

State plan to prevent violence against women

The Victorian Government is broadening its work to date on family violence and sexual assault reform to include preventing violence before it starts. The plan builds on the Government's significant investment in effective, integrated police, service and criminal justice responses to family violence and sexual assault.

Achievements to date

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.

The family violence reforms aim to ensure an effective, integrated police, service and criminal justice response to family violence, well-supported by the sector and wider community.

Similarly the sexual assault reform program aims to increase access to sexual assault services, improved the system response to victim/survivors and increased specialist knowledge.

The Indigenous Family Violence Ten-Year Plan, *Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families* launched in June 2008, is the result of a unique partnership approach led by the Indigenous community in Victoria. It aims to guide joint government and community efforts to prevent and respond to family violence in Indigenous communities.

Together, these reforms and initiatives have placed Victoria as a national leader in its response to violence against women, and in holding perpetrators accountable for their behaviour. Police, courts and support services now work together to better respond to such violence.

A State Plan to Prevent Violence against Women... before it starts

The next stage of Victorian reform focuses on the primary prevention of violence against women – stopping it before it starts. This is now recognised as essential to the longer term goal of eliminating family violence. To put this into action, a comprehensive State Plan to Prevent Violence against Women is now being developed. The Plan aims to build cultural values that reject violence and promote respectful, gender equitable relationships in our communities and homes.

The evidence shows that women are overwhelmingly the victims of intimate partner and sexual violence. Most violence against women occurs in the home or private setting, and is perpetrated by a man known to them, usually a partner or ex-partner. While women can be perpetrators, and men victims, of relationship and acquaintance violence (and while violence can occur in same-sex relationships), the evidence shows that, compared with male victims, women are:

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

Working with men and boys is a critical component of the Plan. Non-violent men have a positive role to play in helping end men's violence against women, and in shaping the attitudes and behaviours of children and other men, including peers, colleagues and friends.

The Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 commits us to addressing human rights abuses such as violence against women, not only through a criminal justice and service response, but also through fostering an 'inclusive human rights culture' of non-violence and gender equity.

The Plan will build on a framework co-funded by the Victorian Government and the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth) in 2007: *Preventing Violence Before it Occurs – A Framework and Background Paper to Guide the Primary Prevention of Violence against Women in Victoria*. The Framework supports a human rights based approach that violence against women is caused by, and reinforces, discrimination and gender inequality, both at the broad social level and within relationships. It gives us an evidence base for prioritising our efforts, establishing goals, and guiding policy and practice across a variety of areas within our community.

The framework suggests 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.

Priority areas

The Plan will include policies and initiatives across five key 'settings': that is, areas where prevention strategies could be targeted and have been shown to succeed:

- *Education*
- *Local Government, Health and Community Services*
- *Sports*
- *Workplaces*
- *Media, Arts and Popular Culture*

How the Plan will be developed

The development of the State Plan to Prevent Violence against Women will be overseen by the Victorian Government's Family Violence Interdepartmental Committee, with additional representatives from government work areas specifically relevant to prevention (including the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Workforce Victoria, Sport and Recreation Victoria, Local Government Victoria and Arts Victoria).

An Indigenous Family Violence Prevention Strategy is being developed in parallel with the State Plan to Prevent Violence against Women, as part of the Indigenous Family Violence Ten-Year Plan. This coordinated approach aims to increase capacity of Indigenous organisations to prevent violence against Indigenous women, and to build cultural competency within 'mainstream' settings.

The Plan will tailor policies and programs to meet the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse communities. It will also consider the specific issues surrounding violence against women with disabilities, and against older women, and design prevention initiatives accordingly for these specific community settings.

The next steps

The Plan is being developed in close consultation with stakeholders with expertise on violence against women, as well as in each of the settings. Working Groups will be established for each of the five settings of the Plan, comprised of practitioners, academics and other experts in each area. It is anticipated that the State Plan will be completed by the end of 2009.

Alongside the development of the Plan, we are also:

- Investing more than \$1.2 million over four years in Indigenous Family Violence prevention projects, based on an Indigenous Prevention Framework. These projects 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.
- Continuing to work in close collaboration with *VicHealth* who has also invested in piloting primary prevention projects.
- Continuing to actively engage the family violence and sexual assault service systems to learn from their experience and knowledge.
- Responding to the interest from a range of businesses, sporting and other organisations in the area of primary prevention.
- Identifying Processes for ensuring appropriate evaluation and monitoring of programs implemented under the plan.

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