

EDUCATING FOR EQUALITY: HOW TO PREVENT GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Universities are vibrant and inclusive communities, committed to providing safe and supportive working and learning environments for people of all genders and sexualities. Some of the people most likely to experience violence in the general community also attend universities in large numbers. For example, we know that young women are more likely to experience sexual and intimate partner violence than other cohorts of the population.¹ Evidence also indicates that some groups within LGBTIQ+ communities are at increased risk of sexual assault and harassment in comparison to people who do not identify as LGBTIQ+.²

In February 2016, Universities Australia launched the *Respect. Now. Always.* initiative. This world-first initiative – where the entire higher education sector united to prevent sexual violence in university communities and improve support for those affected – has resulted in significant changes in universities. But there is still more to do.

Over the past two years, Universities Australia, Our Watch and the Victorian Government have partnered to develop a whole-of-university model to prevent gender-based violence in – and through – universities. This model has been developed in collaboration with four universities across Australia to make sure it is fit for purpose for the university sector and able to be adapted to the context that each university is operating within. As part of this partnership we have developed this set of best practice principles to guide universities in their prevention work. Drawing on international evidence including *Change the story* – Australia’s national framework for the primary prevention of violence against women – these principles outline how universities can maximise the impact and reach of prevention initiatives.³

CORE ELEMENTS TO PREVENT GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AT UNIVERSITIES



ADDRESS THE GENDERED DRIVERS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND LGBTIQ+ PEOPLE

To prevent gender-based violence, we need to address the factors that drive it. International and Australian research shows that the key drivers of violence against women, including sexual assault and sexual harassment, are:

- condoning violence against women
- men's control of decision making and limits to women's independence in public life and relationships
- rigid gender roles and stereotyped constructions of masculinity and femininity
- male peer relations that emphasise aggression and disrespect towards women.⁴

Emerging evidence about the drivers of violence against LGBTIQ+ people shows there is significant overlap with the drivers of violence against women.⁵ These overlapping drivers include rigid conceptions of masculinity and traditional approaches to sex, gender, and sexuality.⁶

Clearly and explicitly addressing the underlying gendered drivers of gender-based violence will improve the efficacy of any prevention initiatives.⁷



TAKE A WHOLE-OF-UNIVERSITY APPROACH

Public health evidence tells us that the most effective violence prevention efforts are those that use multiple strategies to generate change at multiple levels – individual, relationship, institutional, and societal. Whole-of-university approaches are a critical part of a public health approach to the prevention of gendered violence. A whole-of-university approach works in a coordinated way across all levels and aspects of an institution to bring about systemic, sustainable changes in the attitudes and behaviours of those in the institution are reinforced by supportive response mechanisms, policy frameworks, and the organisation's formal and informal culture.⁸

Taking a strategic, coordinated approach to violence prevention that works across the university will have more impact than implementing initiatives in isolation from each other or in only one domain.⁹

In the university context, this means:

- addressing the context and culture in which students and staff study, work, live and play to foster a safe and supportive environment
- reiterating key messages through various mechanisms
- engaging all relevant stakeholders
- working across the diverse settings and levels of the institution necessary to effect cultural change
- addressing the practices, policies and processes in classrooms, schools and faculties, and services relevant to building a safe university.



ENSURE LONG-TERM COMMITMENT AND VISION

Gender-based violence and its drivers are deeply entrenched in our society, and change requires continuous effort and a long-term commitment to violence prevention. Short-term or one-off prevention interventions are less effective than longer term approaches.¹⁰



ENSURE APPROPRIATE RESPONSE SYSTEMS ARE IN PLACE

Appropriate response policies and support services for staff and students need to be in place before delivering prevention initiatives. Prevention initiatives can increase disclosure and reporting rates and demand on response services – students or staff may recognise that what they have experienced is assault or rape, their awareness may improve, and they may feel more confident to report their victimisation.¹¹



TAKE AN INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH

Some groups of people experience inequality as a result of racism, homophobia, ableism and transphobia, amongst many other forms of social prejudice and discrimination. These complex forms of inequality 'intersect' with gender inequality, meaning that women and LGBTIQ+ people who belong to these groups are more likely to experience violence at higher rates than those who do not. Violence response services and prevention initiatives have often not met the needs of people from these groups.

Taking an intersectional approach to preventing gender-based violence means working in partnership from the very beginning of the

process with members of the community to ensure interventions are culturally appropriate, accessible and inclusive.¹² It is important to do this at the outset, so that an intersectional approach is incorporated into the whole-of-university structure, rather than adapting resources or approaches for particular groups retrospectively. Taking an intersectional approach means not only ensuring that prevention initiatives are appropriate for the diversity of their audiences,¹³ but also interrogating the differences in privilege and access to power that impact all members of our communities.¹⁴





ENGAGE STAKEHOLDERS

Each university's violence prevention strategy will be tailored to the needs of their specific community. Universities can engage key internal stakeholders – including university leadership, students and student leaders, academic and professional staff, and organisations that support universities to deliver services – to develop the institution's prevention approach.¹⁵



MONITOR AND EVALUATE PROGRESS

Monitoring and evaluating the progress of prevention work is essential to seeing quality improvements in the short, medium and longer term. Outcomes measured at both the individual and institutional level will help universities better target their initiatives. In the short term, universities might expect to see changes in people's knowledge, skills and attitudes, and increased demand for support services as people become more confident in reporting their experience (such as counselling services). The longer-term goal is positive change in people's behaviors, institutional practices and culture.

NOTES

- ¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) *Personal Safety Survey, Australia, 2016*, ABS, 2017.
- ² Our Watch *Primary prevention of family violence against people from LGBTI communities: An analysis of existing research*, Our Watch, 2017.
- ³ Our Watch, Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) & VicHealth, *Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia*, Our Watch, 2015.
- ⁴ M Johnson and E Bennett, *Everyday Sexism: Australian women's experiences of street harassment*, The Australia Institute, 2015.
- ⁵ K Kelley and J Gruenewalk, 'Accomplishing masculinity through anti-lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender homicide: A comparative case study approach', *Men and Masculinities*, 18(1), 2015, doi:10.1177/1097184X14551204; Our Watch, *Men in focus: Unpacking masculinities and engaging men in the prevention of violence against women*, Our Watch, 2019.
- ⁶ Kelley and Gruenewalk, *Accomplishing masculinity*; K Diemer, *ABS Personal Safety Survey: additional analysis on relationship and sex of perpetrator*, Research on Violence Against Women and Children, 2015:4-6.
- ⁷ AL Bowring, CJC Wright, C Douglass, J Gold and MSC Lim, 'Features of successful sexual health promotion programs for young people: Findings from a review of systematic reviews', *Health Promotion Journal of Australia*, 2018, 29: 46-57, doi:10.1002/hpja.3.
- ⁸ E Fulu, A Kerr-Wilson and J Lang, *What works to prevent violence against women and girls? Evidence Review of interventions to prevent violence against women and girls*, Medical Research Council, South Africa, 2014.
- ⁹ J Dills, D Fowler and G Payne, *Sexual violence on campus: strategies for prevention*, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, United States, 2016.
- ¹⁰ C Crooks, P Jaffe, C Dunlop, A Kerry and D Exner-Cortens, 'Preventing gender-based violence among adolescents and young people: Lessons from 25 years of program development and evaluation', *Violence Against Women*, 25(1): 29-55, doi.org/10.1177/F1077801218815778.
- ¹¹ C Gleeson, S Kearney, L Leung and J Brislane, *Respectful Relationships Education in schools: Evidence paper*, Our Watch, 2015.
- ¹² UNESCO and UN Women, *Global guidance on addressing school-related gender-based violence*, UNESCO and UN Women, 2016.
- ¹³ UNESCO and UN Women, *Global guidance*.
- ¹⁴ Diemer, *Additional analysis*.
- ¹⁵ S McMahon, JJ Steiner, S Synder and VL Banyard, 'Comprehensive Prevention of Campus Sexual Violence: Expanding Who is Invited to the Table', *Trauma, Violence and Abuse*, November 2019, doi:10.1177/1524838019883275.