

Family violence and municipal public health and wellbeing planning

Guidance for local government, May 2017

Introduction

The Victorian Government is committed to working with local government, together with other relevant sectors, to address family violence and build a society based on equality and respect.

The Victorian Government established the Royal Commission into Family Violence in February 2015 in acknowledgement of the seriousness of family violence and its consequences for individuals, families and communities. The government has accepted all 227 recommendations and committed to their implementation as outlined in *Ending Family Violence: Victoria's Plan for Change*. The plan details the outcomes of key family violence reforms including:

- Family violence and gender inequality are not tolerated.
- Victim survivors, vulnerable children and families, are safe and supported to recover and thrive.
- Perpetrators are held to account, engaged and connected.
- Preventing and responding to family violence is systemic and enduring.

This guidance is related to Recommendation 94 that councils “*report on the measures they propose to take to reduce family violence and respond to the needs of victims*” in preparing their municipal public health and wellbeing plans (MPHWPs). The measures referred to may include strategies and/or actions councils propose to take. This new requirement is aimed at increasing the focus on family violence prevention and response at a local level and applies to 2017-2021 MPHWP.

Councils and family violence

Most councils already proactively address family violence in their local communities. This guidance provides examples (table 2) of practical measures that councils have implemented through their role in:

- local leadership
- planning
- developing facilities and creating safe public environments
- service provision and
- as an employer and procurer.

Preventing violence and injury is one of six priority areas in the *Victorian public health and wellbeing plan 2015-2019*, that councils are required to give regard to when preparing their municipal public health and wellbeing plan as required by the Victorian *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008*.

Reporting and review requirements associated with the implementation of this recommendation will align with requirements that councils are already required to meet in regard to the annual review their MPHWP. Councils must review their plan annually, amend if necessary, and give a copy of the current plan to the Secretary Department of Health and Human Services. Any further advice on reporting will be provided upon consultation with councils.

This guidance has been developed in association with the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) and will be updated to reflect initiatives relevant to local government as they are implemented as part of Victoria's approach to ending family violence. It also supports the existing Department of Health and Human Services [Guide to municipal public health and wellbeing planning](#).

Definitions and key concepts

The Victorian *Family Violence Protection Act 2008* defines family violence as

‘(a) behaviour that is physically, sexually, emotionally, psychologically or economically abusive; threatening or coercive; or in any other way controls or dominates the family member and causes them to feel fear for the safety or wellbeing of that family member or another person; or (b) behaviour by a person that causes a child to hear or witness, or otherwise be exposed to the effects of, behaviour referred to in paragraph (a)’.

[Free from Violence](#), Victoria’s Primary Prevention Strategy to prevent family violence and all forms of violence against women and [Change the Story](#) framework define primary prevention approaches that address the primary, or underlying, drivers of violence. They also reinforce the importance of integrating primary prevention approaches with early intervention and response initiatives to enable a comprehensive and holistic approach to family violence.

Several key definitions and concepts referenced in [Free from Violence](#) are listed below.

Primary prevention: A primary prevention approach is a long-term agenda that aims to prevent violence from ever happening in the first place. Primary prevention works by identifying the deep underlying causes of violence – the social norms, structures and practices that influence individual attitudes and behaviours – and acting across the whole population to change these, not just the behaviour of perpetrators. Primary prevention is distinct from early intervention and crisis response activities (also known as secondary and tertiary response) that aim to stop violence from escalating or recurring. An effective primary prevention approach will support and complement early intervention and crisis response efforts and activities by reducing pressure on these other parts of the system.

Gendered drivers: The specific elements or expressions of gender inequality that are most strongly linked to violence against women. They relate to the particular structures, norms and practices arising from gender inequality in public and private life. The gendered drivers are the underlying causes required to create the necessary conditions in which violence against women occurs. They must always be considered in the context of other forms of social discrimination and disadvantage.

Structural discrimination and disadvantage: The norms, policies and systems present in politics, the legal system, education, workplaces and health care that are intended to be neutral, but in effect present obstacles to groups or individuals in achieving the same rights and opportunities available to the majority of the population.

Table 1. Continuum of prevention

The continuum of prevention	Primary prevention	Secondary prevention (early intervention)	Tertiary prevention (response)
What it is	Preventing violence before it occurs	Intervening early to prevent recurring violence	Preventing long-term harm from violence
What we need to focus on	The population as a whole, and the range of settings in which inequalities and violent behaviour are shaped, to address factors that lead to or condone violence	Individuals and groups with a high risk of perpetrating or being a victim of violence, and the factors contributing to that risk	Those affected by violence, and on building systemic, organisational and community capacity to respond to them and hold perpetrators to account
What we need to do	Build social structures, norms and practices that prevent violence from happening or reduce the risk of it occurring	Challenge the impact that exposure to the drivers and reinforcing factors of violence has had on individuals	Contribute to social norms against violence by demonstrating accountability for violence and women’s right to support and recovery

Source: [Free from Violence: Victoria’s strategy to prevent family violence and all forms of violence against women](#)

State policy context

[Ending Family Violence: Victoria's Plan for Change](#) is the Victorian Government's 10 year plan, outlining the delivery of the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Family Violence. The [Rolling Action Plan 2017-2020](#) sets out key initiatives and investment for the implementation of Royal Commission into Family Violence recommendations. Reforms and health policy supporting *Ending Family Violence: Victoria's Plan for Change* include:

- [Free from Violence: Victoria's strategy to prevent family violence and all forms of violence against women](#)
- [Safe and Strong: A Victorian Gender Equality Strategy](#)
- [Roadmap for Reform: strong families, safe children](#)
- [Victoria's 10-year mental health plan](#)
- [Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2015-19](#)
- [Education State Early Childhood Reform Plan: Ready for kinder, ready for school, ready for life](#)
- [Women's Sexual and Reproductive Health Key Priorities 2017-2020](#)

A dedicated Prevention Agency will develop, support and coordinate prevention initiatives across the state, within and across government, local government, partner agencies and the broader community. A family violence coordination agency, Family Safety Victoria will be established to ensure a continued and dedicated focus on the delivery of the government's family violence reform commitments.

Including family violence measures in the preparation of MPHWP's

The approach required to support effective family violence prevention and response and to achieve gender equality requires whole of community action including workplaces, schools, community organisations, sports clubs settings (Our Watch 2015). This section provides examples of how councils are already implementing policies and initiatives that aim to prevent family violence and promote gender equity. These examples, together with the policy context and evidence-informed actions and frameworks found in the family violence resources section will assist councils to specify locally relevant measures in their MPHWP, acknowledging the variation in resources and capacity across councils.

Table 2. Examples of practical local measures

Councils role	Examples
<p>Local leadership</p> <p><i>Councils can demonstrate commitment and lead change by taking action to support the development and coordination of local strategies and initiatives with community partners and within their organisation</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mayors and Councilors • All Council business units 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate a commitment of leadership to addressing family violence within their community at multiple levels of decision-making across all council business units. • Develop equity and inclusion policies and practice promoting women's leadership both within council and through their work with community partners, and opportunities for increasing workplace diversity. • Recognise November 25 as the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women (for example, participating in the White Ribbon campaign). • Participate in the Victoria Against Violence campaign (16 days of activism against gender-based violence) from 25 November (International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women) to 10 December (Human Rights Day) to raise awareness of family violence. • Recognise March 8 as International Women's Day by celebrating the social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women and calling to action to celebrate gender equality. • Endorse or re-endorse the Victorian Local Government Women's Charter. • Build collaborative partnerships to support and contribute to whole of community actions to prevent and respond to family violence (for example, Women's Health Services, Police and Family Violence Response Services, Indigenous Services, Community Health Services, Legal Aid, Respectful Relationships in Schools).

Councils role	Examples
<p>Planner</p> <p><i>Councils can incorporate family violence considerations across organisational policy</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health, early years, youth, aged and social planning • Strategic and statutory planning • Communications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide an enabling policy framework (through municipal public health and wellbeing planning processes) integrating family violence prevention and response measures across organisational policy. • Address the drivers of gender-based violence in policy and programming across council business units. • Incorporate the factors contributing to family violence (such as including financial pressures, harm from gambling, alcohol and other drugs, mental illness and social and economic exclusion) in the municipal public health and wellbeing profile. • Consider the impact of family violence on the community more broadly by applying a diversity (including gender) and disadvantage lens to councils work across business units and community partners. • Engage stakeholders using family violence advisory and partnership mechanisms providing a structure for councils to work with partners in developing and delivering a co-ordinated and integrated approach to preventing and responding to family violence. • Consult with relevant community stakeholders including: Aboriginal people, people with a disability, people from diverse culturally and linguistically and faith backgrounds, lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and gender diverse and intersex people, young and older people and people living in rural, regional or remote areas, and pregnant women and parents in post-natal period. • Use existing evidence-base strategies to guide the range of approaches and measures selected.
<p>Developing facilities and creating safe public environments</p> <p><i>Councils as providers of safe and inclusive public facilities and spaces</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Urban planning and facility design • Community safety • Community facilities • Sport and recreation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sport and recreation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – promote and support the participation of girls and women (across all life stages) as part of all council sport and recreation programs and policies – undertake prevention work with men by promoting gender equity and challenging conservative gender norms to create a culture where women and girls feel safe and welcome • Consider urban planning and design of public buildings and spaces to create safe public environments and community facilities, using Safer Design Guidelines. • Provide public information and awareness raising, for example, promoting family violence support services through council websites and across community facilities including Neighbourhood Houses, community groups and sport and recreation services.
<p>Service provider</p> <p><i>Councils as providers of services and programs can support front line workers to contribute to prevention of family violence and confidently identify and respond appropriately to all forms of family violence.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maternal and child health services • Early years services • Youth • Aged and disability services 	<p>The transition to parenthood is a time when women are particularly vulnerable to violence, with family violence often starting or increasing at this time. As Maternal and Child Health services see nearly every Victorian family after the birth of a child, they are a key setting for identifying and responding to family violence.</p> <p>Implement effective family violence prevention and early identification screening measures in universal services in partnership with local services for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ChildFIRST– to be integrated with Support and Safety Hubs – as the key platform connecting children, young people and their families to the services they need. • Family Violence Risk Assessment and Risk Management Framework (also known as the common risk assessment framework). • Early Years Compact to support children and families (local government, the Department of Education and Training, and the Department of Health and Human Services). • Patchwork – connecting front line staff to multiple agencies including public sector services, community agencies, and relevant private health practitioners.

Councils role	Examples
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parenting and family support services • Home and community care • Sport and recreation • Local laws including animal management • Emergency management including recovery 	<p>Early years services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Model and build respectful relationships with children in early childhood settings • Municipal Early Years Plans to include key family violence initiatives to support the planning and delivery of early years services. <p>Support front-line staff with education and training to recognise and handle incidents and respond to the needs of victim survivors, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maternal and child health services • Early years and Youth services • Aged and Disability Services: elder abuse policy and training • Local laws including animal management • Emergency management/recovery: family violence risk management and referral training • Libraries and Leisure centres
<p>Employer and Procurer</p> <p><i>Councils as employers and workplaces with the opportunity to promote cultures of non-violence, respect and gender equity.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corporate and human resource services • Community facilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement Human Resource arrangements to support employees impacted by family violence. For example, develop a staff family violence policy and incorporate a Family Violence Leave Clause in Enterprise Bargaining Agreements. This should include staff affected vicariously as well as those affected directly. • Provide development and training opportunities to support all relevant council employees, with a focus on relevant front line services, to support family violence risk identification, assessment and management, consistent with Family Violence Risk Assessment and Management Framework. • Support workplace-based initiatives and capacity building opportunities to build a respectful and gender-equitable workplace culture, for example, workshops delivered by Municipal Association of Australia and VicHealth, and Victorian Workplace Equality and Respect Project.

Family violence resources

Information – policy and research

- [Victorian Government Family Violence](#) – the Plan for Change – including Family Violence and Gender Equality policy, Royal Commission into Family Violence Report.
- [Municipal Association of Victoria](#) – Gender equity, Preventing violence against women, Women in local government resources, including Victorian Local Government Women’s Charter
- [VicHealth](#) resources on [Preventing violence against women](#) and [Health equity](#) including local government action guides
- [Our Watch](#) resources – including [CHANGE the STORY](#) A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia
- [Equality and safety for women](#) – access to regional women health services, guidance to preventing violence against women plans and applying a gender lens
- [Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria](#) – information and referral to specialist support services
- [The Lookout](#) website – family violence sector related information, including training and events
- [ANROWS](#) Australia’s National Research Organisation for Women’s Safety, including leading the National Community Attitudes towards Violence Against Women Survey from 2017
- [inTouch](#) Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence
- [Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission](#)

Data

- [Victorian Population Health Survey](#)
- [Explore Your Data](#)
- [Statistical Data for Victorian Communities](#)
- [Victorian Child and Adolescent Monitoring System](#)
- [Victorian Women's Health Atlas](#)
- [Crime Statistics](#)

Support services for people experiencing family violence

- In an emergency call 000
- [Safe Steps](#) 1800 015 188
- [Men's Referral Service](#) 1300 766 491
- [Kids Helpline](#) 1800 55 1800
- [1800 RESPECT](#) 1800 737 732
- [Victim Support Agency](#) 1800 819 817

References

Department of Premier and Cabinet 2017, Free from violence: Victoria's strategy to prevent family violence and all forms of violence against women is the Victorian Government's primary prevention strategy to stop violence before it happens, State of Victoria

Department of Premier and Cabinet 2016, Ending Family Violence: Victoria's Plan for Change, State Government of Victoria, Melbourne

Family Violence Protection Act 2008 (Vic), s 5(2)

Our Watch, Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) and VicHealth 2015, Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia, Our Watch, Melbourne, Australia

Appendix

Case studies

The following three case studies describe the variety of approaches councils have undertaken to address family violence. Further examples can be found in the family violence resources section.

Councils are encouraged to share their stories aligned with efforts to end family violence on the Department of Health and Human services [Prevention.Health](https://www.prevention.health.vic.gov.au) website. For further information visit the website or email prevention@health.vic.gov.au.

Workplace policies and practices

Darebin City Council, in partnership with Women's Health in the North and No To Violence, have strengthened workplace policies and practices to support employees experiencing family violence, and prevent violence against women. This work builds on Darebin City Council's Family Violence Policy.

To create a safe, equitable and respectful workplace, council have embedded a range of activities into Human Resources processes, including:

- ensuring every new employee receives details of the Family Violence Policy and supports through the Employee Handbook, Corporate Induction and Family Violence Policy eLearning Module
- developing a video to communicate the Family Violence Policy to staff and leaders, including the objectives of the policy and provisions for staff experiencing family violence (leave arrangements, workplace safety planning, changes to workplace practices to ensure safety, access to a support officer and the Employee Assistance Program)
- providing access to training to build staff knowledge and skills in identifying and responding to family violence, including developing workplace safety plans and making referrals to local services.

A Family Violence eLearning Module is now a mandated staff training component for all Council employees. It includes an overview of the Family Violence Policy, local data, addressing family violence in the workplace, and procedures for supporting staff and colleagues.

Prevention of violence against women in emergencies

Macedon Ranges Shire Council led the development of Australia's first *Prevention of Violence Against Women in Emergencies Action Plan 2015-16* with support of fellow members of the Prevention of Violence Against Women in Emergencies Subcommittee of the Municipal Emergency Management Planning Committee. This plan aimed to prevent violence before it occurs in the context of emergencies – either in relation to residents who are directly or indirectly impacted by an emergency, or those volunteers and staff (or their partners) who work in emergency response, relief and recovery

Little evidence existed about successful strategies for local action in the largely uncharted arena where violence prevention and emergency management intersect so the actions developed focussed on addressing the underlying causes of violence against women such as gender inequality; beliefs in rigid gender roles and stereotypes; and behaviours that contribute to, or condone, violence.

The Cobaw Lancefield fires in October 2015 provided a real-life opportunity to implement new approaches. These included:

- creating awareness at all post-fire community meetings about the increased potential for family violence and the need to look out for family and friends who might need help.
- including information on local support services for those experiencing, or at risk of, family violence in packs for affected residents and ensuring information was readily available at the Recovery Centre and other community gathering places
- trained staff and volunteers working for support agencies were able to pick up on several instances of family violence and respond with referrals and information.

Key findings from a review of the first plan (which informed the development of a subsequent plan for 2017) include the need to factor in the limited availability and capacity of partner agencies during the fire danger period; and that a focus on building understanding of the link between gender equity and family violence is necessary.

Active women and girls

In 2009 Moreland City Council led the way for councils in Victoria to prioritise the allocation and use of sporting grounds and pavilions to clubs which demonstrate inclusiveness of women and girls. This action was in response to research and consultation that indicated that there was a serious imbalance in the uptake of sports for women and girls in the municipality, with just 8% of sporting ground users being female. The new policy also encouraged inclusiveness of people with a disability and those from culturally diverse communities.

In the intervening years, this policy has been strengthened, moving from encouraging inclusiveness to mandating inclusiveness for clubs using council facilities. At the current time, the leasing and allocation of council facilities will only be provided to clubs whose membership provides opportunities for junior sides, female sides, female development initiatives, and female representation on club committees and boards. Clubs have a three year phase-in period to achieve the policy objectives, with council offering workshops and seminars to assist clubs in implementing the policy.

Local sports such as football, cricket and netball have combined their governance practices, increasing camaraderie between clubs and pooling resources to effectively deliver more female and family friendly environments and programs. One club now combines five different sports, with netball and softball being started to provide sporting activities for the mothers of junior participants.

As a result, female participation in sporting ground use has more than doubled, increasing from just 8% in 2009 to 21% in 2016 a 161% increase in female participation in organised sport.

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