

State Plan to Prevent Violence Against Women

Towards the prevention of violence against women

In our community, the level of violence against women remains unacceptably high. Since 2005, the Victorian Government has invested \$100 million in a comprehensive range of reform initiatives to enhance responses of the police, courts and the service sector to women and their children affected by family violence and sexual assault.

But no matter how effective and essential the response to family violence and sexual assault, interventions focussed 'after the fact' will only have a limited impact on the prevalence of violence against women. To substantially reduce levels of violence against women, and ultimately end it, we need to 'stop it before it starts.' The next stage of the Victorian reforms will focus on *preventing* violence against women before it occurs.

In April 2009 the National Council to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children launched *Time for Action*, a national plan for action to prevent and respond to violence against women¹. The Federal Government has agreed to implement several urgent actions and is now considering this framework as part of Commonwealth policy. *Time for Action* includes a significant commitment to primary prevention and states that this will be achieved through a coordinated, consistent approach involving Federal, State and Territory governments. A link to the National Council's Plan is included on the Federal Office for Women homepage via www.fahcsia.gov.au

The State Plan to Prevent Violence against Women: 2010-2020

The prevention of violence against women is not an aspirational goal but, rather, is well within our reach. We now know that practice in the prevention of violence against women has an evidence base, sound rationale for action and support for development.²

It is possible to prevent violence against women. We have a growing evidence base to show that a sustained policy approach to create cultural and attitudinal change will lead to a reduction in levels of violence. The evidence also shows that prevention policies are most effective when they are coupled with community-based programs and strategies.

The evidence suggests that prevention work must happen across a variety of settings - such as schools, local communities, sports and the media - and that it needs to target whole communities and broad social norms, as well as individuals. Just as governments have used education, awareness-raising and capacity-building to help reduce smoking and drink driving, so too can such strategies help to end violence against women.

Effective prevention requires a long-term commitment from government and the community, working together to a common vision. It's a complex task which may take many years to achieve. The Victorian Government is demonstrating leadership by committing to a 10-year State Plan and a coordinated approach to the primary prevention of violence against women.

Our new focus on prevention will not take priority over, or compete with, the ongoing development of family violence and sexual assault service systems. Rather, primary prevention is a critical and complementary component of the Victorian Government's overall response to the issue of violence against women.

1. National Council to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children (2009) *Time for Action: The National Council's Plan for Australia to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children, 2009-2021*. Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra.
2. VicHealth (2007) *Preventing Violence before it Occurs: A Framework and Background Paper to Guide the Primary Prevention of Violence against Women in Victoria*, VicHealth, Melbourne. p. 5.

Background

The Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 commits government to addressing violence against women as a human rights abuse by fostering an 'inclusive human rights culture' of non-violence and gender equity. This commitment to human rights has also helped to drive reforms in the criminal justice and service systems on family violence and sexual assault. The Government further recognises its responsibility for prevention in light of international human rights obligations to eliminate discrimination against women and address the underlying causes of violence.³

In 2007, the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth) was commissioned to review the evidence on violence prevention. VicHealth produced a comprehensive framework for policy and practice on the prevention of violence against women entitled **Preventing Violence Before it Occurs – A Framework and Background Paper to Guide the Primary Prevention of Violence against Women in Victoria**.

Following this achievement, the Government invested in the development of a State Plan to Prevent Violence against Women in the 2008-09 State Budget building on the concepts and strategies outlined in the VicHealth Framework.

Working from an evidence-base

The Plan will be built using an evidence-based approach, drawing on the research provided by the VicHealth Framework and focussing on the 'primary prevention' of violence against women. 'Primary prevention' is a public health term describing efforts to address the underlying causes of a problem (see Frequently Asked Questions below).

VicHealth's research examined international evidence on the underlying and structural causes of violence against women. Research showed there are three key contributing factors to violence against women: unequal power relations between men and women; adherence to gender stereotypes; and broader cultures of violence. The research also highlighted that primary prevention efforts must include the provision of appropriate and supportive responses to women who are already experiencing violence.

The VicHealth Framework therefore suggested that the prevention of violence against women should be guided by three interrelated themes:

- Promoting equal and respectful relationships between men and women,

- Promoting non-violent social norms and reducing the effects of prior exposure to violence, and
- Improving access to resources and systems of support.

The Framework recommended addressing these factors through mutually reinforcing strategies at multiple levels – societal, community and individual – and in a range of settings in the community.

The State Plan will build on the VicHealth evidence base to include actions across five key settings:

- 1) Education and Training
- 2) Local Government, Health and Community Services
- 3) Workplaces
- 4) Sports and Recreation
- 5) Media, Arts and Popular Culture.

Further research has been undertaken by State Government in each of these settings to identify options and strategies for effective primary prevention. This research tells us what works in primary prevention, where we are now in terms of good practice, where the gaps are and possible ways forward in each area. These research findings will inform the development of the Plan within each setting at the program level and at the policy level. These actions will engage government work areas in a number of departments, such as education, local government, sport and recreation, workplace relations and the arts.

A whole-of government approach

Prevention of violence against women engages all government work areas that are involved in the promotion of equality, respect and non-discrimination. The State Plan will help to clarify how this work is relevant to all government policy and how it can be applied in multiple areas.

SOCIAL POLICY:

Violence against women is caused by - and also reinforces - gender inequality and entrenched discrimination. The prevention of violence against women therefore necessitates that we reduce inequality and discrimination on the basis of gender. In addition, violence affects some sections of the community disproportionately or in specific ways, including Indigenous women, women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and women with a disability. If the inequalities and disadvantages faced by these communities can also be reduced, the prevention of violence will be more effective.

3. The United Nations has called on governments everywhere to 'take positive measures to address structural causes of violence against women and to strengthen prevention efforts that address discriminatory practices and social norms.' *United Nations General Assembly (2007) Intensification of Efforts to Eliminate All Forms of Violence against Women*, A/RES/61/145, art 8(f). Australian governments also have an international legal requirement under CEDAW to eliminate gender inequalities.

HEALTH POLICY:

Intimate partner violence – including physical, emotional and sexual violence – is the leading contributor to death, disability and ill-health in Victorian women aged 15-44.⁴ Intimate partner violence also contributes to ill-health and injury among girls and older women. All forms of violence against women potentially reinforce a range of known determinants of overall health, including poor mental health status, gender inequity, social isolation and economic disadvantage. In addition, women experiencing violence may respond to the trauma associated with violence in ways that impact their own health. These responses can include substance abuse, depression, anxiety and social withdrawal and all have implications for women's physical and mental well-being.

ECONOMIC POLICY:

Violence against women places significant costs on individuals, employers, governments, services and the community as a whole. In 2004 Access Economics concluded that domestic violence alone cost the Australian economy around \$8.1 billion per year, of which the cost to Victoria on a population basis is estimated to be around \$2 billion a year.⁵

A more recent study undertaken by the National Council to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children found this cost to be even higher. The Council concluded that violence against women and their children will cost the Australian economy a total of \$13.6 billion in 2009 and, unless appropriate action is taken to prevent violence, that sum will increase to \$15.6 billion per year by 2021. Calculating from current population figures, that makes a cost of \$3.3 billion in 2009 and \$3.8 billion in 2021 for the state of Victoria. For every woman whose experience of violence can be prevented, the Council found that \$20,766 in costs can be avoided.⁶

The Victorian Government working in partnership towards preventing violence against women

The necessity of an integrated justice, police, community and human services response to violence against women is well-established and the Victorian Government has actively coordinated policy across these areas over recent years.

Prevention of violence requires an even broader effort. Prevention of violence against women is, for example, an issue for education and youth affairs, given that the most-effective and best-evaluated prevention activities we have occur in schools and with young people. Similarly, local communities, workplaces, sports, media and the arts are all key places where social and cultural values are expressed and maintained and where prevention efforts can be effective.

An interdepartmental committee has been established to guide the development of the Plan. It includes representatives from a diversity of government areas including education, sport and recreation, local government, industrial relations, justice, human services, arts, police and community development. It also includes statutory bodies such as the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, WorkSafe and VicHealth.

Our established advisory committees, including the Statewide Advisory Committee to Prevent Sexual Assault, the Family Violence Statewide Advisory Committee and the Indigenous Family Violence Partnership Forum, will continue to bring together government and non-government policy experts and service providers to advise on issues specific to their respective areas. These advisory groups will be consulted throughout the development of the Plan. The Victorian Government also continues to work collaboratively with VicHealth in progressing the development and proposed implementation of activities prioritised in the State Plan.

In addition to these existing structures, new Working Groups will be established in each of the key settings of the Plan. These groups will comprise government, non-government and academic experts in different areas and will help refine strategic action areas for the Plan.

4. VicHealth (2004), *The Health Costs of Violence: Measuring the burden of disease caused by intimate partner violence*, VicHealth, Melbourne.

5. Access Economics, 2004 *The Cost of Domestic Violence to the Australian Economy*, Australian Government, Canberra

6. National Council to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children (2009) *The Costs of Violence against Women and their Children*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is 'primary prevention'?

The State Plan to Prevent Violence Against Women is focussing on *primary* prevention. This is a public health term that means we address the underlying causes of a problem, aim to change behaviours, build people's skills and promote shifts in the social environment. The primary prevention of violence against women is about changing the social norms and individual attitudes and behaviours that are identified in the VicHealth Framework as key determinants of violence. These include unequal power relations between men and women, rigid adherence to gender stereotypes and broader cultures of violence.

Examples of primary prevention activities include schools-based programs aiming to give young people the skills to develop respectful relationships; initiatives in sporting communities to promote gender equity and respectful behaviours; and programs to support respectful relationships in the workplace. Broad-based social marketing campaigns are also an important avenue for promoting messages of non-violence and gender equity.

Why focus on 'violence against women'?

The State Plan will focus on violence against *women* because women constitute the overwhelming majority of victims of intimate partner and sexual violence.⁷ While women can sometimes be perpetrators of relationship and acquaintance violence and men can sometimes be victims (and while violence can occur in same-sex relationships), the evidence shows that women are:

- Three times more likely than men to be injured as a result of violence
- Five times more likely than men to require medical attention or hospitalisation as a result of violence
- Five times more likely than men to report fearing for their lives.⁸

A strong evidence base shows that most violence against women is committed by someone known to them, usually a partner or ex-partner rather than a stranger.⁹ The VicHealth review found that while a cluster of factors are sometimes correlated with this type of violence (such as alcohol and drug use, lack of social connectedness), none of these are actually the underlying causes of violence (that

is, they were neither necessary nor sufficient factors to predict violence against women). These factors only become significant when they interact with the key determinants specific to violence against women, namely unequal power relations between men and women and rigid adherence to gender stereotypes. This specific causal matrix requires equally specific approaches, strategies and frameworks for prevention.¹⁰

The Victorian Government recognises that there are multiple forms of violence occurring in the Victorian community and that different strategies are required to address these different types of violence. Violence against women has different underlying causes than, for example, alcohol-fuelled violence between men and therefore requires specific strategies for prevention. The State Plan to Prevent Violence Against Women will exist alongside other Government strategies to prevent other kinds of violence.

The primary prevention of violence against women is above all about the promotion of equal and respectful relationships and non-violent social norms. Schools-based programs, for instance, aim to raise awareness among young people of their rights and responsibilities in relationships and to build their skills in communication, negotiation and non-violent conflict resolution. Social marketing campaigns to advance primary prevention might similarly aim to promote positive relationships and break down the stereotypes that contribute to violence. As such, while effective prevention of violence against women relies on a coherent strategy to address its distinct causes and contributing factors, it is evident that such efforts will likely have a positive impact on other forms of violence.

What about men, children and young people?

Primary prevention of violence requires changes in culture, society and social norms. Importantly, the fact that the Plan aims to prevent violence against women means that it will target many population groups. It is recognised that the engagement of men, children and young people is essential to prevention efforts.

Working with men is a critical component of the Plan. While most men do not perpetrate violence against women, it is perpetrated mostly by men. The majority of men, however, have a positive role to play in reducing violence against women by changing community attitudes and encouraging respectful behaviours.

7. Australian Bureau of Statistics (2006), *Personal Safety Survey*, Cat. No. 4906.0, Canberra.

8. Statistics Canada (2003), *Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile 2003*, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, ministry of Industry, Ottawa, Canada.

9. Australian Bureau of Statistics (2006), *Personal Safety Survey*, Cat. No. 4906.0, Canberra.

10. It is obvious, for example, that the perpetrator of intimate partner violence is motivated by different factors than the perpetrator of a mugging, and while both forms of violence stem from a profound disregard for the victim's physical integrity and disrespect of their rights, any attempt to prevent either form of violence must take into account the more specific causes and motivations of the perpetrator, on the individual and socio-structural level.

Working with children and young people is also an important part of the Plan. It is well-documented that children and adolescents form their attitudes, beliefs and behaviours during school years and that this is a crucial time to provide education and skill-building around respectful relationships. Primary prevention can provide young people with the skills, role models and reinforcement to choose positive, respectful behaviours and to engage in non-violent relationships. Prevention strategies targeted at children and young people can make a significant difference to society.¹¹

Victorian legislation also recognises the vulnerability of children as victims of violence. Recent data shows that children were present in 65 per cent of family violence incidents recorded by police from 1999-2006.¹² The State Plan aims to prevent violence against women in the home and will also therefore aim to reduce the number of children exposed to violence against their mothers and other female carers. However, primary prevention of violence against children (ie – child abuse and neglect) is not within the scope of the Plan, as it is encompassed by other areas of work.¹³ The Victorian Government is committed to the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children and implementing the initial actions it contains. A link to the framework is included on the National Child Protection Clearinghouse homepage at www.aifs.gov.au/nch/

What about violence against women that is already occurring?

The statistics tell us that violence against women and girls is already widespread across the community. Our efforts must also encompass strategies to respond effectively to violence that has already begun. Schools-based primary prevention programs, for example, must give schools the capacity to identify and respond appropriately to children and young people currently living with violence and make the appropriate referrals. Likewise, workplace-based programs to prevent sexual harassment must also have effective systems in place to respond to sexual harassment if it occurs. The State Plan will therefore also include some direction for this early intervention and response work.

Interventions aiming to prevent the recurrence of violence (for example, through men's behaviour change workshops) are not included in the scope of the Plan, as such initiatives are already being undertaken through reform of the family violence service system.

What about groups with particular needs and contexts?

Violence against women occurs across the Victorian community, however the Government recognises that primary prevention is more effective when it is tailored to suit the needs of specific population groups. Tailored violence prevention activity may also be more effective for groups that are less likely to be reached by whole-of-population strategies.

The Plan will seek to ensure that prevention strategies benefit *all* Victorians. To this end, the Office for Disability has provided resources for a research project which reviews the literature on violence against women with disabilities and in the context of care-dependent relationships. The research will assist State Government to understand how such violence might be prevented from happening in the first place and will guide the development of strategies to prevent violence against women where disability is a factor.

Similarly, the Victorian Multicultural Commission has commissioned research on how primary prevention strategies can be effectively tailored to the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse communities. It will also help to inform us about how to enhance the cultural competency of mainstream agencies to provide primary prevention services for diverse communities.

The specific needs of other population groups will also be considered in the development of the Plan with the assistance of government units such as the Department of Human Services Diversity Unit and the Office for Youth. Non-government stakeholders will participate in the Working Groups to help ensure population groups and life-course issues are addressed in the Plan.

How does this link with Indigenous Family Violence programs?

An Indigenous family violence prevention framework is being developed in parallel with the State Plan to Prevent Violence against Women as this forms part of the Indigenous Family Violence Ten-Year Plan. The Indigenous prevention strategy will inform the investment of more than \$1.2 million over four years in Indigenous family violence prevention projects, which will strengthen those already funded through the Community Initiative Fund and support the priorities identified by the Indigenous Family Violence Regional Action Groups across Victoria.

11. Flood, M and Fergus, L (2009), *An Assault on Our Future: The Impact of Violence on Young People and Their Relationships*, White Ribbon Foundation, Sydney.
12. Department of Justice (2008) *Victorian Family Violence Database (Volume 3): Seven Year Trend Analysis Report*, Victorian Government, p. 71.
13. In addition, Child FIRST (Child and Family Information, Referral and Support Teams) have been established across Victoria and family services have been strengthened to meet the needs of vulnerable children.

The prevention actions of the Indigenous Family Violence Ten-Year Plan will be taken up by the State Plan. Indigenous-specific prevention activity driven by Indigenous communities will be included within each setting. The Indigenous family violence prevention framework will provide an important guide for the Plan's development in these areas.

Key role of Working Groups

Representatives from community, non-government and corporate organisations are being invited to participate in Working Groups in each setting to assist with the distillation and prioritisation of the Plan's action areas. This process will enable government to build on existing knowledge and experience in the field and to ensure broad community ownership of the Plan's directions and actions.

The Plan will also build on existing community programs underway in Victoria as well as other government policies such as *A Fairer Victoria*. The State Plan will develop links to Commonwealth initiatives in primary prevention in order to build on good practice and support consistency in the approach to violence against women.

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The Plan will also build on existing community programs underway in Victoria as well as other government policies such as *A Fairer Victoria*. The State Plan will develop links to the Commonwealth directions in primary prevention in order to build on significant opportunities to consolidate good practice and support consistency in the approach to primary prevention of violence against women.

The next steps

The Victorian Government will continue to work with a range of partners in the area of primary prevention. There is growing recognition that prevention of violence against women *before it occurs* will have significant long term benefits for the health, wellbeing and economic prosperity of Victorian communities as a whole.

The Plan will be launched in late 2009. The following is an outline of the process involved to develop the Plan:

- Map the prevention activity already taking place both within Victoria and at an Australian Government level.
- Consult to maximise the benefit of existing knowledge and experience in the field, and ensure broad community ownership.
- Continue to work in close collaboration with VicHealth and to consider the results achieved through their program of innovative primary prevention activity, currently being implemented in partnership with local government, sports, workplace, education and community settings.
- Engage regularly with non-government family violence and sexual assault organisations and service providers.

Regular updates will be provided to key stakeholders throughout the development of the Plan. These updates will include briefings and online communications.

For more information

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