

ENGAGING MEN FROM MULTICULTURAL AND FAITH-BASED COMMUNITIES IN PRIMARY PREVENTION

LESSONS FROM THE CONNECTING COMMUNITIES PROGRAM



This resource has been developed as part of the *Connecting Communities* program, a partnership between the Multicultural Centre for Women's Health (MCWH) and Safe and Equal to support the learning and professional development needs of the *Connecting Communities* network. This network is a group of organisations working with multicultural and faith-based communities to prevent violence against women in Victoria since 2022, and is funded through the Victorian Government, *Supporting Multicultural Communities to Prevent Family Violence Program*.

Primary prevention involves working to challenge and change systems, structures, norms, attitudes, and beliefs across whole populations, as a means of ending family and gender-based violence. For gender equality and violence prevention activities to be effective, they need to engage everyone, this includes men and boys from multicultural and faith-based communities.¹ By meaningfully addressing barriers to engagement, highlighting the benefits of prevention activities within communities, and consulting with communities to build trust and capacity, prevention practitioners can support men from multicultural and faith-based communities to be active and proud supporters of gender equality and healthy relationships.

This resource aims to strengthen practice around engaging men in primary prevention of family violence by sharing key lessons from practitioners in the *Connecting Communities* program.

INVOLVING MEN FROM MULTICULTURAL AND FAITH COMMUNITIES IN PREVENTION

There is a strong and growing evidence base of strategies to engage men in prevention practice, which we have drawn on to develop this resource - including the *Men in Focus resources* by Our Watch, and others that you can find in the further reading section of this resource.

The way this evidence translates into practice within communities is an area of ongoing adaptation and learning. This highlights the importance of integrating knowledge from community-led practice, as has been done in this resource. Practitioners from the *Connecting Communities* network engage with men and boys across a variety of programs, ranging from respectful relationships in co-education classrooms, capacity building with faith leaders, financial education sessions with men, and workshops open to the whole community.



KEY LESSONS FROM THE CONNECTING COMMUNITIES NETWORK

“Bringing men on board is an objective and a strategy at the same time”²

The importance of taking a community-led approach to engaging men has been a key insight from the *Connecting Community* projects, where organisations have reflected on the benefit of being able to uniquely engage with migrant and refugee communities on these issues. They also shared that this community-led approach to building relationships helped practitioners to understand the impacts of racism and other intersecting forms of discrimination.³

This intersectional approach assists us to see people’s lives as multi-dimensional, and focus on the interlinking forms of discrimination that drive gendered violence. Our lives, attitudes and experiences are shaped by many dynamic factors and relationships that change, and these markers help to describe how we are perceived and positioned in systems of power.⁴

Demonstrate that family violence is not just a ‘singular community issue’, it is a global problem, and all communities are impacted

“When we show that [family violence] affects everyone... it releases a burden of holding space as if they are the problem community... It is empowering to see that shift”⁵

The network noted that it is often useful to frame family violence as something that affects all communities and is a human rights issue. This helps to reinforce that violence is not unique to a specific culture or set of beliefs when speaking about prevalence or the need for prevention work.⁶ It demonstrates that family violence can be addressed in all communities and societies, and that everyone plays a role in prevention. This grounds our understanding of gender and racial inequality as the main driver of violence and reinforces that no culture is more or less violent than another.

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Seek to engage men through the leadership of women, non-binary and gender diverse people

A common strategy used by practitioners in the network is to engage with community leaders to support and promote their work. This strategy may involve looking beyond the most visible and accessible community leaders (often male), and platforming the voices and experiences of women, non-binary, and gender diverse people in advocacy forums.

Ensure that your engagement of men is guided by the leadership of women, non-binary and gender diverse people from the multicultural or faith-based community you are working with, and that men’s engagement supports and enhances, rather than replaces, the leadership of women, gender diverse or other marginalised community members as a way of addressing existing power inequalities.⁷ This includes listening to their voices in identifying suitable men to role model in prevention work.

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Recruit and build the capacity of men as community advocates and role models

Many *Connecting Communities* practitioners shared that recruiting men as community advocates and co-facilitators is an effective means of engagement. Under the leadership of women in the community, aim to create spaces that enable men to role model healthy masculinities for other men. One participant shared:

“In my project, we ... built [men’s] engagement by highlighting capacity building activities, [and] opportunities to work with specialist services and government ... as a way of advocating for their community”⁸

The network shared that talking about opportunities to uplift and care for community—rather than reinforcing leadership as a position of power, control or as a means of receiving praise—is a productive way to engage men. They also spoke about the importance of intentionally challenging power inequalities and promoting healthy, nuanced understanding of masculinities through the opportunity to be a community advocate, so as not to reinforce harmful ideas about power and masculinity.

Men in the role of a community advocate should be supported to:

- Work in partnership with women, non-binary and gender diverse people from their communities.
- Expand their understandings of being a man and how to be a role model for their community.
- Contribute to challenging rigid gender roles and stereotypes.



Be creative in your approach

The *Connecting Communities* network has shared that success in engaging men and boys in prevention work has been achieved by exploring creative project design, tailored campaigns,

and diverse approaches that challenge and transform norms and attitudes. Examples include setting-based projects that involve board games nights, cooking classes and sporting events where participants can discuss healthy relationships and masculinities.

Use values-based messaging that is tailored for the community you are working with

Using tailored, values-based messaging can be an effective tool in campaigning for change, or when you are preempting backlash or resistance.⁹

In conversations with the network, practitioners shared that values around care and respect for others exist in all cultures. They found success in bringing men into prevention activities by highlighting the links between gender equality and these shared values. Practitioners also shared success in framing violence as a tool to achieve safe and thriving communities.

Getting to know your participants through ongoing consultation and engagement will assist in aligning prevention messaging to the community’s values. Some examples include engaging men through established channels such as faith settings, sports clubs, healthcare providers, cultural groups, hobby activities or education settings, where prevention messaging can integrate with existing values. To learn more, read our [value-based messaging resource](#).

When working with migrant and refugee men, it is important to remember that their experiences are not homogenous, and that different levels of privilege and power influence their capacity to act. When designing projects to engage men in prevention, enable time to consult with the community, and find spaces where they can meaningfully engage.

To create communities that are safe, happy and connected, we need to bring all parts of the community on the journey to achieve our shared vision. By embedding [community-led approaches](#) into our work and implementing some of the key lessons above, we can engage men and boys in prevention in a way that addresses barriers to their engagement, aligns to their values, enables positive remodeling, and makes them feel enthusiastic about creating change.

- 1 Murdolo, A & Quiazon, R. (2016). *Key Issues in working with men from immigrant and refugee communities in preventing violence against women*.
- 2 Connecting Communities Community of Practice participant, December 2023.
- 3 Multicultural Centre for Women’s Health 2017, *Intersectionality Matters: A guide to engaging immigrant and refugee communities to prevention violence against women*, MCHW, Melbourne
- 4 Multicultural Centre for Women’s Health. (2020). *Challenging Myths about Culture and Violence in Migrant and Refugee Communities*. Melbourne
- 5 Connecting Communities participant, speaking on PreventX Conference panel March 2024
- 6 Connecting Communities participant, Transforming cultural resistance workshop, March 28, 2023
- 7 Murdolo, A & Quiazon, R. (2016). *Key Issues in working with men from immigrant and refugee communities in preventing violence against women*.
- 8 Connecting Communities Community of Practice participant, December 2023.
- 9 For more information on values-based messaging, see the [Connecting Communities resource 3] and Common Cause. (2011). *The Common Cause Handbook: A Guide to Values and Frames for Campaigners, Community Organisers, Civil Servants, Fundraisers, Educators, Social Entrepreneurs, Activists, Funders, Politicians, and everyone in between*. PIRC.

FURTHER READING

Common Cause. (2011). *The Common Cause Handbook: A Guide to Values and Frames for Campaigners, Community Organisers, Civil Servants, Fundraisers, Educators, Social Entrepreneurs, Activists, Funders, Politicians, and everyone in between*. PIRC.

Manal Shehab, Sisters4Sisters and WIRE. (2022). *A Faith Leader's Practice Guide and Toolkit- Preventing and Responding to Family Violence*. WIRE. Melbourne.

Multicultural Centre for Women's Health. (2020). *Challenging Myths about Culture and Violence in Migrant and Refugee Communities*. Melbourne.

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Our Watch. (2021). *Change the Story: A shared framework for the prevention of violence against women in Australia (2nd ed.)*. Melbourne.

Our Watch. (2022). *Men in Focus practice guide: Addressing masculinities and working with men in the prevention of violence against women*. Melbourne.

South East Community Links (2023). *Exploring Life, Culture, and Relationships with Boys and Men: Community Consultation Report*.

Vaughan, C., et. al. (2016). *Promoting community-led responses to violence against immigrant and refugee women in metropolitan and regional Australia: The ASPIRE Project: Key findings and future directions*.

VicHealth (2020). *Framing Masculinity Message Guide*.

Volpp, L. (2011). Framing cultural difference: Immigrant women and discourses of tradition. *differences*, 22(1), 90-110.

ABOUT THE CONNECTING COMMUNITIES BRIEF GUIDES

The *Connecting Communities* network have expressed a need for short, concise and practical resources in topics relevant to their primary prevention work. The *Connecting Communities* brief guides have been developed to meet this need, and the content in these guides have been informed by learnings shared from the network, as well as the existing evidence base. While these brief guides do not go into in-depth detail (we recommend referring to the reading list for more detailed information), we hope that they provide a useful point of reference not just for the network but for the broader prevention sector working with multicultural and faith-based communities.

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Safe and Equal and Multicultural Centre for Women's Health are based on Wurundjeri Country. We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the traditional and ongoing custodians of the lands on which we live and work and we pay respects to Elders past and present. We acknowledge that sovereignty has never been ceded and recognise First Nations peoples' rights to self-determination and continuing connections to land, waters and community.



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