with individuals who are already experiencing or perpetrating violence (or at risk of doing so), primary prevention is a whole-of-population approach that aims to deliver a future where all women and their children live free from violence. For a visual model of the relationship between primary prevention and other work that addresses violence against women, refer to Figure 1.

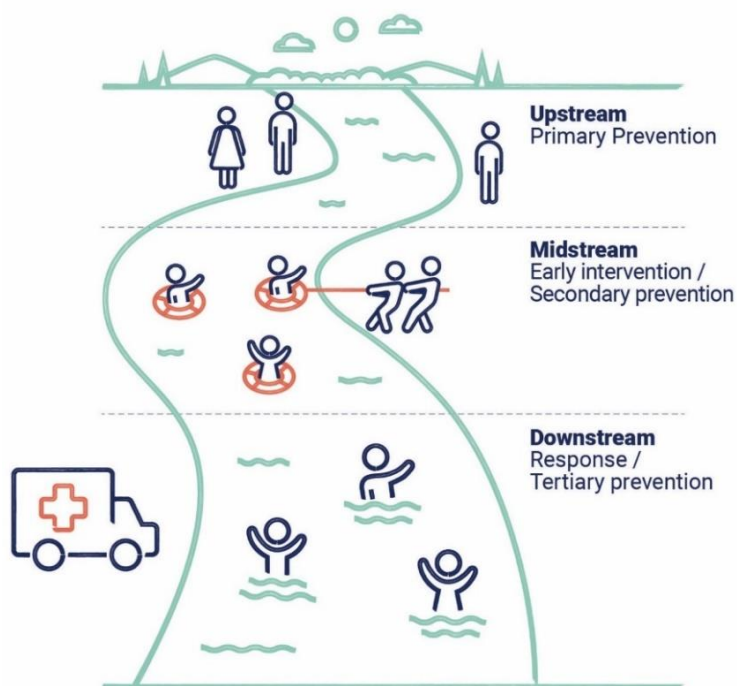


Figure 1. Primary prevention of violence against women as an 'upstream' approach – See alternative text for Figure 1 in Appendix <sup>1</sup>.

As a result, and while recognising the relationship and intersection between primary prevention and early intervention, Our Watch suggests that it may be useful to more clearly articulate the distinction between primary prevention and early intervention in the following ways:

- Include clear definitions of prevention and early intervention in the National Plan and more clearly articulate the distinct but interconnected nature of each.
- Identify actions and activities within each 5-year action plan that utilise prevention techniques and practices to address the drivers of violence and abuse against older people.
- Clarify which indicators will integrate the primary prevention evidence-base in the Monitoring and Evidence Framework to ensure appropriate visibility and inclusion of primary prevention in the Framework.
- Identify ways in which the National Plan, associated mechanisms, and actions can support increased collaboration, information sharing and identification of research gaps and opportunities in relation to prevention of violence against older people.

## **2. Address the intersection of gender inequality and ageism**

A strength of the draft National Plan is that it outlines how the different aspects of an older person's identity expose them to overlapping forms of discrimination and marginalisation. There is an opportunity to build on this by outlining the intersections between ageism, gender inequality and the abuse and mistreatment of older people.

To understand and prevent violence against older women, it is critical to consider ageism, age discrimination, and other forms of inequality affecting older women at a population level. The design and implementation of initiatives to prevent violence against older women should address the social norms, structures and practices that shape the situation of older women, placing them in a position of inequality compared to men, and to women of younger age groups.

Data on older women's experiences of violence remains limited, however we know that:

- 15.9% of women aged 65 years and older reported experiencing any form of abuse in the previous 12 months.<sup>3</sup>
- Older women have a higher risk of experiencing any form of abuse.<sup>4</sup>
- Older women were more likely than older men to report sexual abuse, psychological abuse or neglect.<sup>5</sup>
- Perpetrators of elder abuse are more likely to be male.<sup>6</sup>
- Older women experiencing intimate partner violence are often not considered within both the elder abuse and family violence sectors.<sup>7</sup>

Our Watch suggests the National Plan and supporting documents:

- Address the gendered drivers of violence against women<sup>i</sup> as a key principle in the National Plan and development of the National Plan's evidence-based prevention framework. This includes recognising for many older women, their experiences are also shaped by intersecting forms of discrimination, such as ageism racism, homophobia or transphobia, ableism and classism.
- Centre primary prevention as a core principle to guide implementation of the two 5-year Action Plans.
- Centre intersectionality as a core principle to guide implementation of the two 5-year Action Plans.
- Ensure the two 5-year Action Plans include priority actions such as communication, media, and awareness campaigns that challenge stereotypes about older people, for example ageing as a burden and as undesirable. For women, these campaigns should address how ageism and gender inequality intersect to create disempowering or disrespectful social norms, structures and practices. These may relate to finance management, caring roles and sexuality.

### **3. Strengthen implementation, monitoring and evaluation**

The draft National Plan Program Logic provides a clear structure to inform the development of a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework and Prevention Framework.

Our Watch looks forward to providing input into the development of the Monitoring and Evaluation Framework and recommends consideration of the primary prevention indicators outlined in Our Watch's *Counting on change: A guide to prevention monitoring*<sup>8</sup> and *Tracking progress in prevention: A national monitoring report on progress towards the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia*.<sup>9</sup>

Our Watch also recommends the following to strengthen implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the National Plan:

- Align indicators and measures with the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022-2032 Outcomes Framework and Performance Measurement Plan where possible.
- Use the primary prevention indicators outlined in *Counting on change*<sup>10</sup> and *Tracking progress in prevention*.<sup>11</sup>
- Ensure that each five-year action plan responds to trends and changes in data to maintain an evidence-informed focus on primary prevention activities and respond to emerging issues.
- Identify indicators and measures that can capture intersectional data to monitor progress in prevention of abuse and mistreatment for groups of older people who have an increased risk of experiencing violence. This includes the use of data

<sup>i</sup> *Change the Story* outlines the four drivers of men's violence against women that are crucial to address to stop this violence before it starts. These drivers are gendered and arise from discriminatory structures, norms, and practices that shape people's experiences in all parts of society; where people live, learn, work, play and socialise. They are: Condoning of violence against women; Men's control of decision-making and limits to women's independence; Rigid gender roles and stereotyped constructions of masculinity and femininity; Men disrespecting women to bond with other men.



disaggregation, including for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, LGBTIQ+ people, people with disability and in relation to culture and ethnicity.

- Consider ways in which to provide visibility and transparency in relation to investment in actions under the National Plan and the 5-year action plans.

#### **4. Build capacity and capability of the workforce in primary prevention**

The successful implementation of the National Plan depends in part on the size and strength of the primary prevention workforce, and the capacity of this workforce to plan, implement and evaluate primary prevention initiatives

Mechanisms for workforce and sector development is identified as one of eight key foundations of primary prevention in *Building strong foundations to support primary prevention*<sup>ii</sup>. *Growing With change: Developing an expert workforce to prevent violence against women*<sup>12</sup> further outlines five areas of governments focus to expand the prevention workforce and support its growth.<sup>iii</sup> These provide opportunities to strengthen prevention foundations and increase capacity and capability of the workforce required to support the National Plan.

Our Watch recommends that the National Plan:

- Expand the scope of Focus Area 3: Capacity and capability of services to include organisations as well as services. This acknowledges opportunities within other organisations that undertake primary prevention activities to reduce and prevent abuse and mistreatment of older people.
- Ensure that professional development actions also include a focus on prevention. For example, expand the focus of priority action 3.6: to ensure that professionals in relevant occupations are equipped not only to identify and respond to ageism and abuse, but also to prevent it.
- Support pathways for men to enter the prevention workforce and build the capacity of existing workforces to work with men and boys in all priority settings and other sectors that already engage men.

#### **5. Engage men in primary prevention activities**

Engaging and working with men is critical to the success of preventing violence against older women. Older women are more likely than older men to be victims of elder abuse, and perpetrators are more likely to be male.<sup>13</sup> As a result, there are opportunities for the National Plan to more clearly directly and indirectly involve men in challenging and

<sup>ii</sup>The eight key elements of workforce and sector: sustained political leadership; private sector, civil society and community leadership; a well-resourced, independent women's movement; policy, regulatory and legislative reform; mechanisms for coordination; collaboration and quality assurance; mechanisms for workforce and sector development; strong evidence based, informed by ongoing research; and practice evaluation and national monitoring and reporting mechanisms.

<sup>iii</sup> This guide outlines five areas governments can focus on including: workforce planning; workforce preparation and pathways; sector governance and coordination; working conditions; and professional development.

shifting dominant norms and ideas of masculinity and the associated attitudes throughout the course of men's lives.

Our Watch recommends:

- That the National Plan clearly highlights how men and boys will be engaged in gender equality and violence prevention efforts that employ various techniques, including direct participation programs, education-based initiatives, targeting and representing men in communications and social marketing, and engaging men as fathers.
- Ensure priority actions that engage men are included in the 5-year action plans and are informed by evidence including:
  - The Our Watch Men in focus practice guide: Addressing masculinities and working with men in the prevention of men's violence against women<https://www.ourwatch.org.au/change-the-story/men-in-focus><sup>14</sup> which has been developed to support practitioners in their efforts to build violence prevention programs that work with men and boys.
  - The recently published ANROWS evidence brief on, The role of men's behavior change programs in addressing men's use of domestic, family and sexual violence.<sup>15</sup>
- Include indicators and measures in the Monitoring and Evaluation Framework related to perpetration data and address gaps in knowledge around men's use of violence.
- That actions to engage and mobilise communities to promote more positive, respectful forms of masculinity, strengthen prosocial behaviours, increase community connectedness and access to services are included in the 5-year action plans.<sup>16</sup>

## 6. Governance

Our Watch welcomes the articulation of the implementation, governance and monitoring of the National Plan as well as the articulation of the respective roles of the Commonwealth, state and territory governments.

Given the importance of a whole of government approach to preventing violence against women (including older women) and alignment with existing national plans, strategies and frameworks, Our Watch encourages further consideration of these issues in establishing governance under the National Plan.

Our Watch encourages that the National Plan:

- Consider and align with the work of the Women and Women's Safety Ministerial Council; National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children, including the National Outcomes Framework and National Plan governance; and the National Gender Equality Strategy.
- Include primary prevention of violence against women and gender equality as a key issue that the Australian Government; state government and territories; local

governments; private sector; non-for-profit sector, community services and leaders; and the Australian community, all play a role in.

- Include a map of the whole system to enable readers to see the complexity of, and gaps within the system, and emphasise the need for a multi-disciplinary multifaceted, integrated and intersectional approach in line with the recommendation from Elder Abuse Action Australia.<sup>17</sup>

## Appendix 1: Alternative text for figures

### **Figure 1: Primary prevention of violence against women as an upstream response**

Infographic showing the different stages of intervention in the problem of violence against women. The different stages of the problem are represented by a river.

Prevention is work that occurs upstream in the river, because it is trying to prevent the problem from happening in the first place. This is represented in the image as people standing on the riverbank, stopping anyone from falling in.

The second stage is early intervention. It is work that tries to help people who have only just fallen into the river. Early intervention is represented in the image by a person throwing life buoys to rescue people who are midstream in the river.

The third stage is crisis response. It occurs downstream when the problem is already advanced. It is represented in the image by an ambulance attempting to rescue people who are in very serious trouble much further downstream in the river.

## References

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- <sup>1</sup> Our Watch (2021). [Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women in Australia \(2nd ed.\)](#).
- <sup>2</sup> Our Watch (2024). [Building strong foundations to support primary prevention](#). Melbourne, Australia: Our Watch.
- <sup>3</sup> Qu, L., Kaspiew, R., Carson, R., Roopani, D., De Maio, J., Harvey, J., Horsfall, B. (2021). [National Elder Abuse Prevalence Study: Final Report](#). (Research Report). Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies.
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- <sup>7</sup> Crockett, C., Brandl, B., & Dabby, F. (2015). Survivors in the margins: The invisibility of violence against older women. *Journal of Elder Abuse and Neglect*. 27(4–5). 291–302.
- <sup>8</sup> Our Watch. (2017). [Counting on change: A guide to prevention monitoring](#). Melbourne, Australia: Our Watch.
- <sup>9</sup> Our Watch (2020) [Tracking progress in prevention: A national monitoring report on progress towards the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia](#), Our Watch, Melbourne, Australia.
- <sup>10</sup> Our Watch. (2017). [Counting on change: A guide to prevention monitoring](#). Melbourne, Australia: Our Watch.
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- <sup>12</sup> Our Watch (2023). [Growing With change: Developing an expert workforce to prevent violence against women](#). Our Watch, Melbourne, Australia.
- <sup>13</sup> Qu, L., Kaspiew, R., Carson, R., Roopani, D., De Maio, J., Harvey, J., Horsfall, B. (2021). [National Elder Abuse Prevalence Study: Final Report](#). (Research Report). Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies.
- <sup>14</sup> Our Watch. (2022). [Men in focus practice guide: Addressing masculinities and working with men in the prevention of men's violence against women](#). Melbourne, Australia: Our Watch.
- <sup>15</sup> Helps, N., Bell, C., Schulze, C., Vlasis, R., Clark, O., Seamer, J., & Buys, R. (2025). [The role of men's behaviour change programs in addressing men's use of domestic, family and sexual violence: An evidence brief](#) (ANROWS Insights, 01/2025). ANROWS.
- <sup>16</sup> Our Watch (2021). [Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women in Australia \(2nd ed.\)](#). In the context of preventing violence against women, prosocial behaviours are those that demonstrate empathy, respect, care and concern for women.
- <sup>17</sup> Elder Abuse Action Australia (2024) [From insight to action: Second National Plan to Prevent and Respond to Abuse of Older People in Australia. Research and Consultation Report](#) recommends a map of the whole system to enable readers to see the complexity of, and gaps within, the system, and emphasise the need for a multi-disciplinary multifaceted, integrated and intersectional response.