

Advocacy Summary: Strengthening Primary Prevention

Why this matters

Primary prevention is critical to achieving our vision of a world where everyone is safe, respected and thriving, living free from family and gender-based violence.

This is a shared vision supported and underpinned by a national framework for preventing violence against women, [Change the Story](#). It is a feature of the Victorian strategic narrative [Strong Foundations: Building on Victoria's work to end family violence](#). The [National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children](#) also boldly lays out the aim to end gender-based violence in one generation.

Primary prevention is focused on whole-of-population initiatives, in different settings where people live, work, learn, socialise and play. It aims to address the underlying drivers of violence (or factors that lead to violence) and stop violence from happening in the first place.

What we know

Since the Royal Commission into Family Violence delivered its report in 2016, primary prevention has become further established through dedicated funding and policy frameworks, and integrated government action plans across prevention and response.

This has built on a proud history of community-level primary prevention activity and activism to further establish a system of organisations and initiatives with overlapping interests in working to prevent violence against women, address women's health and gender equality, and focus on family violence and gender-based violence prevention for all communities.

Increasingly, a broad, multi-disciplinary cohort of skilled primary prevention practitioners and organisations is coming together to lead and grow this work across a range of sectors, settings, communities and locations.

Delivering effective and mutually-reinforcing prevention activities and initiatives *at scale* requires sustainable funding and sector infrastructure. The report by the Victorian Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor on [Primary Prevention System Architecture](#) specifically states that a Victoria requires a strong and coordinated system that:

- has the appropriate infrastructure
- is clear about the roles and responsibilities of all parties
- retains a skilled prevention workforce
- is backed by sufficient and sustained funding
- is committed to ongoing evidence-based improvement and refinement

Safe and Equal works within this system, alongside its members, sector partners and government agencies. We seek to contribute to system strengthening through a focus on workforce development and practice leadership. A key priority moving forward needs to be developing a stronger collective view of the entire prevention system, and where and how our efforts are best targeted.

With a growth in Commonwealth investment in primary prevention, it is ever more important that Victorian expertise is sustained and supported in ways that deliver change at both a state and national level.

Safe and Equal's position on this issue: recommendations and asks

Ensure sustainable funding for key players in the primary prevention system

Long-term and sustainable funding for key players in the primary prevention system is critical to ensuring that workforce and practice expertise are maintained and lessons from implementation can be built upon over time.

Priority actions:

- Embed an ongoing funding commitment for key specialist organisations delivering primary prevention in Victoria, particularly the Women's Health Services Network and the statewide infrastructure provided through the regional prevention partnerships.
- Provide ongoing funding for statewide local government initiatives coordinated through the Municipal Association of Victoria.
- Provide an ongoing uplift in core funding for Safe and Equal to represent and support its primary prevention membership, enhance connections in the work of its members across the continuum, build relationships with other peaks and partners, and contribute positively to broader system strengthening.
- Provide ongoing funding for Respectful Relationships Education, continuing the roll-out across the state in schools and in early childhood settings, as well as continued attention to professional learning to support the workforce to deliver whole-of-school programs, and deal with backlash and resistance.

Fund and sustain community-led prevention

There is a specific need to value and fund work being undertaken in community-led prevention with a range of priority communities, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, LGBTIQ+ communities, people living with disabilities, and multicultural and refugee communities.

A number of key community-led organisations statewide have a dual role in leading primary prevention activities with and for their communities, but also play a role in building the capability of organisations within the broader prevention and service system. These roles in the system need to be supported and maintained.

Priority actions:

- Support intersectional primary prevention messaging and programs by providing ongoing funding for community-led prevention organisations such as Multicultural Centre for Women's Health, Rainbow Health Australia and Women with Disabilities Victoria.
- Ongoing funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led primary prevention programs (through Dhelk Dja) in line with the principles of self-determination.

Recognise and support primary prevention being undertaken by specialist family violence services

There is a substantial amount of primary prevention and early intervention work being undertaken by specialist family violence services. These services are embedded in local and regional communities and have built existing partnerships with a focus on primary prevention. This work is often unfunded or funded through small and insecure philanthropic or community grants. Recognising, valuing, and funding the primary prevention role that specialist family violence services play in their communities must be an important focus.

Priority actions:

- Map the primary prevention and early intervention activity being undertaken by specialist family violence services and consider funding opportunities to enhance and support this work.

Prioritise programmatic prevention funding to deliver outcomes and grow capability

Program funding must be prioritised to build distinct areas of specialisation and need, and to support emerging networks that aim to grow the work in key settings and sectors. Current and future investments must be leveraged to ensure capability building for the broader sectors involved in primary prevention.

Priority actions:

- Build on existing programs working with young people around affirmative consent, including the partnership between SASVic, YACVic and Safe and Equal, and leverage lessons from this program to support capability building across the prevention workforce for reaching adults as well as young people.
- Extend and build on existing programs working with multicultural and faith communities, looking to embed lessons and learning across the workforce.
- Provide multi-year funding to enable workforce capability in working with men and boys, leveraging existing practice undertaken by The Men's Project, and building capability across the primary prevention workforce in transformative approaches to gender and masculinity.
- Expand and support primary prevention professional networks in key settings, e.g. TAFE and universities.

Focus strategically on prevention workforce development

Safe and Equal seeks to contribute to system strengthening through a focus on workforce development and practice leadership. This includes a focus on building skills, knowledge and confidence, but also supporting collaboration and connection. The dispersed nature of the prevention workforce means that the needs of the primary prevention workforce are distinct from the needs of the family violence response workforce; and additional mechanisms are vital for primary prevention workforce wellbeing, learning through mentoring, and peer relationships.

Priority actions:

- Commit to minimum five-year funding agreements for Safe and Equal to continue to deliver primary prevention workforce development statewide, including training, communities of practice, the Partners in Prevention network, events, resources and the PreventX conference.

- Secure funding for Safe and Equal to build on recent workforce mapping activities to advise and assist in the implementation of prevention workforce priorities and actions in the Industry Rolling Action Plan.
- Continue to invest in Fast Track, as a leadership program that has an established uptake, reputation and effectiveness.
- Support Safe and Equal to take up a stronger role in practice leadership and development, with a focus on convening networks and working groups in priority areas at an advanced practitioner level.

Focus on prevention sector governance

As well as ensuring that family violence governance structures oversee a comprehensive and integrated family violence system across the continuum, there is a need for specific structures that draw together primary prevention expertise and foster understanding and leadership across a diversity of programs and approaches. Governance must support a growing need for policy integration and coordination of funding that contributes to primary prevention through various government departments to support this work, including those concerned with family violence, women, education, health, and equality.

Priority actions:

- Maintain the Primary Prevention Sector Reference Group as a key governance group to share and advise on primary prevention policy and initiatives, including the integration of primary prevention initiatives across government.
- Develop mechanisms to ensure coordination of legislative and policy initiatives across family violence and gender equality, including engaging with the sectors involved in implementation and roll-out of initiatives.
- Advocate for an increase in primary prevention expertise and representation on the National Plan Advisory Group and/or the establishment of a national primary prevention working group at a Commonwealth level, with representation from sector and governments from each state and territory.

Ongoing support for research, monitoring, evaluation and learning in primary prevention

Effective primary prevention must be evidence-based and evidence-building. We need ongoing attention to research, monitoring and evaluation to inform efforts and share learning.

Priority actions:

- Continue to invest in monitoring and evaluation for all funded programs, and establish regular sector forums to share reports, summaries and discuss evaluations of key investments, in order to ensure accountability, learning and sustainability.
- Implement the recommendations from the recent review of the Family Violence Outcomes Framework, including improving 'buy-in' and reporting, developing short- and medium-term measures, and making the most of existing investments through a synthesis of program evaluations.
- Ensure engagement of the primary prevention sector in the build of a clear and concise statewide MEL system that tells the story of impact, drawing on evidence collected from within the prevention system.

- Establish a Primary Prevention Research Network to support engagement across government, researchers and research institutions, sector and community to map and prioritise research, support translation in programs and policy, and assist in measuring impact.
- Commission research to establish the contemporary cost of family violence, along with the investment and workforce required to make meaningful change over time.