



Second Action Plan 2027–2032

for the

National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022–2032

Submission

August 2026



About this submission

Ending gender-based violence in one generation depends on action in the places where people live, work, learn and connect. Local government shapes those places. This submission sets out what Victorian councils already contribute to preventing family, sexual and gender-based violence, what two decades of local prevention practice show, and what the Second Action Plan needs to do to recognise and resource local government as part of Australia's prevention infrastructure.

The Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) is the legislated peak body for local government in Victoria, advocating for all 79 councils across the state.

MAV works closely with councils, state and federal governments and global experts across industry and academia to deliver services and solutions grounded in local knowledge and community needs across metropolitan, rural and regional Victoria.

MAV offers sector-specific, not-for-profit procurement and insurance services, a local government innovation lab and statewide annual learning, convening programs designed to support Victorian local government to meet the challenges of a fast-changing future.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we live. We recognise their continuing connection to land, waters and culture and pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging.

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1 Executive summary

The Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the development of the *Second Action Plan 2027–2032* under the *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032*. As the legislated peak body for local government in Victoria, MAV makes this submission on behalf of Victoria's 79 councils.

Recognise local government as a core prevention partner

Local government is a critical, but under-recognised, partner in achieving the National Plan's vision of ending gender-based violence in one generation. Councils are uniquely positioned to translate this ambition into practical, place-based solutions that reflect and respond to the needs, strengths and circumstances of local communities. Through their influence over places, services, civic environments and community networks, councils can help create safer public spaces, strengthen primary prevention and early intervention, and build the local conditions that foster safety, respect, inclusion and belonging.

Invest in whole-of-council prevention

Victoria's nation-leading local government primary prevention movement has grown steadily since the late-2000s. All 79 Victorian councils now have an identified key contact with subject-matter expertise, providing a strong foundation for coordinated, place-based prevention. However, in many councils, particularly rural shires, prevention remains only a slight or small part of that person's role, limiting the capacity to embed prevention across council or sustain community engagement.

In 2022, the Victorian Government launched the Free from Violence Local Government Program (FFVLGP), investing \$6.5 million in 27 councils through two rounds of three-year funding: 15 councils from 2022-2025 and a further 12 councils from 2024-2027.

There is great diversity amongst the 27 councils that received FFVLGP funding: 11 metropolitan (includes Melbourne City Council), 10 rural, 4 regional cities, 1 remote (Mildura Rural City).

The funded councils were required to make financial and in-kind contributions and implement a coordinated, whole-of-council approach to prevention, modelled on the [Local government guide for preventing family violence and all forms of violence against women](#) (the Guide). The program demonstrates how targeted investment can build council capability and create the conditions for prevention to be embedded across council.

The Guide identifies four domains of influence through which councils can apply mutually reinforcing prevention action - as a workplace, service provider, connector and civic leader:

- **Council as a workplace** – as a significant local employer, councils can model gender equality and respectful workplace practice. Examples of this included paid family violence leave, first introduced by Surf Coast Shire in 2010, extended paid primary and partner parental leave, and preventing sexual harassment training for all staff.

- **Council as a service provider** – universal services such as libraries, maternal and child health, early years and community services create opportunities to promote equality, identify risk and connect people with support.
- **Council as a connector** – councils provide community infrastructure such as sport and recreation facilities, parks and playgrounds enabling community connection. They convene local networks, support navigation and referral, and connect community organisations, services and partners.
- **Council and councillors as civic leaders** – councils can demonstrate leadership through commitments to gender equality, community events, days of significance and representation of issues affecting local communities.

An independent evaluation of the FFVLGP was completed in 2026.¹ It assessed the program as delivering good value for money, with very good reach into council workforces and communities, good evidence of impact, and good cost efficiency. Every participating council was able to demonstrate change at the workforce level, and the evaluation found emerging evidence of community-level change, noting that the strength of that evidence would improve with a longer funding term.

The evaluation is instructive on how the funding was used. Councils directed the majority of grant funding to a dedicated prevention officer role and then funded much of their community-facing activity from their own contributions. This is the coordination capacity that makes a whole-of-council approach possible: the officer role convenes teams across the organisation, builds partnerships with local services and community organisations, and embeds prevention in council planning and practice. It is also the capacity most at risk when funding ends. Councils told the evaluation that without continued investment they would scale back to what could be sustained with minimal resourcing, and that the relational, culture-change work would be difficult to continue without someone to coordinate it.

Councils invested their own money alongside the grant. Under a co-contribution model, most participating councils contributed more than the minimum required of them, and councils described the model as building local ownership and positioning them as active investors in prevention rather than recipients of a grant.

The evaluation also found that the sector-level coordination provided by MAV was integral to delivery, and that shared resources, common templates and coordinated training across councils would reduce duplication and free councils to focus on activity tailored to their own communities. These findings point to what a national program would need: a funded local coordination role within councils, an investment model that draws local contribution alongside Commonwealth funding, and association-level infrastructure to hold the shared capability.

Fund place-based, community-led prevention

Despite two decades of funded and unfunded prevention innovation across Victorian councils, local government's contribution remains under-recognised and under-resourced nationally. Greater investment and recognition are needed to enable councils to build on this

¹ Urbis, *Free from Violence Local Government Grant Program: 2022-25 and 2024-27 Evaluation - Summative and Progress Report*, unpublished report, prepared for the Victorian Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, June 2026.

experience and deliver sustained, place-based prevention solutions that reflect the needs and strengths of local communities. Short-term and fragmented funding limits councils' capacity to build cultural and systems change or contribute meaningfully to developing the evidence base for what works in different communities, and why.

The need for access to flexible, sustained investment for community-led prevention should recognise councils and communities have different priorities, challenges, strengths and levels of maturity in this work. Effective prevention must be locally relevant, culturally safe, trauma-informed, evidence-based and well connected to the specialist family and sexual violence services for their area, even when there is no physical service presence in their LGA.

Providing councils with access to a national local government funding stream for community-led prevention would significantly strengthen local prevention efforts. In particular, it would enable councils to support and build the capacity of leaders from communities that are often under-represented in prevention, including First Peoples, refugee and migrant communities, people with disability, multicultural and multifaith communities, LGBTIQ+ communities, and younger and older people. This investment would help councils build new partnerships with community organisations and leaders, grow local prevention capability and create stronger connections between communities and councils. Over time, this will build the momentum, local ownership and sustainability needed for a strong, community-led prevention movement.

Establish national local government prevention infrastructure

The Second Action Plan is an opportunity to formally recognise local government as part of Australia's prevention infrastructure. Local government associations can provide national and jurisdictional coordination, strengthen prevention capability, share resources and partnerships, and contribute to the evidence base by identifying and sharing promising place-based practice.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Recognise local government as a core prevention partner

The Second Action Plan should formally recognise local government and associations as part of Australia's prevention infrastructure and establish mechanisms for local government participation in implementation, coordination, capability building and evaluation.

Recommendation 2: Invest in whole-of-council prevention

Resource expansion of the Victorian Free from Violence Local Government Program to all Victorian councils, with program assets and learnings developed to support adaptation nationally.

Recommendation 3: Fund place-based, community-led prevention

Establish a sustained national local government prevention grants stream enabling councils to work with communities and local organisations to design, implement and evaluate locally relevant prevention initiatives.

Recommendation 4: Establish national local government prevention infrastructure

Establish a nationally funded local government domestic, family and sexual violence prevention network, with dedicated roles within local government associations and a mechanism for coordinated learning and innovation, capability building, and sharing of resources and evidence across jurisdictions.

2 Introduction

Rates of family, sexual and other forms of gendered violence, particularly against women, girls and gender-diverse people, remain at levels that constitute a national crisis, and no local government area is immune. At the same time, technology-enabled abuse, disinformation and harassment targeting local elected representatives are being used to intimidate, undermine and silence local leaders across Australia.

Ending gender-based violence will not be achieved through response services alone. The *Second Action Plan 2027–2032* provides an opportunity to think nationally and act locally through equitable investment in coordinated, mutually reinforcing, place-based prevention that helps build safer communities characterised by respect and belonging.

MAV is the legislated peak body for local government in Victoria. It is governed by a Board of councillors elected by their peers from 11 regions across Victoria's 79 local government areas. MAV, together with other state and territory local government associations, is connected nationally through the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA). This existing local government infrastructure provides a mechanism for reaching councils across urban, regional, rural and remote Australia.

The First Action Plan noted the potential contribution of the Free from Violence Local Government Program (FFVLGP). The Second Action Plan has the opportunity to move beyond recognising local government as an example of good practice, towards investing in local government as a genuine prevention partner.

The Second Action Plan can use the national reach of local government associations and the community and social infrastructure of councils to engage people where they live, learn, rest, work and play – across the life course and the prevention continuum.

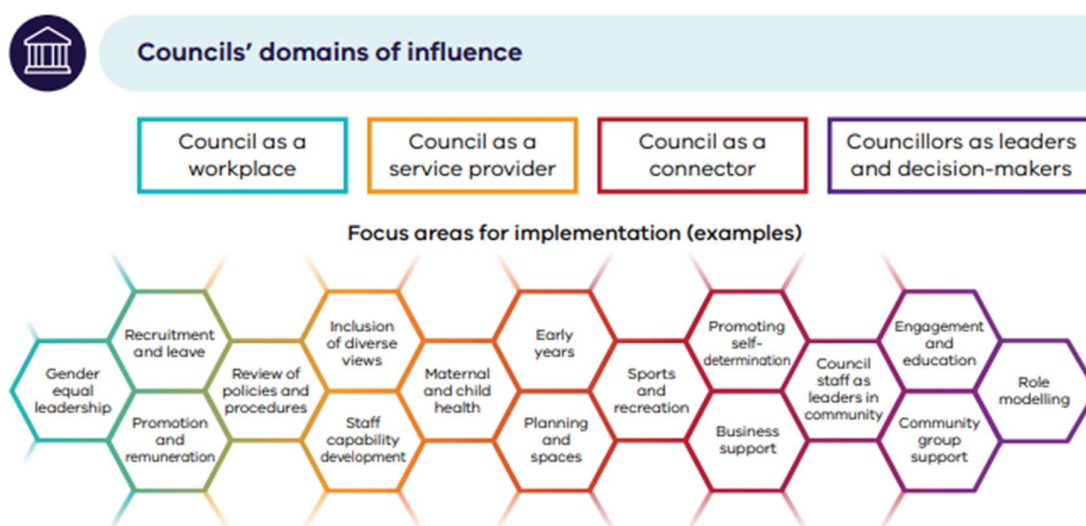
Direct engagement with local government creates opportunities for coordinated evidence-based and evidence-building action through councils as workplaces, service providers, community connectors and civic leaders.

“Victoria stands at a crossroads. The prosperity and social cohesion of our state depend on the strength of our communities and the capacity of local systems to adapt in the face of unprecedented disruption. Climate volatility, demographic shifts, digital disruption, and rising costs are reshaping the way we live, work, and connect. Local government is the first tier of government where democracy meets daily life – where trust and resilience is built through the services, spaces, and connections that sustain more than seven million Victorians” [Future is Local](#)

3 Local government: a whole-of-council approach to prevention

Councils are already embedded in the places where prevention needs to happen – workplaces, early years services, community facilities, libraries, sport and recreation, planning, customer services and local community organisations.

Council services often encounter the impacts of family and gender-based violence, while councils also have significant capacity to influence the environments, relationships and social norms in which people live, work, learn and connect.



The Free from Violence Local Government Program (FFVLGP) provides a strong model for directing prevention efforts towards the places and communities where councils have the greatest sphere of influence. Since 2022, 27 councils have received three-year funding through the program, with all councils encouraged to engage with the model and its supporting resources.

The Guide developed through the FFVLGP was made available to all councils to support the creation of safer, more respectful, equitable and connected communities. All councils were also invited to contribute to the independent evaluation, strengthening the evidence base for local government's role in prevention.

Importantly, the FFVLGP has demonstrated how investment in council capability can create the conditions for a whole-of-council approach to prevention. This provides a foundation for broader whole-of-community action, enabling councils to come together with local services, organisations, businesses and communities to develop solutions that respond to local needs and build safer, more connected places. The experience of [Respect Ballarat](#) demonstrates the potential of this approach in practice.

“Our council was already committed to this work, but receiving Free from Violence funding was what enabled us to speed up the process and do something that would have taken us 4–5 years to roll out, in a 12-month period. Our work has set the tone across councils that has flowed on to other programs.” **Gender Equality Lead, large metro council**

3.1 Council as a workplace

The Victorian local government sector employs more than 50,000 people, making councils significant local employers, particularly of women. Many council employees also live locally. Investment in workplace prevention, including training to prevent sexual harassment, can therefore extend beyond the organisation through employees’ family, social, sporting, and community connections.

The Guide suggests councils begin with a ‘Health Check’ of understanding and awareness of gender-based violence and intersecting forms of discrimination across the organisation.

The Health Check considers whether sex- and gender-disaggregated data is collected and how it is used, and whether gender is considered in relevant policies, programs and services, consistent with obligations under the *Gender Equality Act 2020*.

FFVLGP funding enabled councils to provide tailored training to address gaps identified through the Health Check. Workshops and training included:

- family violence policies and leave
- bystander capability
- elder abuse prevention
- sexual harassment prevention
- applying a gender lens through gender impact assessments
- workforce leadership
- workforce reach into the community.

Council as a workplace case studies:

- [Glen Eira City Council: Leading What We Learned - Leadership Redesigned at Glen Eira \(2026\)](#)
- [Nillumbik Shire Council: Building Capacity to Respond to Family Violence Disclosures \(2026\)](#)
- [Monash City Council: Monash Ally Program \(2025\)](#)
- [Yarra Ranges Shire Council: The Power of Whole-of-Organisation Bystander Training \(2025\)](#)

3.2 Council as a service provider

Councils provide more than 100 services and programs that intersect with people’s daily lives. Their universal services create specific opportunities for prevention, early intervention and connection to support. Maternal and Child Health (MCH), early years services, youth

services, libraries, customer service, and aged and community services can all contribute to primary prevention. Through these mainstream services, councils are also well placed to identify risk earlier and facilitate connection with specialist supports.

Council staff working in MCH, childcare and kindergarten services are highly educated, skilled and trusted workforces operating in settings that enable observation, screening, identification and early referral. This is not about asking councils to replace specialist family violence, sexual assault or other services. It is about complementing specialist responses by investing in the local systems, relationships and community infrastructure that can help prevent violence before it occurs.

Councils' early years settings engage extensively with parents across Victoria, supported by Victorian legislation relating to birth notices and proactive engagement strategies. This reach creates opportunities for early engagement during the transition to parenting, a period when family violence can commence or escalate. Through non-stigmatising services and reliable, evidence-based information about shared parenting and infant and child behaviour, councils can help reduce stress and connect families with the supports they need.

MCH nurses and Early Childhood educators and teachers do have mandatory reporting obligations and engage with child protection, Victoria Police and health services. Councils' Local Laws teams can also encounter family violence, including when Victoria Police require the removal of abused or dangerous animals from a home, or when temporary accommodation for a family pet is needed to enable a victim-survivor to leave a violent situation for emergency accommodation. This is a complex area requiring an improved family violence response, including greater consistency across the state and territories on the legal status of pets in intervention orders.

"There's a lot of passionate people in local government, because we see that local government is the breadth and depth of where primary prevention through to response can absolutely happen." **Gender Equality Lead, large metro council**

Council Youth Services also play an important role in primary prevention by engaging young people during critical stages of identity formation, relationship development and social connection. Through a variety of programs including Respectful Relationships, consent, gender equality and healthy masculinities, councils support young people to build the knowledge, skills and attitudes that contribute to safe and respectful communities.

3.3 Council as a connector

Councils are not seeking to deliver every intervention themselves. Their distinctive value is often their ability to convene the right people, connect local systems and create the conditions for communities and organisations to lead change.

Customer service teams act as navigators for all manner of enquiry. With appropriate training, they are another community-facing team well placed to identify vulnerability and potential signs of violence to connect people with support. For many communities where there are no geographically based services, understanding how to navigate and connect people with the service system is a vital role councils need to grapple with. This is becoming even more complex as the number of people experiencing homelessness grows, most

commonly stemming from family violence, and the fastest growing cohort being women aged over 55 years.

Of Victoria's 79 councils, 48 are located beyond metropolitan boundaries. It is important that the next Action Plan is shaped through an equity lens to address rural disadvantage.

"We've got some really unique challenges. We are an ageing shire, so elder abuse is a particular problem for us. We have no terrestrial services, and we have no public transport in the Shire really to speak of, nothing between the towns and that really provides some real isolation points, particularly for people who are older and may not be able to drive anymore. A lot of this work has never been done here before." **Free from Violence Officer, rural shire**

"The Free from violence program is really great as it supports place-based solutions. A lot of other grant programs are wanting solutions that can be rolled out across the state, and what that means is that the grants go to regional centres, because what needs to happen here is very different to what needs to happen in an urban situation or even in a regional centre. One size doesn't fit all." **Free from Violence Officer, rural shire**

Councils make significant annual investments in community sport and recreation infrastructure, recognising its foundational role in building health and wellbeing, strengthening social connection and fostering a sense of belonging. In recent years, councils have also made genuine progress in creating community facilities, sporting clubs and participation opportunities that are more welcoming and inclusive, particularly for people who have historically faced barriers to participation. This investment creates significant opportunities for councils to use community sport and recreation as settings for primary prevention, where people can connect, participate and build positive relationships as part of their community. The scale and reach of community sport presents an immense opportunity for promoting respectful relationships, challenging harmful gender norms and creating cultures of inclusion and safety. However, councils require sustained specialist support and resources to embed prevention approaches effectively across the community sports sector and setting.

"Doing work in sport is really important and it is disappointing that there aren't any dedicated resources. The Prevention of Violence Through Sport program developed a guide and tools, but once the funding stopped, the momentum stopped. We've seen the Office for Women in Sport cease, as has passion for the Fair Access Policy. It's become very difficult to continue, as we need specialised people. How amazing would it be if had the additional support and resource required to embed sport as a setting, knowing it touches everyone." **Prevention Practitioner, small metro council**

MCH services are active participants in the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management (MARAM) Framework and work collaboratively with other parts of the service sector. MCH services were early adopters of the Child Information Sharing Scheme (CISS) and utilise this system to work with Information Scheme Entities (ISEs) to share knowledge, improve understanding and facilitate joint work. For example, MCH regularly connects with the Orange Door, specialist family and sexual violence services, Child Protection, VicPol (connecting mother with response services) so that a woman does not have to repeat their

story countless times while trying to navigate the difficult journey of leaving a violent situation.

MCH services are also well placed to connect women with health justice partnerships delivered through community health and community legal services, such as the award-winning [Mabels](#) program.

Some councils have entered place-based partnerships with response services. For example, a southern metropolitan council has a family violence specialist worker co-located within the council's Enhanced MCH team; and an inner Melbourne council has a family violence lawyer attend Storytime at the local library, allowing the non-perpetrator parent to access free legal advice during the book reading session.

"Our librarians do so much more than just borrowing out books. They are a safe haven for people in our community who are vulnerable. They are cool places on hot days for our homeless community. They also do job support and job readiness." **Gender Equity Lead, outer metro council**

MCH services also connect new parents with gender equity, capacity and confidence-building programs, including New Parent Groups and the well-established [Baby Makes 3](#) program.

There is increasing interest and demand for New Dads' Groups, with fatherhood recognised as an under-utilised lever and a potential cross-sectoral entry point. Resourcing to support the expansion of new dads' programs at a statewide level needs to be accompanied by evidence-based guidelines to ensure consistency in programming, messaging and practice.

"Since I've started working in local government, I have had my mind blown by the direct impact that council has – the access to families and to people, that doesn't happen anywhere else. I'm not sure of any other services that get this access, definitely not higher levels of government." **Dad's Program Facilitator, large metro council**

"I would love if there's opportunities for more men to be worked with in this space. Our main aim is best child outcomes, and we know that we get to that by ensuring equitable parenting, happy families, healthy relationships." **Dad's Program Facilitator, large metro council**

Council as a connector case studies:

- [Greater Bendigo City Council: Decreasing Gender Segregation through the Women in Non-Traditional Roles \(WINTR\) Network \(2024\)](#)
- [Hume City Council: Engaging Faith Leaders in Family Violence Prevention \(2025\)](#)
- [Melbourne City Council: MenCare Cities: Melbourne \(2026\)](#)
- [Mildura Rural City Council: The Equal and Safe Community Banner \(2024\)](#)
- [Mitchell Shire Council: This is NOT a Healthy Relationship Poster Series \(2025\)](#)
- [Mount Alexander Shire Council: Re-establishment of the Mount Alexander Family Violence Prevention Network \(2025\)](#)
- [Murrindindi Shire Council: Free from Violence Activity Cards \(2024\)](#)

3.4 Council and councillors as civic leaders

Promoting the civic role of the Mayor and Councillors through prevention activities is important symbolically and from an advocacy and inclusion perspective. All Victorian councils invest annually in the 16 Days of Activism, with numerous activities scheduled through libraries (author talks, children's and young adult fiction that promotes respect, diversity and inclusion) guest speakers through sporting clubs, service clubs, theatres, schools, local community walks against family violence led by Council and Councillors, and/or join the statewide momentum at the Melbourne CBD walk that grows larger each year, and with increasing numbers of council contingencies walking proudly with their banner.

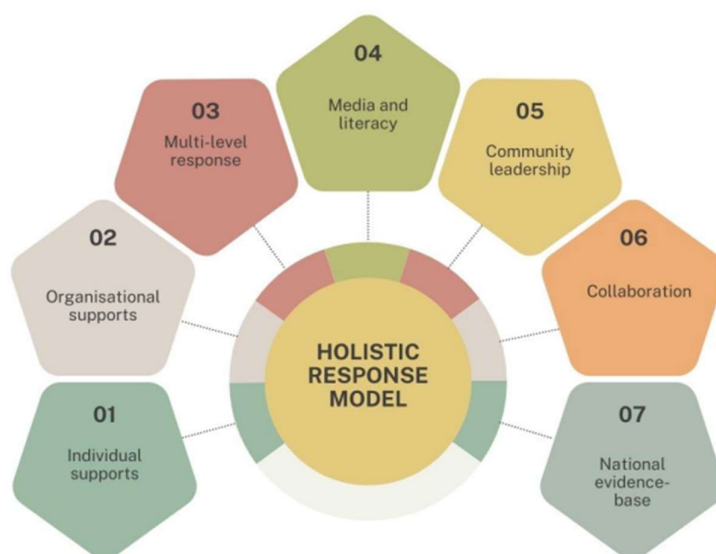
"Having a passionate councillor group has made a huge difference, but the structural changes wouldn't have happened without Free from Violence funding." **Free from Violence Officer, interface growth council**

Through national local government infrastructure, prevention campaigns such as the 16 Days of Activism, and days of significance including International Women's Day and R U OK? Day could be more effectively scaled and translated into local action through councils' trusted, place-based channels. This would enable consistent national messaging to be amplified through local networks, services, spaces and community partnerships, reaching communities in ways that are relevant to their local context.

The growing influence of online misogyny, manosphere content and digital forgery is an emerging issue that warrants greater attention within the Second Action Plan. Online environments are increasingly creating and reinforcing harmful gender norms and shaping attitudes among some young men and boys in ways that undermine our progress for gender equality, along with doing themselves harm.

Tech-facilitated abuse and disinformation is disproportionately targeting women in leadership roles - this is evident amongst women councillors and many other professions. The [Information Manipulation and Harassment of Local Leaders: Impacts and Implications](#)² promotes a holistic, seven-segment response model that focuses on addressing the impacts, as well as drivers of targeted disinformation and harassment.

² Author: Ika Trijsburg*1,2,3, Paul Costello3 1. Australian National University 2. Municipal Association of Victoria 3. German Marshall Fund of the United States



The Second Action Plan needs to support coordinated, evidence-informed action that provides women with the confidence and safety to take on leadership roles in community, government and other sectors, providing young girls with the role models that inspire future leaders.

“Local government is where global challenges translate to local action - strengthening trust and resilience through the places, services and experiences people rely on every day”. **MAV Annual Plan 2026-2027**

Council as civic leaders case studies:

- [Maroondah City Council: Re-Capture Equity Project \(2024\)](#)
- [Melton City Council: Inclusive Language Guide for Councillors \(2025\)](#)

4 What is needed from the Second Action Plan

The Second Action Plan must recognise local government as an essential delivery partner in achieving the National Plan’s ambition to end gender-based violence in one generation. National and state commitments will only translate into lasting change when they are implemented and make sense in the places where people live, work, learn and connect.

Councils bring trusted local relationships, community knowledge, established service networks and influence over the environments in which prevention occurs. The Second Action Plan should therefore embed a stronger place-based approach, supported by

sustained investment, clear roles for local government, and the infrastructure and equitable distribution of resources needed to enable all councils to translate national priorities into locally relevant prevention solutions and whole-of-community action.

This can be done through:

Recognising

Recognise Local Government as a core part of Australia's prevention infrastructure.

Investing

Invest in whole-of-council capability and place-based community prevention through direct funding from the Federal Government to Local Government.

Connecting

Create the national infrastructure required for local government associations and councils to share learning, evidence, resources and capability.



MAV would be pleased to provide clarification on any information in this submission. For further information, please contact Kath Brackett, Director Community and Sector Development at kbrackett@mav.asn.au

Municipal Association of Victoria

Level 5, 1 Nicholson Street, East Melbourne VIC 3002

PO Box 24131, 6 Southern Cross Lane, Melbourne VIC 3000

Telephone: 03 9667 5555 Email: inquiries@mav.asn.au

www.mav.asn.au