

Background to the MAV GE, PVAW and GBV Network

The Network was established as the MAV Preventing Violence Against Women Network in mid-2010, and has convened quarterly to meet an expressed need identified by council officers whose work includes the prevention of violence against women. The MAV Preventing Violence Against Women Project, including this Network, has continued to enjoy the expertise and financial and in kind support of the State Government since 2011. In 2020 the name of the Network was changed to the Gender Equality (GE) and Preventing Violence Against Women (PVAW) and all forms of Gender-based Violence (GBV) Network to better reflect the increased attention to gender equality in the policy and practice context of local government's work and the role of people of all genders in preventing violence and achieving equality.

The Network has seen increasing attendance and engagement from a growing number of councils since its inception, and has actively sought to increase accessibility of the Network for regional, rural and remote councils by offering participation via webconferencing since 2018. Prior to the coronavirus pandemic, attendance at each meeting was around 40 people in person and online. The first meeting that was held entirely online in June 2020 saw a total of 64 people from 43 councils and 12 other organisations in attendance.

Statement of Commitment

The MAV GE, PVAW and GBV Network is committed to the promotion of best practice in working towards gender equality, and the prevention of violence against women and all forms of gender-based violence. This includes a commitment to strive for inclusion, diversity and intersectional practice in all that we do, as well as continuous reflection on our own practices to identify personal and structural biases and privilege that may perpetuate inequality of all kinds.

Purpose of the MAV GE, PVAW and GBV Network

The purpose of the Network is to provide leadership for the local government sector in gender equality, PVAW and all forms of GBV by:

- sharing knowledge, practice wisdom, successes and challenges of gender equality, PVAW and GBV work in local government
- building understanding of the role and responsibilities of local government in gender equality, PVAW and GBV to improve outcomes in local communities
- supporting members to develop skills and expertise in gender equality, PVAW and GBV through guest speakers and professional development opportunities
- providing networking and peer support opportunities to build the capacity of the sector
- encouraging local government partnerships with each other and other sectors to drive change
- providing a conduit for information exchange with regional partnerships via the Network Executive Group
- promoting intersectional approaches to our work.

Membership of the MAV GE, PVAW and GBV Network

The Network is an inclusive group of local government organisational representatives, who are considered “full members”, and key stakeholders representing statewide and regional interests (e.g. sector peak bodies, regional women’s health services, organisations representing the interests of diverse groups such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, multicultural women, women with a disability or LGBTIQ people, and government representatives), who are considered “associate members”. Councillors are also welcome to join as associate members.

Full members are the primary target audience for this Network, while associate members are important for promoting leadership, strong partnerships and the development of best practice of GE, PVAW and GBV work in local government. Further information about full and associate membership with regards to meetings is detailed below.

The members of this Network collaborate to promote and progress the work of local government leading communities in the prevention of violence against women and all forms of gender-based violence, and the promotion of gender equality.

People wishing to join the Network should contact the MAV PVAW Policy Adviser.

Network Executive Group

The Network Executive Group is elected every two years in September and consists of a local government representative from each of the nine Victorian regional prevention partnership regions listed below. Regional prevention partnerships, convened by regional women’s health services, will be asked to nominate a representative for the Executive Group every two years in September. Potential candidates will be representatives from the local government sector who are active participants in the Network. If there is a different regional partnership arrangement in place the MAV PVAW Policy Adviser will work with that region to ascertain the most appropriate method for achieving representation from that region.

The Executive assists with meeting planning and supporting broader network activity.

Responsibilities of the Executive include:

- Chair quarterly Network meetings (rotated amongst members)
- Actively contribute to the development of meeting agendas
- Participate in meeting debriefs via webconferencing following quarterly meetings
- Liaise with and provide advice about local government needs to the MAV PVAW Policy Adviser as required
- Provide leadership, peer support and skill development support to the Network membership
- Promote the Network as appropriate
- Act as a conduit for information to flow from the Network to regional prevention partnerships.

Administrative support for the Network will be provided by the MAV PVAW Project Officer.

Regional prevention partnerships are encouraged to give strong consideration to nominating local government representatives whose perspectives may be underrepresented such as people with a disability, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people who are culturally and linguistically diverse and LGBTIQ people.

Nominations should be sent to the MAV PVAW Policy Adviser by email.

For the period 2020-2022 there will be nine members of the Network Executive Group, corresponding to the nine regional women’s health services catchment areas in Victoria. The nominated members are:

Eastern Metro

- Kathy Oliver, Yarra Ranges Shire Council and Tracey Egan, Monash City Council

Northern Metro

- Disa Linden-Perlis, Darebin City Council

South East Metro

- Krissy Nicholson, Casey City Council

Western Metro

- Nancy Pierorazio, Melbourne City Council

Loddon Mallee

- Frances Ford and Felicity Beissmann, Greater Bendigo City Council

Barwon South West

- Olivia Naughtin, Surf Coast Shire Council

Gippsland

- Liam Bantock, Latrobe City Council

Grampians

- Nichole Knight, Moorabool Shire Council

Hume

- Hayley Benson, Moira Shire Council

If Executive positions become available before September 2022, regional partnerships will be asked to nominate a new representative. If a position becomes available due to the representative taking extended leave (e.g. parental, bereavement or sick leave) the region may nominate an interim representative, however, the original representative will be offered their position back upon returning to their role in council.

At the end of the 2 year term all Executive positions will become vacant to encourage rotation of leadership. Individuals who have previously held a position on the Executive can be renominated by their region.

Meeting Records

The MAV will record meeting minutes to be circulated to the Network contact list after the meeting. Presentation slides will be available on the MAV GE, PVAW and GBV Network webpage, with the presenter’s consent. When consent is provided, meeting presentations may be video and audio recorded and published online. Other aspects of the meeting will not be recorded.

Meeting Protocol

The MAV GE, PVAW and GBV Network meetings aim to provide a supportive and safe environment for members to discuss relevant issues and share information. As this may involve the discussion of sensitive topics, participants agree to be mindful of confidentiality and respectful, low-impact disclosure related to specific workplaces, people etc. Participants also agree to:

- alert those at the meeting and the minute taker when sharing potentially sensitive information

- exercise judgement when discussing the content of the meetings outside the meeting space.

When online, in order to be identified and have their attendance recorded, all participants are required to list their name and the council or organisation that they represent. Participants are also encouraged to list their preferred pronouns (i.e. they/them, she/her, he/him) to promote an inclusive and safe environment for people of all genders.

Meetings

Two 1.5 hour meetings are scheduled per quarter on the dates listed below, commencing at 10am. These will usually be held in an online format, however at least one meeting per year will be held in person. In person meetings may be a single 3 hour meeting instead of two 1.5 hour meetings for that quarter, to be determined by the Executive Group during planning. Where possible the December meeting will be an in person meeting to reflect on and celebrate the year’s achievements.

When there are two meetings in a quarter, the first meeting will be open to both full and associate members, while the second will be open to full members only. The purpose is to provide a space where local government representatives can share indepth discussion and learnings focussed on their specific needs in local government. When there is a single meeting for a quarter, all members will be invited.

In person meetings may be subject to capacity limits per council/organisation. More than one person per council is welcome to attend online meetings.

The dates below are provided below to “hold the date” and assist with planning. Changes such as those described above may be made by the Executive Group during planning.

Meeting dates remaining 2020:

- Wednesday 9 December 2020*
- Wednesday 16 December 2020 (councils only)*

Meeting dates for 2021

- Wednesday 17 March 2021
- Wednesday 24 March 2021 (councils only)
- Wednesday 16 June 2021
- Wednesday 23 June 2021 (councils only)
- Wednesday 8 September 2021
- Wednesday 15 September 2021 (councils only)
- Wednesday 8 December 2021*
- Wednesday 15 December 2021 (councils only)*

Meeting dates for 2022

- Wednesday 16 March 2022
- Wednesday 23 March 2022 (councils only)
- Wednesday 15 June 2022
- Wednesday 22 June 2022 (councils only)
- Wednesday 8 September 2022
- Wednesday 15 September 2022 (councils only)
- Wednesday 7 December 2022*
- Wednesday 14 December 2022 (councils only)*

**Please note: meetings in December will be combined as a single face to face end of year celebration, two dates have been listed to ‘hold the date’ in the event this is not possible.*

Contact

For more information about the MAV GE, PVAW and GBV Network, please contact Kellie Nagle, Policy Adviser - Preventing Violence Against Women via knagle@mav.asn.au or 9667 5585 or visit www.mav.asn.au/genderequality.

Evidence and Policy Context

Women’s rights are human rights¹, and understanding that gender equality and eliminating all forms of discrimination against women, including violence, as human rights underpins and drives the work that we do. While particular groups are more susceptible to gendered violence – women, LGBTIQ people and people who don’t conform to dominant stereotypes – the majority of gendered violence is perpetrated by men against women.

Approximately 1 in 3 Australian women have experienced physical violence and 1 in 5 have experienced sexual violence since the age of 15². The health, social and economic costs of violence against women are profound with intimate partner violence being the third greatest health risk factor for women aged 25-44³. Violence against women and family violence have longlasting physical and mental health impacts⁴, are the leading driver of homelessness for women⁵, and cost Australia an estimated \$21.7 billion per year⁶.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women^{7, 8}, migrant and refugee women⁹, and women with a disability^{10, 11} are significantly more likely to experience family and other forms of violence due to the intersecting and overlapping forms of discrimination, and discriminatory social structures, such as colonialism, racism and ableism, they may experience in addition to sexism. While there is currently a lack of population wide data, some research suggests that intimate partner violence is experienced by LGBTIQ people at similar rates to those in hetero-sexual relationships^{12, 13}. Family violence experienced by LGBTIQ people is complex, underresearched and experienced differently by different people and groups within this community, yet increasingly connections and parallels are being drawn between the drivers of violence against women and the drivers of violence against LGBTIQ people¹⁴.

The leading evidence-based framework through which primary prevention of violence against women is understood and addressed in Australia, Our Watch’s [Change the Story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia](#), provides evidence that gender inequality across society creates the conditions for high rates of violence against women, and identifies four specific gendered ‘drivers’ of this violence and key actions to address these drivers:

Drivers	Actions
Condoning of violence against women	Challenge condoning of violence against women
Men’s control of decision-making and limits to women’s independence in public life and relationships	Promote women’s independence and decision-making in public life and relationships

Rigid gender roles and stereotyped constructions of masculinity and femininity	Foster positive personal identities and challenge gender stereotypes and roles
Male peer relations that emphasise aggression and disrespect towards women	Promote and normalise gender equality in public and private life
	Promote broader social equality and address structural discrimination and disadvantage

Further development of Our Watch’s work has also led to [Reflections on Our Watch’s Organisational Strategy to Strengthen our Intersectional Approach 2017-18](#), and to [Changing the Picture: a national resource to support the prevention of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their children](#).

Change the Story identifies local government as a key influencer of change:

“Local governments are the entities closest to individuals and communities and can influence social and community change. They are well placed to respond to local concerns and to lead primary prevention activities through existing mechanisms and via a range of partnerships. They have a reach and mandate to support people at different stages of life such as young people, new parents, and seniors, different faith and cultural groups and marginalised groups.” (page 53)

In Victoria, commitment to and implementation of work to address gender inequality and prevent violence against women has grown significantly, especially since the 2016 Royal Commission into Family Violence. In response to the Royal Commission, the Victorian Government committed to enact all 227 recommendations. Importantly, local government is identified as a key partner and stakeholder in a number of the reforms.

The Royal Commission into Family Violence has led to a State policy context that encourages, supports, and sometimes requires local government to act in this space. Key state government policy development and reform has included:

- [Free from Violence: Victoria’s Plan to Prevent Family Violence and All Forms of Violence Against Women \(2017\)](#) and the subsequent action plans
- [Safe and Strong: A Victorian Gender Equality Strategy \(2016\)](#)
- [Ending Family Violence: Victoria’s Plan for Change \(2016\)](#)
- [Building from Strength: 10 year industry plan for family violence prevention and response \(2017\)](#)
- Amendment to the [Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008](#) requiring councils to report on measures that prevent family violence and respond to the needs of victims in their Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plans.
- [Gender Equality Act \(2020\)](#)
- Inclusion of gender equality requirements in the [Local Government Act \(2020\)](#)

These sit alongside the Commonwealth Government’s commitment to end violence against women and the [National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022](#). A national inquiry into family, domestic and sexual violence is currently underway and will inform the development of the next *National Plan*. The MAV’s submission to this inquiry encourages those developing the new Plan to

increase inclusion of local government and learn from the experiences of Victorian councils already undertaking this work.

Noting that councils have themselves invested significantly in gender equality and PVAW, the Victorian Government has provided significant investment to local government, including funding positions at the MAV to support this Network, to enhance and progress this work. The most notable investment to date has been the \$2.7 million *Free from Violence* local government grants program which saw a diversity of projects funded in 2018. Many of these *Free from Violence* projects focused on internal workplace and cultural change processes that aimed to improve gender equality within council workplaces.

Australia's gender pay gap remains at 20.8%¹⁵ and, according to the World Economic Forum, Australia ranks 44th in the world on The Gender Gap Index 2020¹⁶ – a drop of 29 places since 2006. As large employers, and as the level of government where Australian democracy starts, councils are well placed to progress gender equality, particularly in relation to women's economic and political participation.

Councils are increasing their leadership in gender equality and PVAW by supporting and implementing particular initiatives and programs, as well as policy and strategy development that guides their approach and supports their civic leadership. Since the MAV began surveying councils about their gender equality and PVAW specific strategies and plans, the number of councils with a stand alone policy, strategy or plan has increased from 24 in 2015 to 47 in 2019.

This local government strategy and policy development is informed by and aligns with the state government policy context outlined above, as well as each council's regional context. Of particular importance to councils are their regional primary prevention partnerships and strategies led by regional women's health services. These partnerships assist with coordination and the reinforcement of activities across a region, allowing for increased cohesion and synergy of efforts.

The last 12 months has seen a number of challenges, as well as positive changes, for local government and the communities they support which impact significantly upon work to promote gender equality and prevent violence against women and all forms of gender-based violence. The impact of disasters upon communities and the disproportionate effects experienced by women have been brought into stark view by both bushfires and the coronavirus pandemic¹⁷, and will require significant policy and program responses to address. In contrast, 2020 also saw the introduction of legislation – the *Gender Equality Act* and the new *Local Government Act* – that will shape the policy context and support work to promote gender equality in local government into the foreseeable future.

References:

- ¹ United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 2014. [Women's Rights Are Human Rights](#).
- ² Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2017. [Personal Safety Survey, Australia, 2016, ABS cat. no. 4906.0](#). Canberra: ABS.
- ³ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) 2019. [Family, domestic and sexual violence in Australia: continuing the national story](#). Cat. no FDV 3. Canberra: AIHW.
- ⁴ VicHealth 2017 [Violence Against Women in Australia: An overview of research and approaches to primary prevention](#)
- ⁵ Mission Australia 2018. [Out of the Shadows: domestic and family violence](#), a leading cause of homelessness in Australia.
- ⁶ PwC 2015. [A High Price to Pay: the economic case for preventing violence against women](#). Melbourne: PricewaterhouseCoopers.
- ⁷ ABS 2016. [National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey 2014-15, Cat. No. 4714.0](#). Canberra: ABS.
- ⁸ Our Watch, Changing the Picture
- ⁹ AIHW 2018. [Family, domestic and sexual violence in Australia 2018](#). Cat. no FDV 2. Canberra: AIHW.
- ¹⁰ ABS 2018, [Experiences of violence and personal safety of people with disability, ABS cat. no. 4431.0.55.003](#), Canberra: ABS.
- ¹¹ Woodlock Delanie, Healey Lucy, Howe Keran, McGuire Magdalena, Geddes Vig and Granek Sharon, [Voices Against Violence Paper One: Summary Report and Recommendations](#) (Women with Disabilities Victoria, Office of the Public Advocate and Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria, 2014).
- ¹² Rollè L, Giardina G, Caldarera AM, Gerino E, Brustia P. When intimate partner violence meets same sex couples: A review of same sex intimate partner violence. *Frontiers in Psychology*. 2018;9.
- ¹³ Murray CE, Mobley AK. Empirical research about same-sex intimate partner violence: A methodological review. *Journal of Homosexuality*.2009;56(3):361-86.
- ¹⁴ Rainbow Health Victoria 2020 [Pride in Prevention: A guide to primary prevention of family violence experienced by LGBTIQ communities](#).
- ¹⁵ Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 2019. [WGEA Data Explorer](#).
- ¹⁶ World Economic Forum, [Insight Report: Global Gender Gap Report 2020](#).
- ¹⁷ Our Watch, June 2020. [Position paper: COVID-19 and primary prevention of violence against women](#).