

National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022-32

Respect Victoria's response

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Respect Victoria's response to the Draft National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022-32

Respect Victoria welcomes consultation on the draft National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022-32. As the nation's only statutory authority solely dedicated to the prevention of family violence and all forms of violence against women and, as outlined in our guiding legislation [Prevention of Family Violence Act 2018] we support governments, organisations and communities to achieve a future free from violence.

Respect Victoria recognises the invaluable input to the National Plan to date by the many specialist organisations and community groups working in the primary prevention of violence against women. We encourage all governments to continue to listen closely to their advice as the Plan progresses.

Public support for targeted effort to prevent violence against women is now at an unprecedented level. The sense of urgency surrounding this has been further boosted by a series of high-profile incidents and courageous advocates over the past two years. Crucially, there is now a wider understanding across the Australian community that we must work together to stop this violence before it starts.

The social and economic logic for investing in primary prevention are compelling – every one per cent reduction in incidence can realise estimated savings of \$54m in Victoria alone. Well-designed prevention programs are shown to be capable of achieving many times this level of reduction in self-reported violence in targeted groups.

We applaud the positioning of primary prevention as one of four pillars and it being recognised as a critical underpinning for the whole Plan - primary prevention is the only way to achieve a large-scale reduction in violence. But this needs to go deeper. Now is the time for this work to be seriously advanced – this requires national leadership and investment to deliver comprehensive action at scale across the community.

Respect Victoria has provided specific feedback to government, which relates primarily to the need to build and embed more sophisticated and mutually reinforcing primary prevention activity nationally, including through growing and sustaining this effort, to ensure we are all working towards preventing this violence from occurring in the first place.

Scope and focus

We welcome the fact that, consistent with the outcomes of the National Summit, the draft Plan embraces a wider spectrum of forms of violence against women, rather than taking a narrower focus on women's experience of family or domestic violence. At the same time, the draft is not always clear on its scope as a result of the interchangeable use of terminology including violence against women, gendered violence, family/domestic violence and sexual violence. We strongly recommend that the Plan's language and focus be guided by *Change the Story*, which has recently been updated in consultation with many specialists and stakeholders across the country.

Whilst a strong focus on violence against women is critical, if the Plan also aims to address gendered violence against LGBTIQ communities, it is critical that clear connection is drawn between the drivers of violence against women and gendered violence against LGBTIQ communities, and specific, targeted prevention activities implemented to address these varying forms of violence.

As *Change the Story* also emphasises, a focus on the gendered drivers of violence against women needs to be complemented by attention to the impact of other forms of systemic and structural discrimination on this violence. While the draft Plan covers several dimensions of this, we would like to see clearer commitments to ensure that all actions address the ways in which other systemic forms of social, political and economic oppression, discrimination and inequality intersect with both experiences of violence and experiences of gender inequality. While engagement of diverse communities is essential, progress will not be achieved solely through a series of discrete activities for different groups.

We specifically support a dedicated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan developed by the community consistent with self-determination principles. Linking this to resourcing and accountability mechanisms for the overall Plan will be important to maintain visibility and to ensure support for Indigenous-led action by all governments.

Shared investment and accountability

The draft Plan appropriately focuses on action that will benefit most from effort at national level. We appreciate references to activity in other jurisdictions but believe the draft Plan misses important opportunities to foster mutually reinforcing efforts across national, state/territory and local levels.

A key issue here is the level of effort and shared investment in primary prevention. We advocate that at a minimum, the Plan must commit to developing a shared investment framework under the first action plan. The framework should articulate how all governments will seek to grow and sustain primary prevention effort over the life of the Plan. This will help to ensure appropriate reach and scale of work in primary prevention nationally and a shared understanding of the current and required levels of investment to collectively prevent violence. Working towards a common investment framework will support adequacy, quality and effective targeting of funded activity that is aligned to outcomes measurement (further discussed below), providing all governments with a clear pathway to achieving outcomes and return on investment. This will have positive impacts for individuals, communities and governments over time, including reduced costs for government in social services provision such as homelessness, health, medical and emergency services.

The Plan should also specify what areas of focus are the responsibility of the Commonwealth alone and which are shared responsibilities across jurisdictions and with community and industry partners. This is critical to ensure the Commonwealth mobilises the levers that it can control (including those in the justice, welfare and economic portfolios) while state, territory and local governments are recognised as the primary stewards of community level prevention activity.

A systemic focus on primary prevention activity

Respect Victoria welcomes the specific primary prevention focus of the Plan, but we recommend that a fuller range of primary prevention approaches (as outlined in *Change the Story*) are identified as necessary to effectively address the attitudes, behaviours, systems and power imbalances that drive violence against women.

The Plan needs to emphasise that successful primary prevention requires a balanced portfolio of programs as well as sustained delivery at scale across the various settings indicated. National initiatives like *Stop it at the Start* are valuable but need to be connected to and coordinated with state and local campaigns and other prevention activity.

In all these primary prevention activities - including the increased focus on working with men and boys - it is important that attention is paid to the role of organisational, systems and structural change needed to achieve lasting change, as well as the current focus on individual attitudinal and behavioural change.

Whilst the Plan signals the need for wider action, it is not explicit enough about the need to develop a stronger, coordinated and sustainable primary prevention system. A dedicated action area committing to national effort to strengthen this system would be welcomed, consistent with the Respect Victoria's previous advice and the key enablers described in *Change the Story*.

This action area should enable a strengthened focus on:

- primary prevention workforce development
- research and evaluation of primary prevention programs and translation of evidence into practical advice on quality and effectiveness of prevention approaches
- alignment of prevention planning at the local, regional, state and national levels
- national support for leadership and engagement of key partners in prevention, within and across government and key contributing settings and sectors in particular
- civil society structures at all levels to advocate, inform and activate targeted change
- specific processes to shape, test and embed policy, regulatory and organisational changes to shift the drivers of violence against women.

Outcomes, monitoring and evaluation

Respect Victoria welcomes the focus on how success will be measured and the commitment to an outcomes framework, measures and targets. However, we would like to emphasise the need to capture measures that reflect the drivers of violence against women, including change to organisations, systems and structures as well as individual attitudes and behaviours. This includes addressing the need for short- and medium-term indicators of these types of change at a national level, in addition to measuring change produced by individual programs.

Another welcome element of the draft Plan relates to data and evidence to support primary prevention; but a clearer commitment to progressively fill outstanding gaps in data that are articulated in *Change the Story* is required. This will require active coordination and alignment of data collection across jurisdictions, levels of government and portfolios.

Finally, Respect Victoria welcomes the announcement of a newly created Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence Commission, an independent body designed to support timely and comprehensive public assessment of progress. We would be keen to see the Commission perform this role in close partnership with state-based bodies that perform similar functions and to liaise widely with community and key sectors able to contribute insights on progress. We would also like to see the Commission coordinate and support accountability for primary prevention across all levels of government, while emphasising the continued importance of strong leadership from the Commonwealth Government itself in this work.