Educating for equality

Implemention guide

2026

Our Watch

Preventing violence against women

Contents

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.

Introduction

Universities have a responsibility to cultivate a safe and inclusive environment for all members of their community. As large institutions and employers, as thought leaders, and as custodians of large and thriving student communities, universities can play a key role in leading positive social change to prevent and address gender-based violence.

Gender-based violence is described as any form of physical or non-physical violence, harassment, abuse or threat, that is based on gender, and that results in, or is likely to result in, harm, coercion, control, fear or deprivation of liberty or autonomy[1]. This includes terminology such as SASH (sexual assault and sexual harassment), sexual harm, gender-based discrimination and other forms of gendered-violence.

Evidence demonstrates that women, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer and asexual (LGBTIQA+) people and gender-diverse people are disproportionately impacted by gender-based violence.

Despite commendable and ongoing efforts to address the issue, gender-based violence continues to impact university communities. National research and statistics highlight the urgency of addressing gender-based violence within Australian universities[2], underscoring the need for a comprehensive and proactive whole-of-university approach to prevention that aligns to existing and emerging workplace and sector obligations[3].

Our Watch's *Educating for equality* model provides a robust framework for universities to take a whole-of-university approach to preventing gender-based violence. It is not intended to replace or duplicate existing work. Rather, it aims to:

- Unite the university community in preventing gender-based violence through an aligned and evidence-based approach.

- Support a holistic, intersectional and long-term prevention strategy.

- Promote a culture that challenges disrespect and stereotyping, and champions gender equality.

- Provide practical tools and resources for taking action and meeting sector obligations.

- Nurture connection between universities to build capacity, strengthen the evidence base on gender-based violence and increase collaboration and knowledge sharing.

This guide provides practical steps to implement the *Educating for equality* model and respond to sector reforms and regulatory and legislative requirements. Grounded in research and evidence-based practices, the model champions a whole-of-university approach utilising 'domains' and 'levers' to facilitate change, supported by leadership commitment and resourcing.

This model was originally launched in 2021, developed by Our Watch in collaboration with Universities Australia and in consultation with universities across Australia. This updated version reflects broad alignment to the National Higher Education Code to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence, and commitments and obligations under national policy and legislation relating to gender-based violence[4].

Specifically designed for senior leaders, working groups and staff responsible for developing and implementing prevention strategies, this updated *Educating for equality* model and implementation guide builds on the evolving evidence-base, acknowledges the diverse nature of Australian universities and allows for flexible implementation.

Whether your university is taking its first steps or strengthening existing efforts, this guide can help you identify any gaps in your current approach and strengthen your efforts to create a safer and more equitable environment for all.

Structured around a 5-step continuous improvement cycle, the guide recognises that implementing a whole-of-university approach is not a linear process. Some steps may require more time and attention than others, and the order of implementation can be tailored to the specific needs and priorities of your university.

This guide can be found on the Universities page on the Our Watch website at www.ourwatch.org.au/universities, along with supplementary tools and resources for assessment and implementation.

This includes an *Educating for equality video* on preventing gender-based violence at, and through, universities.

National Higher Education Code to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence 2025

For the first time, Australian universities and university-operated student accommodation providers will be legally required to not only respond to violence, but also take action to prevent violence before it occurs by creating safe and respectful environments.

The National Code follows the release of the _Action Plan Addressing Gender-Based Violence in Higher Education_ in February 2024 which sets clear standards in leadership and governance, education and training.

Educating for equality **can support universities in meeting prevention requirements of the code. Standards of the Code that relate most prominently to primary prevention include:**

STANDARD 1

Accountable leadership and governance

Higher education providers must prepare, implement and publish a whole-of-organisation prevention and response plan. These plans need to demonstrate that the provider is responding to instances of violence as well as preventing violence by addressing the factors that drive and contribute to gender-based violence.

Educating for equality provides a process for universities to support the development and review of the prevention component of these plans. This includes conducting a whole-of-organisation assessment and identifying short, medium and long-term actions to address the drivers of gender-based violence across all domains.

STANDARD 2

Safe environments and systems

This standard requires the development of a prevention and response policy, which is person-centred and trauma-informed, and must address the factors that drive gender-based violence.

Educating for equality highlights the importance of engaging, including and consulting with a diverse, intersectional range of voices throughout all prevention efforts. This includes the voices of those with lived/living experience of gender-based violence. The assessment tool highlights best practice elements of prevention and gender-equality policy which can support the development of your prevention and response policy.

STANDARD 3

Knowledge and capability

This standard requires the rollout of ongoing comprehensive prevention education for both staff and students about gender-based violence, how to address it and what drives it. This could include topics such as:

- bystander approaches
- healthy, safe and respectful relationships
- masculinities
- ethical conduct in supervisory relationships.

Several _Educating for equality_ tools and resources provide guidance on evidence-based education and training for staff and students. Find out more about how the Our Watch Institute can support you beyond freely available tools, resources and learning activities by reaching out here.

STANDARD 7

Safe student accommodation

This standard is related to obligations for university-owned and operated student accommodation but also covers some responsibilities for both universities and student accommodation providers regarding university affiliated or private student accommodation providers.

Educating for equality recognises the valuable role student accommodation providers play in progressing a whole-of-university approach through its Student life domain. Student accommodation providers can also use it as a model and process to develop their own whole-of-organisation prevention and response plans.

What is primary prevention?

Primary prevention means stopping gender-based violence before it starts. As educational institutions, workplaces and community hubs, universities have a unique opportunity to influence gender inequality and prevent gender-based violence.

Preventing gender-based violence is a whole-of-population approach that aims to shift cultural norms and societal structures that drive this violence. It's about shifting behaviours and attitudes and the structures that uphold them, to create spaces and cultures where respect and equality is the norm, and inequality is challenged.

Based on theory and practice in public health and health promotion, prevention work recognises that there are levels at which work needs to be undertaken to prevent gender-based violence:

Primary prevention

Actions taken at a whole-of-population level to stop violence before it starts.

EXAMPLE

A university-wide gender equality strategy that includes the essential actions to address the gendered drivers of violence.

Secondary prevention or early intervention

Actions targeted at people who are at risk of experiencing or using violence to stop the violence from happening or reduce the severity.

EXAMPLE

Training and counselling available for students who breach codes of conduct with inappropriate behaviour towards women and gender-diverse people, or training in student colleges on bystander intervention.

Tertiary prevention or response

Actions that support survivors and hold perpetrators to account (and aim to prevent the recurrence of violence).

EXAMPLE

Tailored supports and counselling for a student or staff member who has experienced violence.

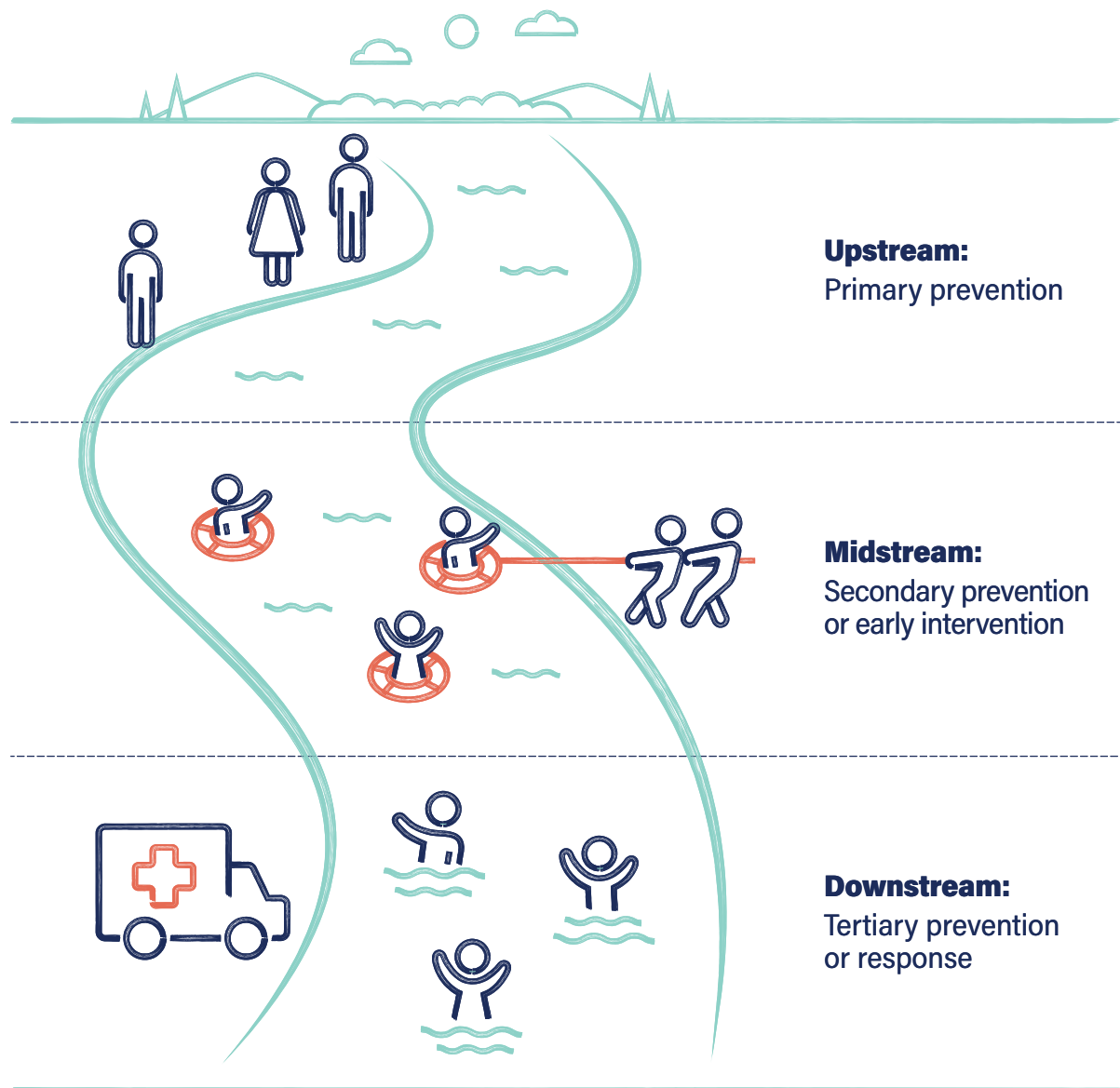# The relationship between response and primary prevention

While *Educating for equality* focuses on primary prevention, it recognises that there needs to be activity operating at all 3 levels (primary prevention, early intervention, response) to ensure the approach to violence prevention is holistic and comprehensive.

Under the National Higher Education Code to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence, there is an obligation to develop a prevention and response plan.

Although related, response and primary prevention are very different practices and evidence bases. Primary prevention is a whole-of-population approach and response is focused on individual cases and experiences.

Specific expertise, structures and skills are required to deliver effective response and prevention, and extensive collaboration between teams and those with specialist expertise will support an effective prevention and response plan that meets compliance and aligns to best practice.

The primary prevention river

Upstream:
Primary prevention

Midstream:
Secondary prevention or early intervention

Downstream:
Tertiary prevention or response

The context in which gender-based violence occurs

International and Australian research demonstrates that gender-based violence is driven by gender inequality[5].

Change the story **– Australia's shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children – identifies 4 drivers of gender inequality that increase the likelihood of gender-based violence occurring[6].**

These are known as the 'gendered drivers'. Gendered drivers are the factors rooted in gender inequality that contribute to gender-based violence. Universities can play a pivotal role in improving gender equality and preventing gender-based violence in our society by taking action to address each of these drivers.

Change the story also identifies reinforcing factors that can increase the frequency or severity of gender-based violence such as harmful alcohol and drug use, gambling, the normalisation of violence and socio-economic disadvantage.

> The *National Higher Education Code to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence* explicitly requires that prevention plans and activities must address the factors that drive gender-based violence, and must take an intersectional approach by ensuring the needs, experience and agency of those who are disproportionately affected by gender-based violence

Although addressing the drivers individually on their own will not prevent all forms of gender-based violence, actions must be taken to address these factors across all levels of society to minimise their impact on gender-based violence.

Change the story.

A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women in Australia (second edition)

Our WATCh

⇗ Our Watch Change the story (PDF)

Drivers, actions and reinforcing factors of gender-based violence

Driver 1

In universities excusing or minimising gender-based violence and sexual harassment (e.g. dismissing women's experiences of sexual harassment, or sexually suggestive comments, or jokes that intimidate or offend), or trying to justify why the violence occured.

Action 1

Challenge condoning of gender-based violence.

EXAMPLE

Integrate content on respect, consent and healthy relationships into staff and student training and programs.

Driver 2

Gender inequality in universities resulting in men dominating decision-making and limits to the independence of women and gender-diverse people (e.g. a lack of women and gender-diverse people in leadership roles).

Action 2

Promote inclusive gender equality, safety and respect.

EXAMPLE

Review recruitment and promotion practices to embed consistent assessment procedures and remove bias.

Driver 3

Rigid gender stereotyping which limits the ways people can express themselves (e.g. making assumptions that certain academic pursuits are better suited for women and men).

Action 3

Challenge gender stereotyping.

EXAMPLE

Develop guidelines for using inclusive language and imagery in university communications and marketing.

Driver 4

Male peer relations that disrespect women and each other (e.g. hazing or chants that degrade women, unwanted touching or sexual gestures, excusing a peer's disrespectful behaviour, being discouraged from taking a stand against disrespectful behaviour because they fear rejection by their male peers).

Action 4

Support and engage men to promote positive masculinities and supportive male peer relationships.

EXAMPLE

Support students in co-designing and delivering peer-to-peer programs that promote respectful relationships and positive male peer relations.

Reinforcing factor 1

Condoning of violence in general.

Reinforcing factor 2

Experience of, and exposure to violence.

Reinforcing factor 3

Factors that weaken prosocial behaviour.

Reinforcing factor 4

Resistance and backlash to prevention and gender equality efforts.

Taking an intersectional approach

What is intersectionality?

Systemic and cultural inequality mean not everyone is impacted by gender-based violence in the same way. Research and evidence show that communities and individuals who are subject to overlapping forms of oppression, subsequently experience higher rates of violence, with this violence appearing in distinct ways.[7] Everyone's identities and experiences are shaped by a range of factors including, but not limited to:

- gender and sex
- age
- race, culture, ethnicity and faith
- health, ability and appearance
- sexuality and family
- social status, class and education.

Gender inequality 'intersects' with other systems of discrimination and oppression, such as ableism, racism and homophobia, to shape women's experiences of violence.

Understanding how gender inequality and other forms of inequality intersect to shape people's experiences of violence is called 'intersectionality' or taking an 'intersectional approach'.

Why use an intersectional approach?

In our community and our universities, gendered violence is overwhelmingly perpetrated by men against women and is disproportionately experienced by women, LGBTIQA+ people, gender-diverse people, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and those with disabilities.[8] We also see international students who are women, experiencing higher rates of sexual and intimate partner violence.[9]

Evidence shows that there are intersections between the drivers of gendered violence and the drivers of violence against the LGBTIQA+ community.[10]

There are also intersections between gendered drivers and other systemic and structural forms of social injustice, discrimination and oppression such as ableism, racism and homophobia. For example, together with sexism, the discrimination and racism caused by colonisation and its systems are inextricably linked to the high rates of violence perpetrated against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.[11] Gender-based violence cannot be addressed without an intersectional lens or an understanding of the impact of colonisation on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

An intersectional approach to preventing gender-based violence is critical.

Intersectionality in practice

Taking an intersectional whole-of-university approach to understanding and addressing gender-based violence requires multiple, but mutually reinforcing, efforts in different contexts.
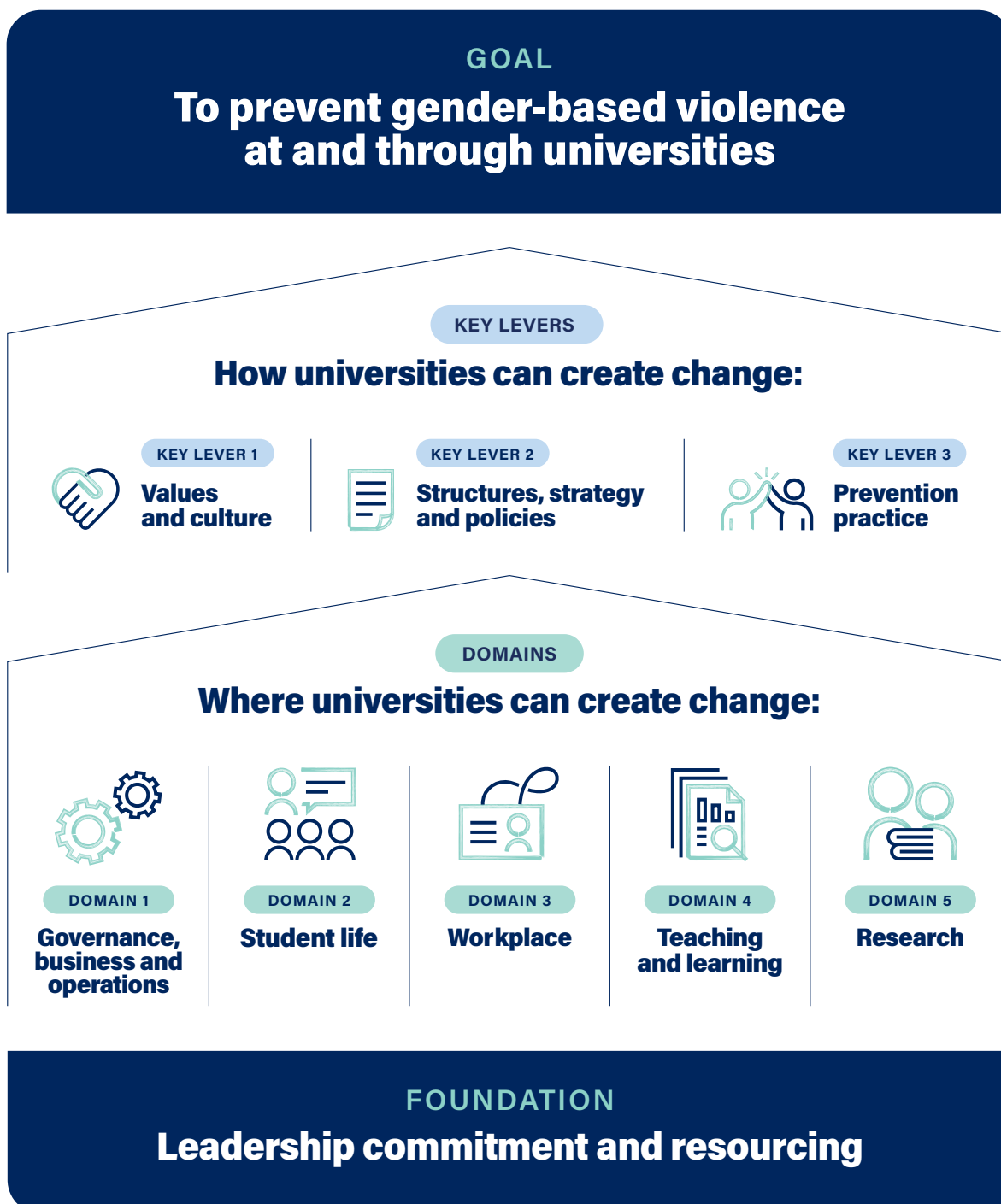
Using an intersectional approach throughout the *Educating for equality* process creates opportunity to:

- Meet the requirements of the National Higher Education Code to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence.
- Support broader diversity, equity and inclusion plans and strategies in your university by addressing multiple forms of discrimination and oppression concurrently.
- Embed a gendered lens in other diversity, equity and inclusion plans and strategies.
- Share knowledge, experience and insights from key teams and practices across the university.
- Establish new partnerships, collaborations and initiatives between teams, departments and organisations.
- Increase the reach of prevention efforts, including communications and relationship building to support diverse consultation, representation and co-design in prevention.
- Build comprehensive reporting data and the evidence base for best practice across the sector.

For Our Watch frameworks and resources that support embedding an intersectional lens across prevention efforts see the resource list at the end of this guide.

The *Educating for equality* model

WHOLE-OF-UNIVERSITY APPROACH

GOAL

To prevent gender-based violence at and through universities

KEY LEVERS

How universities can create change:

KEY LEVER 1
Values and culture

KEY LEVER 2
Structures, strategy and policies

KEY LEVER 3
Prevention practice

DOMAINS

Where universities can create change:

DOMAIN 1
Governance, business and operations

DOMAIN 2
Student life

DOMAIN 3
Workplace

DOMAIN 4
Teaching and learning

DOMAIN 5
Research

FOUNDATION

Leadership commitment and resourcing

Safety and support for all students and staff

Educating for equality **recognises that for primary prevention activities to be delivered safely, appropriate response policies, procedures and services must be in place in a university, which is also detailed in requirements under the National Code.**

A safe, appropriate, and adequate response system is one that holds perpetrators to account for harm, violence, harassment and abuse. This sends important messages about what is and isn't acceptable in the university's culture and community and is a critical element in broader primary prevention efforts.

This includes specialist staff and services as well as training for staff and students in responding to disclosures. While some students may feel comfortable disclosing experiences to staff, others may choose to disclose to students they feel safe with. Having training available for students to respond to disclosures can recognise and support alternative referral and support pathways.

In addition, universities will need to have supports and services available for people who may be displaying disrespectful, inappropriate or harmful behaviours (which can be considered part of early intervention approaches).

It is important that any policies and procedures to support university staff and students to respond appropriately to gender-based violence are:

- trauma-informed
- victim/survivor-centred
- developed by those who are suitably qualified and experienced in response approaches and understand best practice
- published and accessible.

This can be achieved through engaging with specialist organisations and services whose work has drawn on the experience of victim-survivors.

The foundation of *Educating for equality:* Leadership commitment and resourcing

Active leadership for gender equality

University leaders play a crucial role in promoting a whole-of-university approach to prevention, in particular, the executive leadership team.

Effective leadership in this context requires active and sustained commitment to gender equality, demonstrated through:

- **Championing the cause:**
  Leaders must be vocal and visible advocates for gender equality and the prevention of gender-based violence, who consistently create opportunities and platforms to communicate, resource and demonstrate their dedication.

- **Challenging the status quo:**
  Leaders must challenge existing attitudes, behaviours and structures that perpetuate gender-based violence, actively demonstrating a culture of critical reflection and accountability.

- **Creating a culture of support:**
  Leaders must cultivate an environment where survivors feel safe to disclose, report and access support services, and where bystanders are empowered to intervene.

- **Prioritising resources:**
  Leaders must demonstrate their commitment by allocating adequate financial and human resources to support the implementation and sustainability of gender equality and prevention action plans.

Resourcing for success: Investing in sustainable change

Resourcing prevention work and prevention expertise is a tangible demonstration of a university's commitment to gender equality.

Adequate resourcing includes funding for dedicated prevention staff and expertise, but also includes:

- **Developing and delivering comprehensive prevention programs:**
  This includes funding and allocation of resources for training, awareness campaigns and the development of educational materials.

- **Providing adequate support services:**
  Resources are needed to ensure accessible and comprehensive support services are available and accessible.

- **Supporting research and evaluation:**
  Investing in research allows for data-driven decision-making and the evaluation of program effectiveness. There may be opportunities to utilise data to meet multiple reporting requirements or demonstrate gender equity efforts (e.g. National Code, Workplace Gender Equality Agency, Athena Swan).

- **Building capacity and infrastructure:**
  This includes investing in staff training, technology and dedicated spaces for gender equality action plans.

Leadership and resourcing are inextricably linked. By prioritising both, universities can create a foundation for lasting progress towards gender equality.

Domains: *Where* universities can create change

The **5 domains of the** *Educating for equality* **model represent key areas within universities where action can be taken to address the drivers of gender inequality.**

These domains offer a framework for implementing a whole-of university approach, but they are not designed to be used in isolation, and there is often significant overlap between them.

Activities will often span multiple domains, with leadership engagement and communication being relevant across all 5 domains. When implementing prevention activities, consider how best to engage relevant stakeholders and adapt your approach for each domain.

DOMAIN 1
Governance, business and operations

DOMAIN 2
Student life

DOMAIN 3
Workplace

DOMAIN 4
Teaching and learning

DOMAIN 5
Research

DOMAIN 1

Governance, business and operations

The Governance, business and operations domain recognises that universities are major economic and cultural contributors to their communities at the local, state and national level, with reach and influence beyond their campuses.

The ways in which they operate, communicate and engage within their own institutions, as well as within the broader community gives them a platform to model and promote their leadership in, and commitment to, gender equality and the prevention of gender-based violence.

This domain asks universities to consider:

- compliance to the National Code and other relevant gender equality legislation
- strategic alignment of gender equality to university values and leadership KPIs
- leadership commitment and accountability
- resourcing and structure of prevention and response systems within the institution
- risk mitigation and psychosocial safety
- code of conduct application and integrity systems
- staff-student relationships
- physical and built environment and campus facilities
- strategic partnerships (e.g. industry or community organisations)
- suppliers/external contractors and third-party contractors (e.g. consultants)
- subsidiaries, joint entities, and affiliated organisations.

DOMAIN 2

Student life

This domain recognises the importance of creating environments that shape positive attitudes towards gender equality and preventing gender-based violence where students learn, socialise, gather, represent, reside, seek support and access services.

Shaping these expectations and environments not only results in safer and more equitable spaces for students, but it also influences the whole institution and beyond into the workplaces and communities that students are part of.

This domain asks universities to consider:

- colleges, residences and accommodation providers (whether university operated, managed, affiliated or independent)
- students' associations, student representative councils, or other student-led entities
- clubs and societies
- university sports organisations
- extra-curricular and social activities and events
- placement, exchange students and study abroad opportunities support services and programs.

DOMAIN 3

Workplace

People's work lives have a significant influence on them professionally and personally and help shape their attitudes, beliefs and behaviours around gender equality and gender-based violence.

As workplaces, universities have legal obligations and opportunities to support gender equality and prevent gender-based violence across leadership, academic/ professional cohorts, workplace culture and policies, and practices to actively challenge sexism, intersecting forms of discrimination and harmful gender stereotypes.

This domain asks universities to consider:

- executive staff
- academic staff
- professional staff
- contract, casual and sessional staff
- students who also hold staff roles
- workplace culture, policies, practices and human resource functions, including recruitment, promotion, induction, training, support and communications.

DOMAIN 4

Teaching and learning

Regardless of the course they undertake, students' understanding of respect, gender, power and consent can be influenced by the curriculum that is delivered and the environment in which they learn.

Gender equality can be reinforced and modelled – in teaching environments, courses/subjects/units on offer, curriculum, pedagogy and placements, if academic and teaching staff are supported to analyse curriculum for gender bias and consider ways they can challenge the drivers of gender-based violence in the classroom. All staff have a key opportunity to model respect for all students and challenge inequality.

This domain asks universities to consider:

- award and non-award courses on offer
- pathway offerings, ELICOS courses, short courses or micro-credential offerings
- subjects/units on offer
- curriculum
- pedagogy and capacity building for teaching staff
- work integrated learning – placements (clinical and non-clinical) and projects. Visit the Our Watch website for prevention in teaching and learning resources.

DOMAIN 5

Research

Achieving equity in academia requires addressing the unconscious and structural biases that limit the representation and retention and leadership of women and gender-diverse people participating in research programs and projects. This includes biases in funding, scholarships, decision-making and research programs.

Research on gender-based violence and violence against higher-than-average risk groups is also critical to build the evidence base on effective prevention strategies.

This domain asks universities to consider:

- internally and externally funded research programs and projects
- Higher Degree by Research (HDR) students
- early, mid-career and established researchers
- research networks and centres
- visiting scholars
- internal processes, culture, and norms, including examination of power and supporting staff to develop and maintain ethical supervisory relationships.

Key levers: *How* universities can create change

To effect the change necessary to prevent gender-based violence, universities can use key levers available to them as institutions.

When implementing policies or plans, considering which levers you are using can help to ensure that your actions are linked to systems-level, institution-wide change across all domains.

These 3 levers are described below.

KEY LEVER 1

Values and culture

KEY LEVER 2

Structures, strategy and policies

KEY LEVER 3

Prevention practice

KEY LEVER 1

Values and culture

A university's values frame how it sees itself, how others see the university and its approach to all its activities. Authentic values can resonate deeply with staff and students and act as a key support for embedding cultural change.

Universities can impact values by:

- Explicitly addressing gender equality and respect as part of their values statement and Code of Conduct.
- Setting and modelling expected behaviours so that sexism, harassment and violence are never acceptable in the university community.
- Linking values to role design and formal staff performance reviews.
- Recognising and upholding the significance of lived experience and student voices.

But values must be supported by a culture of equality, safety and respect, which requires examining the norms, expectations and experiences of those within the university. This includes the often unspoken 'rules' around accepted behaviour and attitudes that can perpetuate inequality and disrespect, even when policies aim to address it.

To create lasting change, universities need to identify and address these underlying norms and actively shape environments where everyone feels safe and respected and empowered to challenge or report disrespect or harm.

Universities can influence culture by:

- Developing policies, plans, communications and campaigns that ensure the norms (behaviours, attitudes, practices) of the university community contribute to a culture of respect for everyone, regardless of gender, sexuality, race, religion, cultural background and disability.
- Delivering learning and engagement activities with staff and students that supports a 'safe to speak' culture where people can challenge inequality and stereotypes without fear of repercussions.
- Recruiting and retaining a diversity of leaders that actively challenge rigid gender and other stereotypes.

KEY LEVER 2

Structures, strategies and policies

As part of institutional governance, universities have the power to reshape structures that contribute to the unequal distribution of economic, social and political power and resources between people of all genders.

Universities can contribute to structural, strategic and policy change by:

- Embedding gender equality and primary prevention into their strategic plans as a priority area and conducting gender impact assessments.

- Reviewing structures and systems to ensure that they provide equal opportunities and support the leadership of all women and gender-diverse people.

- Consulting with community experts and those with lived experience to ensure structures, policies and procedures are inclusive and representative of the diverse university community.

- Aligning strategies, particularly those that have a diversity, equity and inclusion focus, with each other and with prevention and response plans.

KEY LEVER 3

Prevention practice

Prevention practice refers to the specific resourcing activities and specialised roles required to achieve gender-equality and end gender-based violence. It is critical that prevention work is adequately resourced, visible, well understood and sustainably delivered by a specialised workforce across the university community.

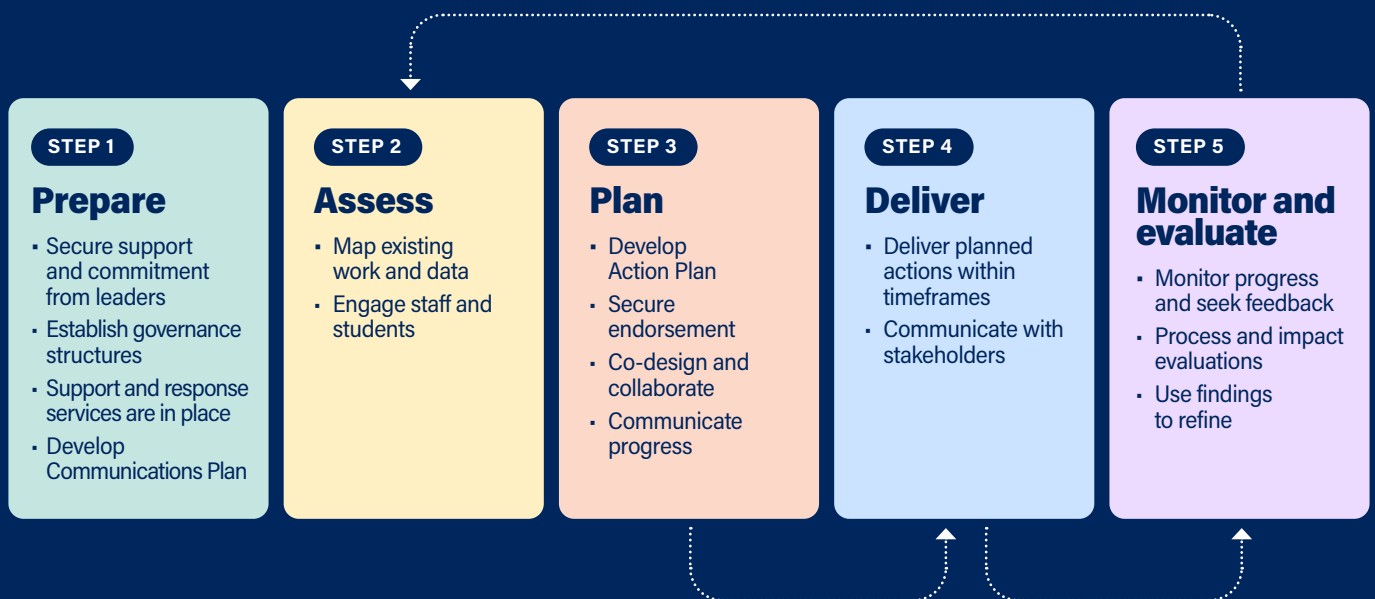**Universities can implement effective prevention practice by:**

- Recognising and investing in a prevention workforce that holds specialised knowledge, education and skills.

- Ensuring a prevention workforce is adequately structured, staffed and supported to deliver projects and programs appropriate to the scale of the university.

  For example, having prevention expertise distributed across the university in areas such as student-engagement and support, leadership and strategy, human resources, education and learning, and monitoring and evaluation.

- Consulting and collaborating with prevention-focused staff on equity, diversity and inclusion strategies and initiatives across the university.

- Delivering evidence-based prevention initiatives, campaigns and education opportunities which directly address the gendered drivers of violence and engage both staff and students.

- Developing whole-of-university prevention plans, then measuring and reporting on impacts and progress.

- Contributing to the national evidence-base on prevention practice in universities, for example, by supporting and encouraging collaboration between universities and across the sector.

- Supporting staff and students to engage with professional development opportunities to increase their prevention skills, knowledge and education.

Implementing
Educating for equality:
A 5-step cycle

Implementing *Educating for equality* involves a 5-step cycle, which may need to repeat with the development of new prevention related plans.

While steps 1 and 2 may be simplified for future iterations, it is important to revisit these steps to account for organisational change, current data, contextual factors and movement of people.

EDUCATING FOR EQUALITY: A 5-STEP CYCLE

STEP 1

Prepare

- Secure support and commitment from leaders
- Establish governance structures
- Support and response services are in place
- Develop Communications Plan

STEP 2

Assess

- Map existing work and data
- Engage staff and students

STEP 3

Plan

- Develop Action Plan
- Secure endorsement
- Co-design and collaborate
- Communicate progress

STEP 4

Deliver

- Deliver planned actions within timeframes
- Communicate with stakeholders

STEP 5

Monitor and evaluate

- Monitor progress and seek feedback
- Process and impact evaluations
- Use findings to refine

STEP 1

Prepare

Preparation is essential to establish the foundation for a successful whole-of-university approach preparation involves creating an action plan, securing leadership endorsement, ensuring adequate support systems are in place for those affected by violence, engaging key stakeholders and determining governance arrangements.

Be ready to respond to people who have experienced harm or violence

- Universities need to have appropriate response systems in place to support staff and students who experience any type of violence and be prepared to deal with increased disclosures, reporting and demand for support services.

- Work with internal experts and specialist services to ensure response and support systems and processes are based on best practice and evidence, trauma-informed and in alignment with the National Higher Education Code.

- Ensure services are also in place to support and engage those who may be accused of causing harm or using violence.

Secure the support and commitment of executive and senior leaders

- Identify and engage champions and those with responsibility for this work. Representation from executive leadership on your implementation team is strongly encouraged to ensure high-level commitment and drive institutional change. Ensure leaders are clear on their crucial role in creating the environment for a whole-of-university approach through their public commitment, strategic input and allocation of resources.

- Provide training for senior leaders on gender equality and prevention strategies to ensure they are well-equipped to champion this work (visit the Our Watch website for a list of current trainings offered by Our Watch).

- Determine budget and resources available to support prevention efforts.

Connect with prevention practitioners and subject matter experts

- Most universities will have established prevention practitioner roles/teams who will hold significant knowledge, expertise and awareness of the current prevention efforts and programs.

- There may also be other subject matter experts within the university; teaching, researching or studying gender equality, primary prevention, masculinities and relevant intersectional areas. Connecting with these experts creates opportunities to build and apply existing local knowledge and expertise.

Engage students early

- Students are key stakeholders in gender equality work and should be provided with ongoing opportunities to engage and show leadership in university prevention work, right from the beginning.

- Consider establishing a student advisory group or identify an alternative structured way to engage students.

- Think about how to engage students who don't already have a voice or who are not in formal representative roles.

- Secure resourcing to provide appropriate remuneration to students who participate in developing and/or delivering your plan.

- Communicate early and often with students, providing clear channels for information sharing and ongoing feedback. Ensure students have opportunities to contribute to the development and implementation of your whole-of-university model. For further guidance on engaging students in prevention, see Our Watch's *Student engagement guide*.

Establish your governance structure and implementation team

- Identify a team with broad representation of staff and students from all levels of the university who will guide the development and implementation of *Educating for equality.* A diverse team ensures broad engagement and ownership, noting the responsibility for enacting change should be shared across the entire university community.
- Ensure you have representation from the **5 domains** to provide ongoing input, accountability and feedback on the development and implementation of the whole-of-university model.
- This team will need to consider how it is structured and governed. This includes who it reports to, if/how budget or authority is allocated and considering how decisions, challenges and barriers will be managed. This can be supported by a terms of reference.
- Provide support, appropriate training and recognition or remuneration to students or those representing lived or cultural experience.
- Connect with relevant entities and subsidiaries (e.g. students' associations, colleges, sporting institutes) to ensure their buy-in and representation on the team and as part of the whole-of-approach.

This group should be diverse and represent various staff and student demographics, ensuring appropriate representation and an intersectional lens.

Determine your governance arrangements

- Establish clear lines of accountability and reporting for this work.
- Define roles and responsibilities for overseeing the implementation and ongoing management of your whole-of-university approach and your action plan.
- Ensure alignment with existing governance and regulatory structures and identify where you can integrate into the university's existing governance, regulatory and reporting framework to avoid duplication and ensure sustainability.
- Consider how this team will connect with existing committees, policies and procedures and report to executive leadership and governing bodies.

Develop a communication plan

Use Our Watch's *Communicating with purpose* guide to prevention communication in higher education to engage the university community early and share key messages that drive cultural change as part of a whole-of-institution approach to preventing gender-based violence.

This communications plan should be regularly updated and reviewed, with messaging changed and expanded as your university increases in maturity in relation to the prevention of gender-based violence. This plan will:

- Help to plan for potential resistance and backlash by communicating shared goals, values and key messages early, building momentum and support, and providing sufficient, relevant and evidence-based information.
- Ensure the university community is aware of the university's commitment to preventing violence, available support, and emphasise everyone's role in creating a respectful environment.
- Keep students, staff and the wider university community engaged using tailored but consistent key messages, ensuring everyone is informed about the university's progress, and establishing regular feedback loops.
- Educate staff and students in understanding the types and drivers of gender-based violence.
- Use messaging which creates a culture of support and encourages staff and students to feel confident in addressing and reporting sexism, harassment, discrimination or violence.
- Highlight relevant resources and tools which students and staff can use, such as Our Watch's *Prevention in teaching and learning* resources, which are designed to support action in the teaching and learning domain.
- Support the use of diverse communication methods and channels to reach different university areas and staff and student cohorts.

Principles of effective student engagement:

Inclusivity:
Ensure diverse representation, including students and staff from all levels and backgrounds.

Transparency:
Clearly communicate the goals, processes and expected outcomes of the engagement.

Accessibility:
Provide various ways for people to participate and share their perspectives, considering different needs and preferences.

Respect:
Value all contributions and create a safe space for open and honest dialogue.

Action-oriented:
Ensure that feedback is taken seriously and used to inform decision-making and implementation.

Recognition and remuneration:
Acknowledge the valuable time and expertise of students, particularly when engagement requires significant input.

STEP 2

Assess

A whole-of organisation assessment is a required under Standard 1 of the National Code, and can support the development of plans, policies and activities that are effective and relevant for your university community. This involves understanding your university's current landscape, gathering relevant data, and considering best practices to ensure your approach is informed by the latest research and evidence.

The *Educating for equality* assessment tool can be used to support and inform external reporting and data collection requirements related to gender equality and the prevention of gender-based violence. This tool outlines 5 stages of assessment and action planning including gathering and assessing data, consulting stakeholders and identifying gaps and priority actions.

Engage with staff and students

- Gather diverse perspectives by engaging or consulting broadly with staff and students across different disciplines and backgrounds to understand their experiences and perspectives on gender equality, safety and respect at your university. This may be through focus groups using the assessment tool, surveys or feedback portals.

- Identify strengths, key concerns, gaps, potential barriers and enablers for change and priorities for action.

- Consider any power imbalances that may impact on students or staff's ability to provide honest, informed input into the assessment process, and how this can be mitigated or addressed.

Map relevant existing work

- Utilise the *Educating for equality* assessment tool to conduct a comprehensive whole-of-university self-assessment across all domains.

- Identify existing actions, policies and activities that promote gender equality, prevent violence and improve safety.

- Review existing policies, procedures and action plans related to gender equality and violence prevention, including those stemming from positive duty and work health and safety obligations, memberships and affiliations, and regulatory and legislative requirements across the 5 domains.

- Map and review existing support services and processes for those affected by violence, including accessibility and capabilities to respond to the diverse needs of the staff and student population.

Gather existing data

- Utilise existing data sets to identify gaps in available data and set priorities (such as staff and student surveys, demographic data across domains, internal reporting and evidence, and sector-wide data).

- Consider informal data types such as qualitative data from students' experiences and take the time to assess trends (such as gender impact assessments on implementation and uptake of equity policies across domains or allocation of resourcing for prevention work across the institution). These assessments are also required under the National Code in Standard 2.

- As much as possible, draw from and align data collection and reporting with other reporting obligations such as the National Higher Education Code to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence, Workplace Gender Equality Agency reporting, National Student Safety Survey, and reporting requirements related to positive duty and work health and safety obligations.

STEP 3

Plan

Developing a prevention action plan translates the understanding gained in your assessment into a structured approach, outlining specific actions, priorities and evaluation plans to guide implementation and ensure its effectiveness. Planning involves prioritising actions, setting SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and timely) goals, co-designing prevention activities with students, embedding monitoring and evaluation, and allocating resources.

You can draw from your priority actions and goals in this planning stage to develop or inform the prevention component of the prevention and response plan and policies required by the National Code and other legislated sector requirements.

Develop a prevention action plan

- Utilise the action planning template in the assessment tool to guide the development of your whole-of organisation action plan.

- Develop and articulate the university's overall goals and timeframes aligned to reporting and compliance with the National Code.

- Consider how other forms of inequality and discrimination intersect with gender inequality to identify synergies or opportunities to leverage and to reduce duplication of effort across other diversity, equity and inclusion plans.

- Set SMART goals for each action with clear senior leader accountability and clear responsible teams and timeframes.

- Prioritise actions, focusing on high-impact areas and addressing gaps identified in your assessment.

- Consider the academic calendar and plan actions and activities throughout the year, avoiding overloading the first semester.

- Align with the whole-of-university model, ensuring actions address the drivers of gender-based violence, cover all domains, share responsibility for delivery and address the needs of both students and staff.

- Develop or align monitoring and evaluation frameworks and indicators to your action plan, including the Outcomes Framework required under the National Code.

- Seek feedback, buy-in and commitment from managers, student leaders, staff, related organisations and community members on the proposed plan to inform the final version.

Secure broad endorsement, approval and resourcing of prevention action plan

- Executive leaders, and leaders and managers must champion the action plans across the domains.

- Secure endorsement for the plan from authorising stakeholders through governance structures, such as the university council.

- Determine any additional resourcing (e.g. funding, personnel, time) and seek approval for the resources required to support the sustainable implementation of the action plan, considering centralised coordination as well as implementation across domains.

Co-design prevention activities with students and those with lived experience

- Utilise the *Educating for equality Student engagement guide* to secure support from students, elevate student voices and co-design impactful prevention activities.

- Promote diverse activities in your action plan, such as peer-to-peer education programs, student-led awareness campaigns and creative projects.

- Encourage collaboration between student groups, university staff and external stakeholders to maximise impact.

- Consider how to include intersectional and lived experience representation and ensure practices are trauma-informed.

- Identify and implement training, mentoring or resourcing required to empower students to participate in co-design and delivery.

- Remember that prevention activities can include education, policy reviews, outreach activities, research and marketing and communications campaigns.

STEP 4

Deliver

It's time to put your carefully developed plan into action, ensuring that your strategies and activities designed to promote gender equality and prevent violence are implemented effectively.

Implement your action plan

- Initiate the strategies and activities outlined in the plan within the timeframes proposed.
- Maintain momentum, ensuring consistent progress across all areas of the action plan.
- Celebrate successes and acknowledge acheivements and milestones to maintain motivation and momentum.

Communicate your activities, aims and outcomes regularly

- Use your communications plan to set regular internal updates to your university community and stakeholders.
- Be honest and transparent about successes and challenges with implementation and celebrate outcomes.
- Provide feedback loops for staff and students for accountability and continuous improvement (such as setting up a specific email address or portal for enquiries and feedback on the action plan).
- Consider external communications to demonstrate sector leadership and accountability and drive social change.
- Join relevant practitioner networks, and participate in sector events and opportunities to share your practice learnings.

STEP 5

Monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation provide a structured way to assess the action plan's progress and impact, ensuring that it is achieving its intended outcomes and identifying areas for improvement. This step involves monitoring progress, seeking feedback, conducting process and impact evaluations, and using evaluation findings to refine the approach.

The approach aligns with the National Code Higher Education Gender-Based Violence Standard 1, which mandates an outcomes framework and regular reporting as part of institutional obligations.

Monitor progress and seek feedback

- In alignment with your monitoring and evaluation framework, track your impact by regularly monitoring progress against the actions and objectives outlined in the action plan.

- Ensure your progress towards actions and objectives aligns with your projected outcomes and indicators of success; this information will be critical under the National Code, which requires a systematic review and analysis of long-term data to inform future action plans.

- Actively seek and gather feedback from stakeholders on the action plan's implementation and impact using a range of feedback mechanisms.

- Respond to feedback and demonstrate a commitment to using it to improve the action plan.

Conduct process and impact evaluations

- Conduct regular evaluations to assess the action plan's effectiveness and identify areas for improvement.

- Evaluate the implementation process, identifying what worked well and areas for refinement to apply these to the next phase of implementation.

- Measure impact by assessing the action plan's impact on key outcomes, such as changes in attitudes, behaviours and experiences related to gender equality and violence prevention.

- Employ appropriate robust evaluation methods, such as pre and post-intervention surveys, qualitative interviews and data analysis, drawing on expertise within your university.

- Consider independently conducted longer term evaluations to measure sustainability of outcomes and build the evidence base around best practice prevention work.

Use evaluation findings to refine your approach

- Revise your monitoring and evaluation approach if there are gaps after reviewing available data from targeted initiatives and existing reporting and evaluation obligations within your university.

- Use evaluation findings to adapt and improve the prevention action plan, ensuring it is achieving the desired impact.

- Share learning and disseminate evaluation findings to stakeholders to promote transparency and accountability.

- Continuously improve and embrace evaluation as an ongoing process, ensuring the prevention action plan remains relevant and effective.

Include student representatives in the evaluation process

- Ensure a diverse range of student representatives are actively involved in the evaluation process.

- Enable students to contribute to data analysis, interpretation and recommendations for improvement.

- Recognise the importance of student insights in assessing the action plan's impact and effectiveness.

Our Watch tools and resources

Resources for universities

Professional development opportunities and new resources

- Sign up to the Our Watch prevention in universities mailing list
- Email: universities@ourwatch.org.au

Visit the Our Watch website for the full range of tools and resources for universities

- www.ourwatch.org.au/universities

Educating for equality model (whole-of-university approach)

- www.ourwatch.org.au/universities/ resources/educating-for-equality

Educating for equality webinar series

- Our Watch Educating for equality webinars

Prevention in teaching and learning (PTL)

- Our Watch prevention in teaching and learning

Educating for equality Implementation tools and guides

- www.ourwatch.org.au/universities/resources

Follow us online

- **Our Watch**
  linkedin.com/company/our-watch
- **ourwatch**
  instagram.com/ourwatch
- **OurWatchAus**
  youtube.com/@OurWatchAus
- **OurWatchAus**
  facebook.com/OurWatchAus

Our Watch frameworks, key tools and resources

Change the story

Change the story is an Our Watch evidence-based framework to guide a coordinated and effective national approach to preventing violence against women.

- Our Watch *Change the story* (PDF)

Changing the picture

Changing the picture contains a set of clear actions that are needed to address the many drivers of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

- Our Watch Changing the picture (PDF)

Changing the landscape

Changing the landscape is an Our Watch and Women with Disabilities Victoria's national, evidence-based resource to guide the prevention of violence against women and girls with disabilities.
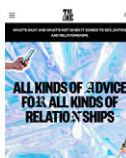
- Our Watch Changing the landscape (PDF)

Men in focus

Research, practice guides and webinars to support people to address masculinities and work with men in the prevention of men's violence against women.

- Our Watch Men in focus

The Line

The Line is a social marketing, behavioural change campaign that helps young people aged 14-20 to negotiate healthy, respectful and consensual relationships.

- The Line website

Resistance and backlash

- Our Watch resistance and backlash resources

Workplace equality and respect

- Our Watch workplace equality and respect resources

Respect and equality in TAFE

- Our Watch respect and equality in TAFE resources

ourwatch.org.au

Endnotes

1   United Nations. (1993). "https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/atrocity-crimes/Doc.21_declaration%20elimination%20vaw.pdf" Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women.

2   For example see Change The Course report and National Student Safety Survey; results of the National Tertiary Education Union survey on workplace sexual harassment in higher education and Australian Bureau of Statistics personal safety survey data reflecting broader community prevalence of gender-based violence.

3   See Respect at Work Act 2022, Work Health and Safety Act, Workplace Gender Equality Amendment Act, National Higher Education Code to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence.

4   For example, positive duty and work health and safety legislation requiring workplaces to take action to prevent gender-based violence including sexual harassment. See also the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children.

5   Our Watch's mandate is to prevent violence against women. Our Watch's work draws on the evidence base as outlined in Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) and Change the story: a shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia.

6   Change the story

7   United Nations Human Rights Council 38th session. (2018). Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences on her mission to Australia.

8   Social Research Centre (SRC), National Student Safety Survey, SRC, 2022; AHRC, Change The Course: National report on sexual assault and sexual harassment at Australian universities, AHRC, 2017. AHRC National Report on Sexual harassment in Australian workplaces.

9   Experiences of Sexual and Intimate Partner Violence Among Women International Students in Australia. Violence Against Women, 0(0). https://doi.org/10.1177/10778012251323267

10 Our Watch, Primary prevention of family violence against people from LGBTI communities: an analysis of existing research, Our Watch, 2017.

11 Our Watch. (2018). Change the picture, p. 3-4.