

# GROWING WITH CHANGE

Developing an expert workforce  
to prevent violence against women



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## Acknowledgements

### © Our Watch (2023)

Suggested citation: Our Watch. (2023). *Growing with change: Developing an expert workforce to prevent violence against women*. Melbourne, Australia: Our Watch.



### Australian Government

Our Watch acknowledges the support, funding and resources provided by the Department of Social Services.

Our Watch acknowledges the individuals and organisations who collaborated on the development of specific parts of this publication, including Emily Maguire, Dr Renee Hamilton, Safe and Equal, the Centre for Workforce Excellence, and WorkUP Queensland. The views and perspectives expressed in this publication are those of Our Watch.

### Acknowledgement of Country

Our Watch acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land across Australia on which we work and live. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples past and present.

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## Executive summary

The success of Australia’s efforts to prevent violence against women in part depends on the size and strength of the national primary prevention workforce and the capacity of this workforce to plan, implement, monitor and evaluate primary prevention initiatives.

Given the society-wide and multi-sector nature of prevention work, the prevention workforce needs to be multidisciplinary and diverse, and comprise a wide range of roles. This includes technical and content experts who hold a significant depth of knowledge and experience in prevention; policy makers, researchers, communicators, evaluators and practitioners whose professional role is primarily dedicated to prevention; and practitioners who work across multiple disciplines and undertake prevention activities as one element of their work.

The existing workforce is small, specialist, disparate and lacking in a collective

professional identity. Significant time and resources need to be invested into developing the skills, size and coordination of the workforce across all states and territories.

Workforce development strategies need to occur across five key areas to build the professionalisation of the prevention workforce. These areas are:

- workforce planning
- workforce preparation and pathways
- sector governance and coordination
- working conditions
- professional development.



Furthermore, any strategy, policy or activity to develop and support the prevention workforce should also be underpinned by principles Our Watch identified in developing this evidence paper. These principles are:

- quality primary prevention (which includes an intersectional approach)
- diversity and representation
- safety and support
- ongoing and sustainable investment.

In the last decade, there has been national leadership in primary prevention, including through the development of the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women 2010–2022*, the establishment of Our Watch and a range of other initiatives, complemented by investment across jurisdictions and sectors. Among this work, there has been limited attention on workforce development, coordination or appropriate mechanisms to drive the development of a primary prevention workforce.

To date, sectors and governments across Australia are at different stages in their approaches to workforce development, resulting in an uneven primary prevention policy and practice landscape. Further attention to a national approach can help build consistency and connection of the workforce, support jurisdiction-led workforce development initiatives and thus support the next expansion of primary prevention activity across Australia.

While an overarching national approach is desirable it should not come at the expense of the progress made at local levels nor limit local, state or territories' ability to lead the development of the primary prevention workforce. Unique local and jurisdictional contexts must continue to be supported and considered in any national approach. The establishment of any mechanism or guidance at a national level for the development of the prevention workforce must be informed by consultation with relevant and diverse stakeholders and be underpinned by a collaborative approach to ensure its appropriateness and applicability.

There are a number of issues affecting the prevention workforce, including limited access to professional development, the highly feminised nature of the workforce, limited career development opportunities, low remuneration and contract insecurity as a result of short-term and inconsistent investment. Further challenges include a lack of clarity around the skills and knowledge necessary for prevention work and limited pathways into the work. There are also other issues which are the result of the unique nature of prevention work, including potential burnout due to factors like vicarious trauma, high levels of resistance and backlash, stress due to workload and limited supervision and support.

## Key findings and opportunities for workforce development

A strong and diverse workforce is a key part of the necessary prevention infrastructure to support and sustain prevention efforts across Australia. The development of a consistent and context adaptable approach to workforce development is a significant opportunity to progress primary prevention. A summary of the elements required for workforce development and key opportunities to build a strong national prevention workforce includes:

### Workforce planning

- Workforce planning is a key component for developing the prevention workforce as a profession so that the increasing demand can be addressed by suitable workforce development strategies.
- More national and jurisdictional data is needed about the make-up of the current workforce to guide future workforce planning to meet the needs of the sector.
- Capability frameworks are also useful in guiding workforce planning to inform other components of workforce development such as education pathways, common workforce identity, recruitment, and professional development.

### Workforce preparation and pathways

- A wide range of higher education and vocational education and training (VET) opportunities, courses and qualifications will be required to establish the education pathways to support individuals in developing the knowledge and skills required for prevention work. These include either as entry-level courses or as specialisations for upskilling. Thought needs to be given to the suitable level of qualification required for different segments of the prevention workforce.
- As more prevention courses become available, education institutions need to be able to employ suitably qualified university and VET teaching staff, and this teaching workforce also requires capability building and support.

### Sector governance and coordination

- The development of a national peak body, alliance or association may be useful to support national advocacy efforts and to achieve a stronger, dedicated focus on the prevention workforce, its capabilities and expansion across Australia.
- The Australian Government, and state and territory governments, can support sector coordination efforts to ensure workforce development priorities and actions are mutually reinforcing and aligned across government and non-government stakeholders.
- Professional governance mechanisms, a clear professional identity, and the development of practice standards would help guide a number of workforce development initiatives, such as benchmarking processes and systems for credentialling, which are useful in establishing a consistent standard and quality of practice across jurisdictions. This should complement context-specific workforce development initiatives.
- There are many examples of sector coordination across government and non-government organisations that provide models for enhancing the reach and effectiveness of prevention practice, as well as creating stronger relationships between the prevention workforce.

## Working conditions

- While many prevention professionals are satisfied with the alignment between their work and their personal and professional values, working conditions do not always meet best practice standards or match the level of qualification, expertise and skills required of workers.
- Low remuneration and short-term contracts in the prevention sector are closely linked to difficulties in attracting qualified staff and poor staff retention.
- Prevention workers face unique wellbeing challenges such as having to deal with resistance and backlash, vicarious trauma and burnout.
- Workplace supervision and supports, as well as further data collection around pay and conditions, are important to improve working conditions.

## Professional development

- Comprehensive and coordinated professional development initiatives are a key element of any workforce development strategy.
- A small number of organisations (primarily in Victoria) deliver training and professional development to the current prevention workforce.
- Limited career development opportunities are one of the reasons employers face challenges in attracting and retaining the workforce.
- Peer learning, networks and leadership programs have proven successful and could be leveraged to further support and inspire careers in primary prevention.

The following opportunities can be leveraged to support the development and expansion of the prevention workforce nationally:

- Collect national data on the prevention workforce to support targeted interventions to enhance current and future prevention working conditions and professional development.
- Develop professional governance mechanisms, build a clear professional identity, and develop practice standards.
- Resource and invest in primary prevention in ways that support long-term contracts, job security and appropriate remuneration, and take into account the gendered dynamics of the workforce and unique challenges of prevention work.
- Establish clear pathways into the workforce, including higher education and vocational education and training (VET) courses, that can support the expansion of the prevention workforce and embed prevention content into adjacent workforces where appropriate. This should be done in partnership with prevention and allied professions, such as response and early intervention, education, health and media sectors.
- Scope sector interest and support for the development of an independent, sector-based national peak body, alliance or association to represent the prevention workforce. This body could support national advocacy efforts and help achieve a stronger, dedicated focus on the prevention workforce, its capabilities and expansion across Australia. The work of such a body would complement government workforce development initiatives and prevention related policy frameworks and help deliver mutually beneficial and reinforcing impacts.



# 1

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## Introduction

The success of Australia's efforts to prevent violence against women depends in part on the size and strength of the national primary prevention workforce and the capacity of this workforce to plan, implement, scale-up, monitor and evaluate primary prevention initiatives.

To deliver sustainable, long-term change, it is important to further develop and grow the specialist prevention workforce, as well as grow the primary prevention capabilities of the broader workforces that intersect with violence against women, including, but not limited to, community services, health, justice, media, sports and education.

Significant work is required to expand, develop and build the capacity of the prevention workforce across the country.

There is a clear need for an approach that supports workforce and sector development. This means supporting transformation in multifaceted and reinforcing ways across systems, institutions, organisations and communities, and for individuals. However, there is currently no mechanism to provide the coordination, collaboration and quality assurance necessary to strengthen and support the professionalisation of the emerging prevention workforce across Australia.

More broadly, the scaling and mainstreaming of prevention across diverse settings requires professionals working across a variety of related or intersecting disciplines to embed prevention and gender equality into their existing work and the core business of their organisations. This mainstreaming also requires leaders in these settings to understand prevention and commit resources and support for professional development, and to drive and secure whole-of-organisation support for this work.

This report aims to provide an understanding of workforce development in the primary prevention sector and a snapshot of the current national prevention workforce, as well as describing initiatives, gaps and opportunities around the country. In doing so it aims to contribute to the ongoing conversation about what needs to be done to strengthen the national prevention workforce.

## What is workforce development?

Workforce development can broadly be described as designing and implementing the infrastructure, strategies, policies and actions that maximise building, attracting and retaining a skilled and capable workforce that is appropriate to an industry or organisational need.<sup>1</sup> Workforce development covers a range of elements and includes not just the size and capability of the people in the workforce, but also the systems and processes that are required to support long-term sustainability and adaptability of the workforce in relation to the needs of the sector. Workforce development initiatives need to be multilayered and the rollout of such initiatives needs to be sequenced and coordinated to ensure quality and consistency of outcomes. Workforce development efforts need to be enduring and systemic, not one-off.

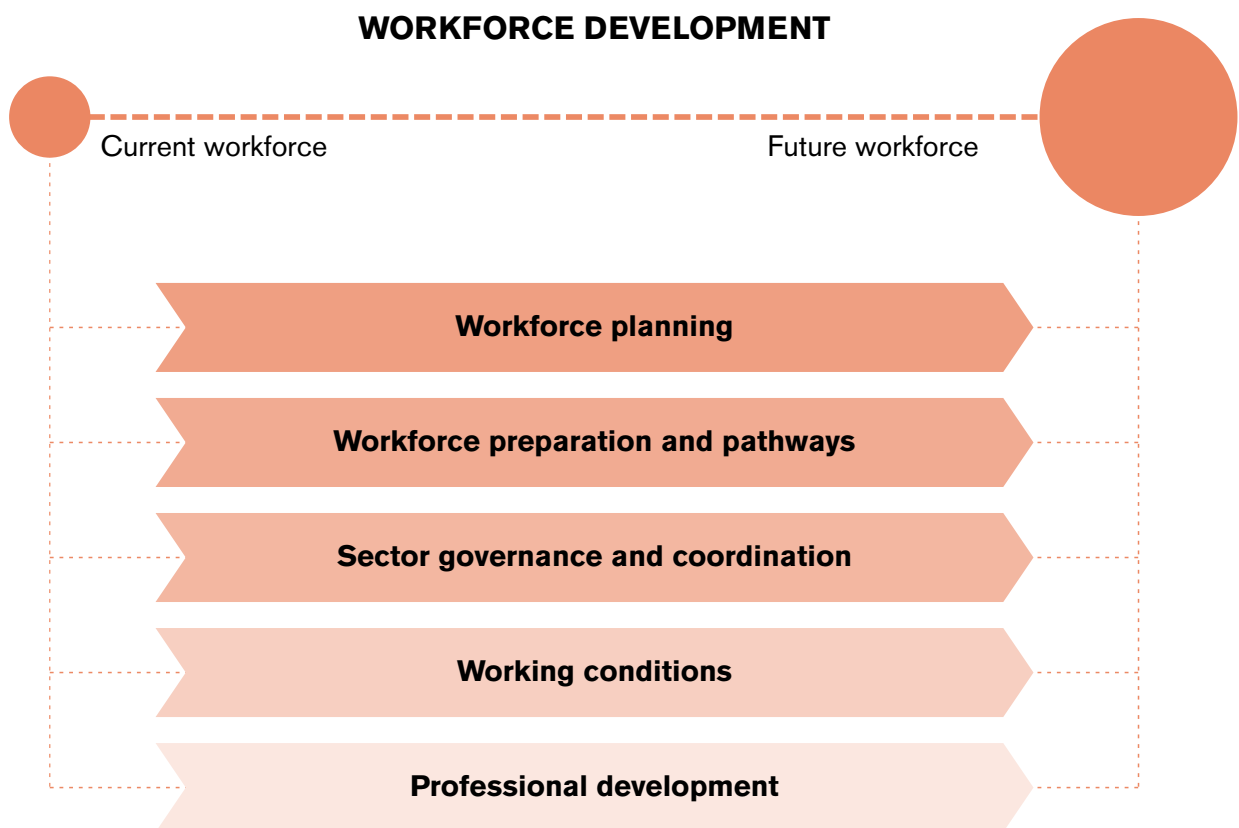
While there are many workforce development models, the following interconnected elements are particularly relevant to the development of an emerging sector like the primary prevention of violence against women (refer to [Figure 1](#)).

- **Workforce planning:** An analysis of the current and future supply and demand of the workforce is critical to support forecasting of the skill and size needs of the prevention workforce across the different states and territories and intersecting sectors, which will support the development of pathways and other mechanisms to grow the workforce. This also means development of consistent and uniform practice standards and capabilities.
- **Workforce preparation and pathways:** This includes pre-service, undergraduate and postgraduate accredited training and education that supports the entry or transition of new workers into the sector as well as the upskilling or career progression of existing workers.
- **Sector governance and coordination:** Peak bodies and professional associations can help to create a common identity of prevention professionals, establish shared standards of practice, and drive advocacy to represent the professional interests of the sector.
- **Working conditions:** Pay and conditions, job satisfaction, and health and wellbeing all play an important role in the attraction and retention of the prevention workforce.
- **Professional development:** Appropriate and tailored professional development and capability building initiatives such as training, mentoring and learning networks help to deepen the skills of the existing workforce, support leadership development, and broaden the reach of prevention practice to emerging prevention professionals and potential partner organisations nationwide.

Professionalisation, broadly defined as encompassing these five elements, is a critical element of workforce development. Without this scope, developing the workforce is likely to be focused on growth and skills rather than all the elements that are needed to build a sector into a high-quality, sustainable profession. Current initiatives to address some of these workforce development elements, including opportunities for improvement, are explored in [section 4](#).

**Figure 1**  
The interconnected elements involved in  
workforce development

Refer to [alternative text for Figure 1](#) on page 59.



## Why is workforce development necessary to prevent violence against women?

Violence against women is a serious and prevalent problem in Australia. An average of one woman a week is killed by a current or former partner<sup>2</sup> and one in four Australian women has experienced violence inflicted by an intimate partner since the age of 15.<sup>3</sup> However, violence against women is preventable and there is a long-term commitment by governments in Australia to reduce the incidence of violence.<sup>4</sup>

Violence against women is underpinned by gender inequality and other forms of discrimination. Preventing this violence requires the whole population to be involved in changing the social conditions that produce and drive it, using a primary prevention approach. More detail about what drives violence and what constitutes a primary prevention approach is provided in [section 2](#).

For an approach to primary prevention to be effective in the short term and sustained over the long term, it requires both a workforce with a high level of specialisation in preventing violence against women and a much larger, multidisciplinary workforce that can deliver prevention work in different settings, sectors and communities across local, state and territory, and national levels. This includes:

- policy makers, researchers, communicators, evaluators and practitioners whose professional role is primarily dedicated to primary prevention
- professionals who work across multiple disciplines and undertake prevention activities as just one element of their work (for example, teachers who deliver respectful relationships education, human resources professionals leading workplace prevention programs, or sports administrators who are leading club-based prevention activity).

The workforce model that informs this is described on [page 25](#).

Building pathways to specialisation for professionals in the prevention workforce is critical, as these specialists play a leadership role in:

- providing technical assistance and guidance to diverse stakeholders and the workforce who undertake prevention work as one part of their role, within their own setting/sector, in particular contexts, or within a particular community
- driving or supporting policy, regulatory and legislative reform
- developing and delivering professional development initiatives and education and training
- informing and supporting quality assurance mechanisms
- enacting advocacy and civil society leadership.

*Change the story*, Australia's shared framework for the prevention of violence against women, identifies that to create a mature, robust, representative and sustainable prevention sector, investment is needed in the workforce and the development of supporting infrastructure. Any investment should focus on building the capacity of the current prevention workforce, supporting pathways into the sector, and increasing the overall size of the workforce across Australia.<sup>5</sup> Infrastructure to support long-term and strategic workforce development could include:

- a national agenda or strategy to support coordination at the state and territory level
- research and data collection mechanisms to increase understanding of the workforce, its strengths and needs, and to inform workforce planning
- tools and instruments that establish a shared understanding of the prevention workforce and that articulate and support the skills and capabilities required for this work – for example, a capability framework, practice standards or codes of practice
- that inform shared conceptualisation and design of roles and positions
- the creation of dedicated education and training pathways for prevention specialists and those interested in leading setting/sector-based work

- the creation of pathways and upskilling opportunities for the broader prevention workforce
- access to high-quality and affordable professional development, including peer and collaborative learning opportunities.

Any sector development infrastructure must include developing a shared understanding of the prevention workforce, to support nationwide recognition and understanding of the workforce and work. The workforce must also be multidisciplinary and developed in a way that values and reflects diversity, intersectionality and lived experience. This means workforce development activities can:

- be nationally led but developed in consultation and partnership with the intended participants and key stakeholders in their preferred modes and modalities
- support and connect state and territory workforce development initiatives across Australia, to ensure consistency while respecting the diverse needs of the workforce
- build on existing capacity and opportunity and integrate diverse experiences, knowledge and quality practice, including those that help to engage more men in prevention
- work across the socio-ecological model (including maintaining a focus on the structural factors which influence workforce development).

## Principles for developing the prevention workforce

As part of the development of this paper, Our Watch identified a number of principles that can guide workforce development initiatives, whether they are led by government or prevention sector organisations. These principles were identified through analysing the evidence that informed the development of this paper, including national prevention frameworks developed by Our Watch. This section outlines four principles that can be followed in building the prevention workforce and associated infrastructure and which are expanded on throughout the paper.

## Quality primary prevention

Efforts to increase the size, skills and coordination of the national prevention workforce need to adhere to primary prevention practice principles identified in leading evidence and national prevention frameworks produced by Our Watch, such as:

- [\*Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women in Australia\*](#)
- [\*Changing the picture: A national resource to support the prevention of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their children\*](#)
- [\*Changing the landscape: A national resource to prevent violence against women and girls with disabilities\*](#)
- [\*Men in focus: Unpacking masculinities and engaging men in the prevention of violence against women\*](#)
- [\*Counting on change: A guide to prevention monitoring\*](#)
- [\*Tracking progress in prevention: A national monitoring report on progress towards the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia.\*](#)

A focus on gendered power relations, intersectional practice, critical reflection and the need to partner across multiple settings and sectors is essential in workforce development strategies. The prevention workforce is currently highly feminised, undervalued and underpaid. The status and invisibility of the prevention workforce reflects gendered hierarchies seen across the broader economy, which account for the gender pay gap and the underrepresentation of women in leadership roles. These stereotypes and roles need to be challenged by the people and organisations that have the influence to grow a stronger, broader and more connected prevention workforce across Australia.

*Change the story* states that primary prevention should be undertaken by ‘those who can work in and with the wide range of population groups and communities who make up the Australian population’.<sup>6</sup> Given the diverse and complex ways in which gender inequality intersects with other forms of oppression and impacts

on groups of women differently, a workforce that applies knowledge of intersectionality is essential for effective and sustainable primary prevention activity to prevent violence against all women in Australia.

## Diversity and representation

Ensuring that the prevention workforce is diverse and representative of the Australian population is critical. It is essential that workforce development initiatives take an intersectional approach that addresses systemic barriers and inequalities that some communities may face in accessing prevention education, training and employment. This has been widely recognised, including by the Victorian Family Violence Reforms (informed by the Royal Commission into Family Violence), which highlighted the importance of prevention programs for diverse communities being led, designed and delivered by members of those communities, to ensure these prevention activities are relevant and meaningful for those target populations.<sup>7</sup> It is essential that workforce development activities are tailored and designed to meet the unique historical and contextual needs of communities and sectors, and that there is a strong focus on ensuring culturally safe workplaces and frameworks to support recruitment, retention and worker wellbeing.

## Safety and support

Prevention work can be very challenging as it centres around discussions of violence against women, gender inequality, power, privilege and oppression, for the purpose of challenging the status quo. Workers need to feel connected to each other and supported by their organisations in order to overcome the unique challenges they face. All employers have an obligation to ensure their workers' safety, and in the context of the prevention workforce this needs to include the psychosocial impacts of working to address systemic inequality and discrimination. A positive and supportive work environment is strengthened by best practice and culturally safe peer support, opportunities for reflective practice, and health, safety and wellbeing tools to support professionals in their work.<sup>8</sup>

## Ongoing and sustainable investment

Sustainable, long-term funding is required for workforce development to ensure increased stability within the sector, a reduction in staff turnover, and greater opportunities for career mentoring, leadership training and succession planning. To date, workforce development investment has largely been short term and inconsistent, and usually an indirect outcome of program-based funding. While this programmatic funding has led to more professionals doing prevention work, activity-based funding is unlikely to support a sustainable workforce across Australia, nor a sophisticated sector that can deliver prevention work at the scale required and called for in *Change the story*.

Resources also need to be allocated on an equity basis, including for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and LGBTIQ communities, women with disabilities, and migrant and refugee women. Investment will help to make prevention workers across all communities and contexts more visible, which will support development of the sector.

### In summary

- Workforce development includes a whole-of-sector approach to building, attracting and retaining a skilled and capable workforce to meet current and future demand.
- Given the population-wide and multi-setting nature of prevention work, the prevention workforce needs to be multidisciplinary, diverse, and comprise of many roles.
- Efforts to grow and deepen the prevention workforce nationally should consider the four principles above for a sustainable, consistent and coherent approach.

# 2

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## Primary prevention of violence against women

To understand the role workforce development plays in the primary prevention of violence against women, it is necessary to understand what primary prevention means. Here we provide a brief overview of the Australian policy and practice context.

### Introduction to primary prevention

Primary prevention aims to stop violence against women from occurring in the first place. It works to change the deep-seated gendered drivers of this violence, and the underlying social condition of gender inequality in which it arises.

While response and early intervention approaches work with individuals who are already experiencing or perpetrating violence (or at risk of doing so), primary prevention is a whole-of-population approach that aims to deliver a future where all women and their children live free from violence. For a visual model of the relationship between primary prevention and other work that addresses violence against women, refer to [Figure 2](#).

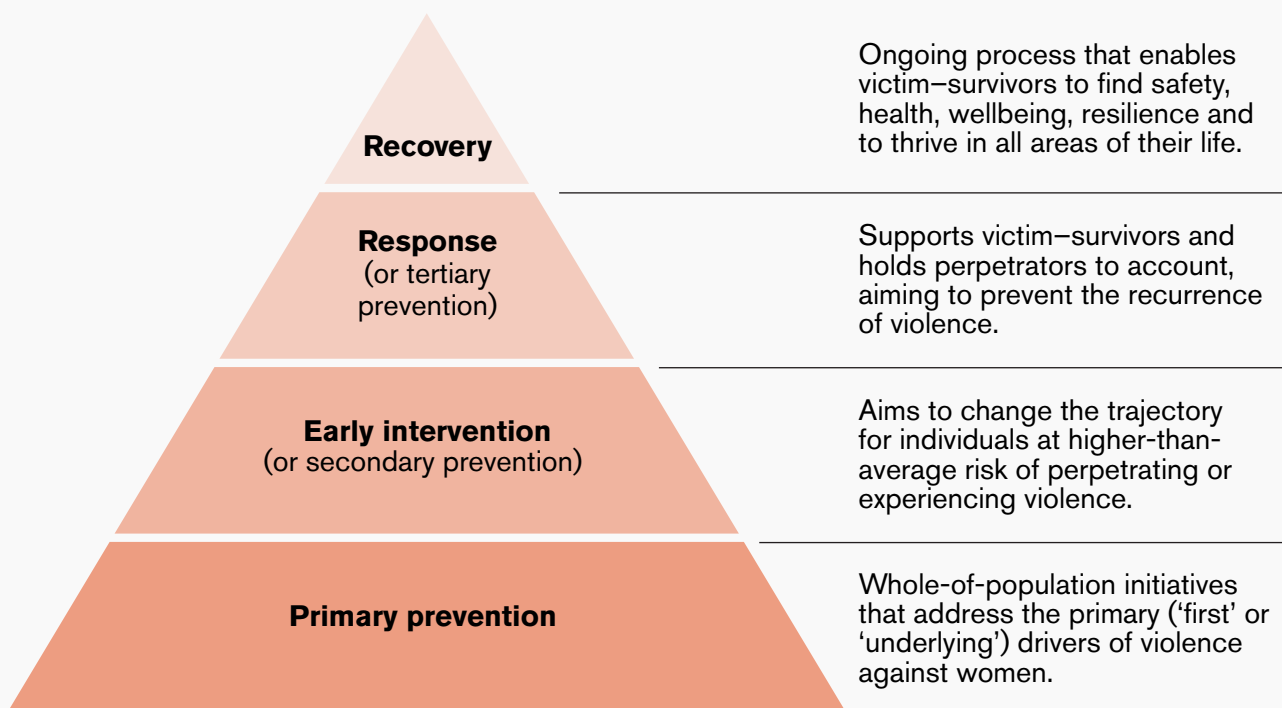
Primary prevention, early intervention and response are inextricably linked – and mutually reinforcing. For primary prevention to be effective, a well-resourced and well-functioning response and early intervention sector is needed. Conversely, to decrease demand on response services in the long term, it is important to resource evidence-based primary prevention strategies that address the gendered drivers of violence and ultimately reduce the prevalence of violence.

Many individuals and organisations working to address violence against women may take a holistic approach and work across the whole spectrum of activity (primary prevention, early intervention and response), in order to meet the needs of their local communities.

**Figure 2**

The relationship between primary prevention and other work to address violence against women

Refer to [alternative text for Figure 2](#) on page 59.



Source: Our Watch's [Change the story](#).



## Australia's shared prevention framework

Australia's shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children, *Change the story*, identifies gender inequality as setting the necessary social context in which violence against women occurs. The framework demonstrates that there are particular expressions or manifestations of gender inequality that are most consistently associated with higher levels of violence against women.

The **gendered drivers of violence** against women outlined in the framework are:

- Driver 1.** Condoning of violence against women.
- Driver 2.** Men's control of decision-making and limits to women's independence in public and private life.
- Driver 3.** Rigid gender stereotyping and dominant forms of masculinity.
- Driver 4.** Male peer relations and cultures of masculinity that emphasise aggression, dominance and control.

*Change the story* also shows that while gender inequality is always influential as a driver of violence against women, it cannot be considered in isolation, and violence is not experienced in the same way by every woman. Other forms of systemic social, political and economic inequality, discrimination and disadvantage influence and intersect with gender inequality in complex ways, and at all levels of society, and should also be considered and addressed to prevent violence against women. This includes, but is not limited to, racism, homophobia, the impacts of colonisation, and ableism.

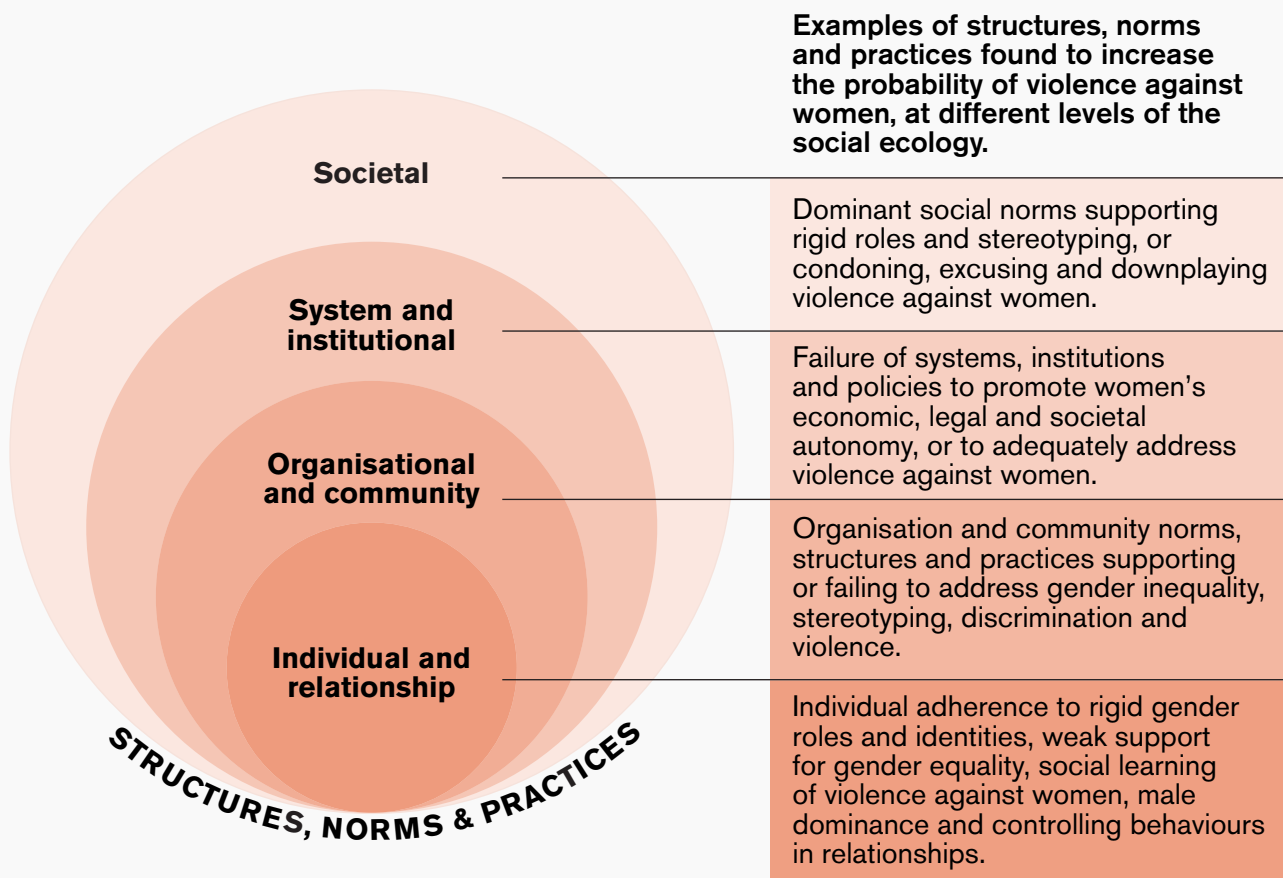
The gendered drivers can manifest in a number of ways – through norms, practices and structures – across multiple levels of society, including at the individual, organisational, community and institutional level. This model of conceptualising the scope and reach of violence against women is known as the socio-ecological model (refer to [Figure 3](#)), which recognises that no single factor leads to violence against women, but rather it is the result of interactions among many factors at different levels.

Addressing these underlying drivers of violence against women and the social context in which violence occurs is the hallmark of a primary prevention approach. *Change the story* identifies **eight essential actions** needed to address violence against women:

- Action 1.** Challenge the condoning of violence against women.
- Action 2.** Promote women's independence and decision-making in public life and relationships.
- Action 3.** Build new social norms that foster personal identities not constrained by rigid gender stereotypes.
- Action 4.** Support men and boys in developing healthy masculinities and positive, supportive male peer relationships.
- Action 5.** Promote and normalise gender equality in public and private life.
- Action 6.** Address the intersections between gender inequality and other forms of systemic and structural oppression and discrimination, and promote broader social justice.
- Action 7.** Build safe, fair and equitable organisations and institutions by focusing on policy and systems change.
- Action 8.** Strengthen positive, equal and respectful relations between and among women and men, girls and boys, in public and private spheres.

**Figure 3**  
The socio-ecological model of violence against women

Refer to [alternative text for Figure 3](#) on page 60.



Source: Our Watch's [Change the story](#).

## Prevention practice in Australia

*Change the story* explains that quality primary prevention requires a shared, national approach comprising mutually reinforcing efforts that together:

- address the multiple gendered drivers and social context of violence
- are implemented in different settings, across the life course, and using a variety of techniques
- target change at different levels – individual and interpersonal, organisational and community, system and institutional, and societal.

Prevention practice is most effective when a range of complementary and multifaceted techniques are used. *Change the story* identifies the following proven and promising techniques, highlighting the importance of developing a broad workforce that has skills and expertise in a range of settings and sectors, and across a variety of disciplines. These techniques are:<sup>9</sup>

- direct participation programs
- community mobilisation and strengthening
- organisational development
- communications and social marketing
- civil society advocacy.

The large-scale and embedded nature of gender inequality also means that prevention work needs to occur across a range of settings (the places where people live, learn, work and play), reaching diverse age groups and communities. Settings include educational institutions such as schools and universities, workplaces, unions, businesses, leisure venues, sports clubs and the media.

The investment in prevention funding and activity has not been spread evenly across all settings and sectors; nor has the application of the proven and promising techniques. Education and care settings, tertiary education institutions, workplaces, sports and the media have had the most focus up to this point, and they are also identified as priority settings in *Change the story*. Health and community services and faith-based contexts have strengthening areas of work; and the aged

care, disability care, arts, popular culture, public spaces and legal and justice contexts are still emerging.

For prevention activity (and the associated workforce) to grow, there need to be intentional efforts to ensure that evidence-based practice occurs in all of the settings and techniques identified in *Change the story*. Prevention work needs to be coordinated across the socio-ecological model to ensure that change is seen not only in individual behaviours and attitudes but in organisational and institutional cultures and systems.

It is also essential that the prevention workforce is able to draw from, and contribute to, the evidence base, as well as adapt their practice in response to the evidence that is emerging. This includes ensuring there are people who specialise in evaluation and monitoring, as well as processes for continual professional development, and processes and capacity to support quality assurance and continual innovation.

## National policy context

In 2010, the Council of Australian Governments established the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and Their Children 2010–2022* (the first National Plan) to bring together the efforts of all governments (Australian, state and territory) aimed at making a real and sustained reduction in the levels of violence against women. Primary prevention was a key focus of the first National Plan and its four Action Plans. This focus has been crucial to driving national commitment and action on primary prevention during the life of the first National Plan.

‘Strengthen the workforce’ was one of four ‘foundations for change’ spanning the Action Plans of the first National Plan.<sup>10</sup> The Fourth Action Plan (2019–2022) included a focus on workforce development, both for the prevention of, and response to, violence against women. Notably, it had an emphasis on increased workforce capability to deliver holistic, trauma-informed and culturally safe supports for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their children.<sup>11</sup>

The [National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032: Ending gender-based violence in one generation](#) (National Plan) contains explicit references to workforce development for the prevention workforce (as well as the workforce that responds to violence against women). The National Plan names strengthening the sector and building the workforce as essential to addressing structural barriers to achieving change necessary to reduce prevalence rates and end violence against women in one generation. The Plan recognises that the prevention workforce needs to be multidisciplinary, encompassing technical and content experts that can drive systems level change, and sector-based professionals and deliver prevention initiatives in their organisation and settings. By building the prevention workforce, prevention will be embedded every setting and sector.

## State and territory policy contexts

Since 2010, primary prevention has been incorporated into most key strategies or policies at a state and territory level, to varying extents. Most state and territory government policies on violence against women, domestic and family violence and sexual violence take a gendered approach, refer to the gendered drivers of violence against women, and identify primary prevention as a priority.

A key driver for workforce development for both prevention and response has been reforms led by state and territory governments, such as inquiries, Royal Commissions or other large policy reforms. An example of this is the [Victorian government’s ten-year industry plan for the family violence sector](#), which recognises the need to grow both the response and prevention workforces, and which was a recommendation of the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence.

Nationally, investment in workforce development has largely been in the response sector workforce. However, under the [Fourth Action Plan of the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and Their Children 2010–2022](#) there was investment in Our Watch

to support the development and upskilling of the prevention workforce.<sup>12</sup> Development of a distinct prevention workforce has not been a strong component of government investment across jurisdictions. However, the need for a skilled and diverse workforce has become clearer, and has been indirectly supported by government investment in prevention initiatives more broadly. In jurisdictions where governments have funded grant schemes, funding has been provided to non-government organisations to undertake prevention activities. Some of these grants have also included learning and peer support activities for the workforce implementing the grant activities, such as training and communities of practice. When suitably resourced, these professional learning activities can play a role in helping to increase the size and skill of the prevention workforce.

## In summary

- All primary prevention needs to be guided by national, evidence-based frameworks which recognise that a whole-of-society approach is required to stop violence before it starts.
- Primary prevention work includes any activities that aim to address one or more of the gendered drivers of violence against women, and proven and promising approaches to do so are evolving as new evidence emerges.
- While there are national frameworks aimed at reducing violence against women, there are inconsistent approaches to, and funding for, primary prevention workforce development across jurisdictions.

# 3

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## Understanding the national prevention workforce

As the prevention of violence against women is given greater priority in the national social policy agenda, the size, shape, capabilities and characteristics of its workforce are becoming increasingly identifiable. Further work is required, however, to better understand, support and coordinate this emerging workforce.

### What we know about the current prevention workforce

Given the relatively new approach of primary prevention,<sup>13</sup> there is currently limited information available about the prevention workforce. The information that is available is primarily based on very small sample sizes or is focused on the broader ‘violence against women/family violence’ workforce, which includes both prevention and response professionals. More is known about the size and scale of the response workforce in Australia as it is a more established sector. This information can provide a useful guide in the absence of prevention-specific data. However, this lack of comprehensive data about the current prevention workforce is a clear gap, and there is also no data or modelling regarding the future workforce, or on how to support workforce growth. This should be identified as a priority area in any national or state/territory workforce development strategy.

Broadly speaking, through engaging stakeholders, we know that the prevention workforce in Australia currently comprises a relatively small but dedicated group of professionals who are focused on a range of activities across the socio-ecological model that seek to address one or more of the gendered drivers of violence against women outlined in *Change the story*. Some have been working in the space for over a decade; many more have been working in the field for less than a few years.

It is important to note that while some professionals may work in both the primary prevention and the gender equality workforce, the prevention workforce is distinct from the wider gender equality workforce. Formal gender equality efforts are not considered violence prevention in and of themselves as they do not always specifically seek to address all the gendered drivers of violence against women. However, they ‘are an important foundation for prevention because they help address the underlying social context of gender

inequality that gives rise to violence against women and enables it to thrive'.<sup>14</sup>

While it is challenging to estimate the size of the current prevention workforce in Australia, there are approximately 300–500 people in Victoria,<sup>15</sup> which constitutes the biggest proportion of the national workforce.<sup>1</sup> The workforce is smaller in other states and territories, all at varying levels of understanding, experience and skills. Refer to [page 23](#) for information we know about the prevention workforce.

Primary prevention workers operate in complex and frequently unknown contexts, and are often building the evidence and practice knowledge as they do the work. This relates to a number of factors such as the changing socio-political environment and funding context, the nature of resistance and backlash to gender equality and primary prevention initiatives, and the fact that work to address norms, practices and structures needs to be tailored to each context and audience to be effective.

## Workforce diversity

An analysis of the data that does exist on the prevention workforce highlights that it is not representative of the diversity of the Australian population and, in particular, of women who face multiple forms of inequality and discrimination. Structural inequality – which negatively affects women who face multiple forms of discrimination, including their ability to access education and employment – is likely to be a key reason for this. While there is limited research on this within the prevention and response sectors, other factors may contribute, including culturally unsafe workplaces, structural discrimination in recruitment and employment practices,<sup>16</sup> vicarious trauma and burnout, and experiential knowledge and lived experience not being recognised as legitimately informing prevention initiatives.

There is also very low representation of men in the workforce. This in part reflects the history of work to prevent violence against women in Australia (which has been led for the most part by the feminist movement over many decades), the types of industries that practitioners have been drawn from (for example, female-dominated industries such as community and social services), and results from the gendered nature of many occupations that undertake prevention and response work.<sup>17</sup> It also highlights the importance of women's leadership and the development of feminist theory over many decades to address violence against women.

While increasing the number of men working in prevention is a goal, it is essential this occurs carefully and adheres to key principles to ensure that gender inequality is not unintentionally replicated and reinforced. Given that much violence prevention work involves challenging and reframing dominant expressions of masculinity, there are particular ways that men can engage in these conversations that will support effective prevention and accountability to women and girls. This is explored in the [\*Men in focus practice guide: Addressing masculinities and working with men in the prevention of men's violence against women\*](#). The guide highlights how self-awareness and critical reflection required of practitioners in this work, especially men, as well as those with other forms of privilege, challenge and transform the structures, norms and practices of inequality and discrimination in our society. This can in turn overcome some of the resistance and backlash referred to above.

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1 It is worth noting that this figure is based on respondents to the Victorian [\*2019–20 Census of Workforces that Intersect with Family Violence: Primary Prevention Workforce\*](#). The Victorian census defines the prevention workforce as comprising two groups with varying roles. These are practitioners (those who specialise in designing, implementing and monitoring actions to prevent family violence) and contributors (those located within specific sectors or disciplines where participation in preventing family violence may be a part of their role, but is not their primary focus). For the purposes of the Census, practitioners were the key audience and contributors were not in scope.

**Figure 4**  
What we know about the prevention workforce  
in Australia

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## GENDER

It is a predominantly female workforce. According to a survey of the Victorian prevention workforce in 2019, 85 per cent identified as female. However, a growing trend of more workers identifying as male is evident when these figures are compared to those of the survey undertaken in 2017.<sup>18</sup>

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## LOCATION AND SETTING

The workforce is located predominantly in particular states (primarily Victoria). According to a survey conducted by Our Watch, 65 per cent of respondents work in health, family and community services, with the next biggest cohort working across government, workplaces and education and care settings.<sup>19</sup>

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## EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

The workforce is highly qualified. Three-quarters of respondents to an Our Watch survey hold a bachelor degree or higher qualification, with just over half of respondents reporting that their highest qualification did not include any content about primary prevention of violence against women or gender equality.<sup>20</sup> Common informal pathways into primary prevention include qualifications in humanities, law, health promotion and public health, gender studies, education, community development, youth work and public policy.<sup>21</sup>

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## FOCUS

According to an Our Watch survey, approximately a quarter of the workforce focus solely on primary prevention, a third focus at least half their work on prevention, and for 16 per cent, primary prevention comprises less than half of their work.<sup>22</sup>

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## ROLES AND ACTIVITIES

The workforce hold a diversity of roles including policy, research, advocacy, program design and delivery, evaluation, communications, and capability building/education/training. This is spread across a number of sectors such as the public service, education institutions, the private sector and corporations and others identified in *Change the story*. The core activities most frequently undertaken include developing and maintaining partnerships and networks, project management, and planning and implementing primary prevention initiatives.<sup>23</sup>

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## Context of the COVID-19 pandemic

Since the COVID-19 pandemic began there has been a significant increase in reports of family violence and violence against women in Australia and throughout the world, with the United Nations dubbing the higher prevalence of violence against women as the ‘Shadow Pandemic’.<sup>24</sup> While this has impacted the response sector significantly, it has also had a number of direct and indirect consequences on the primary prevention workforce.

In research undertaken by Gender and Disaster Pod and commissioned by Respect Victoria looking at the Victorian prevention workforce,<sup>25</sup> many Victorian prevention workers reportedly took up additional duties during the pandemic related to responding to violence against women, or the delivery of online programs and services for clients. However, this was generally not supported with additional resources to ensure their primary prevention activities continued. For example, one research participant reported that the primary prevention focus of their role dropped from 30 per cent to 5 or 10 per cent of their work, and it was a struggle to maintain gender equality on their organisation’s agenda.

Alternatively, some research participants reported that the new attention to family violence in general during the pandemic (for example, through the media) and an emphasis on response meant they had more opportunities to increase awareness of the importance of gender equality and primary prevention in their organisations. Those who shifted to a greater response focus said they benefited from broadening their program knowledge, and increased their access to new networks and decision-making forums.

In terms of working from home, many participants reported benefits such as flexibility and an increase in organisational efficiencies through the use of online platforms. However, the report cautions about the need to ensure

worker safety and support in the context of a shift in work focus, added duties and the loss of incidental interactions with colleagues in the pandemic environment. Furthermore, building and maintaining trust and meaningful relationships with stakeholders can be a challenge when working exclusively online.

The report also highlighted the added burden on women of unpaid work, childcare and home schooling, which contributed to the amplification of the gendered division of labour during the pandemic. Given that the majority of prevention workers identify as female, it will be important for employers of prevention professionals to be aware of the workplace health and safety aspects of this new reality.

## Conceptual model for understanding the prevention workforce in Australia

A whole-of-society approach to preventing violence against women requires a multidisciplinary and diverse workforce with expertise in a range of settings and prevention techniques. This includes both specialist and generalist workers who undertake prevention activities. Specialist workers are those whose substantive role and expertise is in primary prevention. Generalist workers are those with expertise and substantive roles in a range of sectors and settings who undertake some prevention activities as part of their role. This includes, but is not limited to, teachers delivering respectful relationships education in classrooms, human resources officers, community development workers, local government officers, diversity and inclusion specialists, journalists, sports administrators, and marketing and communication specialists.

Our Watch has developed a conceptual model for understanding the national prevention workforce (refer to [Figure 5](#)). This includes four distinct groupings of professionals who are currently,<sup>2</sup> or could in the future, work in primary prevention.

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2 Noting that these current staff identify their work as prevention or believe they are part of the prevention workforce, and hold professional roles that are focused in part or wholly on addressing one or more of the drivers of violence against women as articulated in *Change the story*.



**Group 1 – Technical and content experts:** these professionals are focused solely on prevention and they hold significant depth of knowledge and experience in prevention. They are often focused on systems change or scaling up of prevention initiatives, play a leadership role in strategy, programming, policy, advocacy, research, evaluation or practice, and set strategic agendas. They comprise the smallest proportion of the workforce but are fundamental to the success of this work.

**Group 2 – Specialist primary prevention professionals:** roles are significantly or entirely focused on prevention, and these professionals often have substantial experience in the design and delivery of prevention activities. They have a sound understanding of the evidence base, but less experience in applying it at setting, sector, state or system levels.

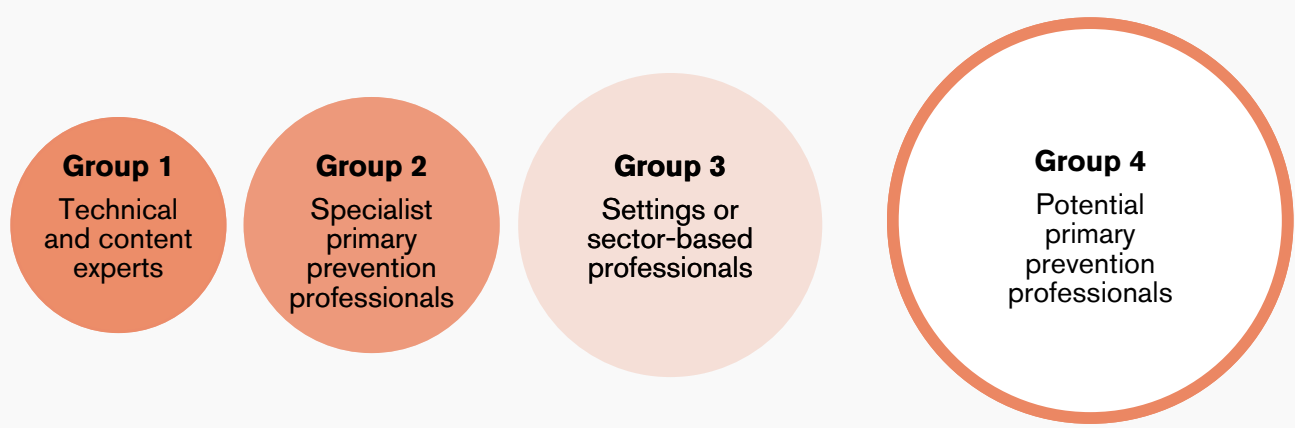
**Group 3 – Settings or sector-based professionals:** these professionals tailor and deliver prevention activity as part of their broader role, but have other primary or specialist expertise or qualification (for example, teaching, human resources, sports administration, journalism, family violence response). These workers comprise the largest proportion of the workforce.

**Group 4 – Potential primary prevention professionals:** these are people (employed or volunteering) who may be interested in addressing violence against women but need further motivation, opportunity, support and guidance to start their journey as a prevention professional.

**Figure 5**  
A conceptual model for understanding the prevention workforce in Australia

Refer to [alternative text for Figure 5](#) on page 60.

### PREVENTION WORKFORCE IN AUSTRALIA



It is harder to define the specific skills and capabilities that pertain to each group. There is currently no shared framework, such as a capability framework or similar, that defines the skill requirements of the national prevention workforce. A survey conducted by Our Watch for the [Tracking progress in prevention](#) report found that professionals whose work is wholly or in part dedicated to prevention draw on a wide range of skills in their work to prevent violence against women, including those related to:

- facilitation, training and adult learning
- stakeholder engagement and relationships
- applying a gender lens (gender analysis)
- research and data analysis
- program design and development
- cultural awareness and cultural safety
- partnerships and collaboration
- communications, speaking and influencing
- evaluation
- understanding and applying theoretical frameworks
- analysis of gender inequality and other forms of discrimination and privilege.

An example of a specific approach in a particular context (universities) was the implementation of the [Upskilling pre-service professionals](#) project. Our Watch, in consultation with university partners, identified the following knowledge and skills capabilities as essential for universities when integrating primary prevention into some academic programs, such as primary education and occupational therapy.<sup>26</sup>

While this knowledge and these skills were developed for a particular context and a complex environment, they may be relevant for a diverse range of workers within the prevention workforce, in particular settings- or sector-based professionals (that is, Group 3) who have the opportunity to do some primary prevention work as part of their broader roles. Careful consideration is needed of the applicability and transferability of the identified skills and knowledge into other environments.

Primary prevention practitioners should also have basic skills in responding to disclosures of violence against women, and in providing

referral information to specialist family, domestic and sexual violence support services. This recognises that increasing awareness and understanding of violence against women through prevention activities can result in individuals feeling more comfortable to disclose their own experiences of violence to those delivering these activities.

There has been considerable work in Victoria to map the knowledge and skill requirements of prevention specialist and sector-based professionals (known respectively as ‘practitioners’ and ‘contributors’ in the Victorian context) via the development of the [Preventing family violence and violence against women capability framework](#). This framework is specific to the Victorian primary prevention workforce and has not been tested or applied in other jurisdictions. This framework is covered in more detail, refer to [Workforce planning](#).

A more precise understanding of how the above skills and knowledge are applied across roles, levels of experience and settings, and at a national level, requires further development.

### In summary

- From the data available, we know that the current prevention workforce is small, specialist, highly feminised, values-based and mainly concentrated in the state of Victoria.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has increased the demand for workers in response and prevention of violence, while also making visible some of the structural weaknesses of the workforce, such as low remuneration, contract insecurity and insufficient funding.
- Conceptually, there are four distinct groups that make up the current and future workforce and specific strategies are required for developing each.

**Figure 6**

Essential knowledge and skills when integrating primary prevention into academic programs, as identified in *Upskilling pre-service professionals to support the prevention of gender-based violence*

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## KNOWLEDGE

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Gender construction and reinforcement in society

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Gender stereotypes, assumptions and myths

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Socio-ecology of gender norms, practices and structures

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Intersectionality and systemic forms of discrimination and inequality

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Gender-based/family violence: statistics, facts and types of violence

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Drivers of gender-based violence

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Essential actions for addressing gender-based violence that are tailored to the discipline

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Locating gender equity within professional codes of conduct, ethics and accreditation standards

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Forms of resistance and backlash to gender equity initiatives

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## SKILLS

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Locate and identify own bias/beliefs/values and assumptions relating to key knowledge areas

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Increase capacity to engage in self-reflection relating to key knowledge areas

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Identify the drivers of gender-based violence within profession

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Identify systemic and structural forms of discrimination and abuse that influence how gender-based violence is experienced differently by different groups of women

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Apply an intersectional lens to work with individuals and communities

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Identify and call out sexism, harmful gender norms/stereotypes/violence-supporting behaviours and gender inequality related to professional role

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Identify opportunities to integrate prevention into professional role

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Respond to resistance and backlash when attempting social and behavioural change

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# 4

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## Building a strong national prevention workforce

From a review of workforce development literature, the following elements have been identified as key to workforce development broadly, as well as being particularly relevant for the prevention workforce and associated infrastructure and standards: workforce planning, workforce preparation and pathways, sector governance and coordination, professional development, and working conditions.

These elements are explored in this section, including their relevance to workforce development, their relevance to the primary prevention workforce, and examples of initiatives already occurring in Australia.

The elements have been considered in terms of how they relate to one another, and the importance of there being a staged and coordinated approach to workforce development by all prevention stakeholders.

### Workforce planning

Workforce planning is the process of analysing, forecasting and planning workforce supply and demand, assessing gaps, and determining workforce development strategies to ensure that a sector or industry has the right people –

with the right skills, in the right places, at the right time – to meet its objectives now and into the future. It also needs to consider potential future risks and uncertainties and develop and implement strategies to address these.

In the context of the prevention workforce, this means planning for a workforce that will support the development and implementation of prevention initiatives across jurisdictions, in line with the National Plan, and the reform appetite and expectations of the community.

Despite the essential role of the prevention workforce in building Australia's long-term capacity to prevent violence against women, there is currently no existing mechanism or coordinated approach for conducting appropriate workforce planning and sector development across the country. Prevention

of violence against women is a growing sector and there is a critical shortage of people with the expertise required. Additionally, workforce planning for prevention is complex, given the small and emerging nature of the sector, the small number of prevention roles currently available, uncertainty about future investments in prevention and associated roles, and limited data about the current workforce.

## Analysing workforce supply and demand

Workforce supply can be defined in terms of skills, capabilities and headcount required for the prevention workforce. This includes those currently employed in the prevention workforce, as well as the potential prevention workforce, who may work as specialists or in settings- or sector-based roles.

There are many workforce planning models, but a common one is to conduct a gap analysis of the workforce, based on current and future supply and demand data. This generally involves:

- determining what the current workforce resources are and how they will evolve over time
- developing specifications for the kinds, numbers and location of workers and managers needed to meet the demands of the sector
- determining what gaps exist between the current and projected workforce needs.<sup>27</sup>

As indicated above, there is limited data about the prevention workforce because there is no national survey or data collection tool to measure the number of people who work in prevention, nor to estimate how that number might change over time. There are, however, some fields of study that can support our understanding of the prevention workforce landscape.

The health care and social assistance industry is the sector that employs the majority of prevention workers and family violence response workers nationally. This includes professions and roles such as those in hospitals, social welfare support, social work and aged care. It is a large sector and is

expected to grow by 15 per cent between 2019 and 2024.<sup>28</sup> Workforce supply is a common challenge across the community services sector, particularly in areas experiencing large reforms, such as the disability sector and family violence prevention and response sectors.

In Victoria, the state government has conducted two workforce censuses of the family violence sector (the first in 2017 and the second in 2019–2020), including prevention and response workers. This instrument has supported a number of workforce planning initiatives such as the [\*Strengthening the foundations: First rolling Action Plan 2019–22\*](#) and the review of the [\*Preventing family violence and violence against women capability framework\*](#) being undertaken in 2022–2023 (refer to [page 30](#)). Drawing on this data, factors impacting workforce supply in the prevention context include:

- low remuneration in the prevention (and specialist family violence response) sector, which is linked to difficulties in attracting qualified staff as well as poor staff retention and high turnover
- challenges to attracting and retaining qualified and experienced staff in rural and regional areas
- lack of a consistent approach to training and professional development and career progression for the sector.<sup>29</sup>

While there are many constraints on workforce supply, there is an increasing demand for prevention work and for a prevention workforce to undertake this work. Governments are increasingly adopting stronger commitments to various forms of prevention activity. In Victoria in particular, the state government's high level of commitment to primary prevention is driving demand for skilled practitioners in the state. In other jurisdictions, governments are making commitments driven by a range of factors including their commitment to this issue, their communities' concerns regarding the issue, and in response to the National Plan, or other key frameworks such as the Australian Human Rights Commission's *Respect@Work* report into workplace sexual harassment.<sup>30</sup>

Implementing many of these activities and delivering on these commitments will require an expanded prevention workforce. In addition to governments, many other stakeholders are making commitments and showing interest in prevention activity in their field of work, such as primary, secondary and tertiary educational institutions, national and community-based sports organisations and corporate entities which are taking whole-of-organisation approaches to gender equality, inclusion and diversity. These efforts within the public, private and community sectors will also contribute to driving demand for prevention workers in the short, medium and long term.

## Capability frameworks

Capability frameworks are a key tool to support workforce planning which are commonly used across many industries and sectors. They provide a conceptual understanding of the specific types of skills, knowledge and attributes that are required or desired of the growing workforce, across different roles, levels of experience and in different settings and contexts. Capability frameworks inform a consistent approach for key stakeholders – including all levels of government, industry groups, education providers, employers, and current and future employees – to understand and work towards. They can support the development of position descriptions and role classifications, education pathways into the sector, and inform individuals professional development such as non-accredited training and communities of practice.

Capabilities are the knowledge, skills and abilities required by individuals to perform their roles efficiently and effectively. A capability framework is an instrument to identify the critical factors or capabilities required now and in the future for high performance.<sup>31</sup> Capability frameworks can guide and support the development of the current and future prevention workforce by:

- articulating clearly the knowledge and skills needed to plan, implement and evaluate initiatives for the prevention of violence against women efficiently, effectively and appropriately

- creating a shared understanding and language of key concepts and practices
- clarifying expectations for workers along a continuum/pathway
- shaping training and professional development programs and qualifications to make them relevant for the work carried out in the field
- informing employment practices such as training and professional development programs, development of job descriptions, and appraisal processes
- contributing to greater recognition and validation of the knowledge and skills of the professionals in the prevention of violence against women sector, and the value of their work
- identifying practice and learning gaps and improvement strategies at the organisational and sector levels.<sup>32</sup>

Capability frameworks have yet to be broadly utilised in the context of preventing violence against women. In late 2017, the Victorian government released the [\*Preventing family violence and violence against women capability framework\*](#). The Victorian framework contains knowledge and skill capability areas for both contributors and prevention practitioners, and defines four levels of practitioner – entry, mid, senior and expert. There are three foundational knowledge capabilities for both contributors and practitioners, followed by four capability areas for practitioners, with multiple abilities (skills) within each capability. However, because of the diverse range of professionals working in prevention, professionals may not identify as being part of the prevention workforce even though they are doing prevention work. This is particularly relevant for professionals who are not content or technical experts but are part of the ‘contributor’ workforce (refer to [Figure 5](#) for more information on the prevention workforce). The capability framework is currently being reviewed and updated and is due for release in 2023.

There are translatable and useful elements of the Victorian prevention capability framework that could be used to develop a consistent national approach to prevention capability and

workforce development. However, as some capabilities documented in the framework are unique to the state, size and regulation of the Victorian prevention sector, it is not a one-size-fits-all approach.

Capability frameworks can play a foundational and important role in the strategic direction of workplace planning and assist in the national consistency and coordination that is required for the prevention workforce. Sector perspectives on a national capability framework are mixed, with a recognition that the sector is varied and comprises of diverse histories, environments, strengths and challenges. An Our Watch consultation with key workforce development stakeholders in 2020 identified that there is a strong desire for the sector to be a driving force in any framework development, and acknowledgement that increased and consistent funding in workforce development will be required as a lever for key organisations to engage with and adopt a capability framework.

### **In summary**

- Workforce planning is a key component for developing primary prevention as a profession so that the increasing demand can be met with suitable workforce development strategies.
- More national and jurisdictional data is needed about the workforce to guide workforce planning. Undertaking processes such as a gap analysis to understand the state of the workforce and areas needing growth can help prioritise strategies to build the workforce.
- Capability frameworks are also useful in guiding workforce planning to inform other components of workforce development such as education pathways, common workforce identify, recruitment, and professional development.

# CASE STUDY

## WorkUP Queensland

From the family and domestic violence response sector, this example provides insights into how a non-government organisation can initiate the development of a strategic and supportive workforce development approach for a multifaceted, diverse and dispersed sector.

### BACKGROUND

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WorkUP Queensland (WorkUP) was created in May 2019 partnering with the state's specialist sexual violence, women's health, and domestic and family violence sector (188 services) in supporting a strong and skilled workforce. It was established by The Healing Foundation, in partnership with Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS), and is funded by the Queensland government as part of its response to the report *Not now, not ever: Putting an end to domestic and family violence in Queensland*.

The sector that WorkUP represents does not include organisations or programs focused solely on primary prevention of violence against women, but rather tertiary response and early intervention activities to address violence against women.

### APPROACH

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Through broad consultation across the state, they have co-designed regional and statewide workforce plans to guide workforce capacity and capability delivery, with the objectives of:

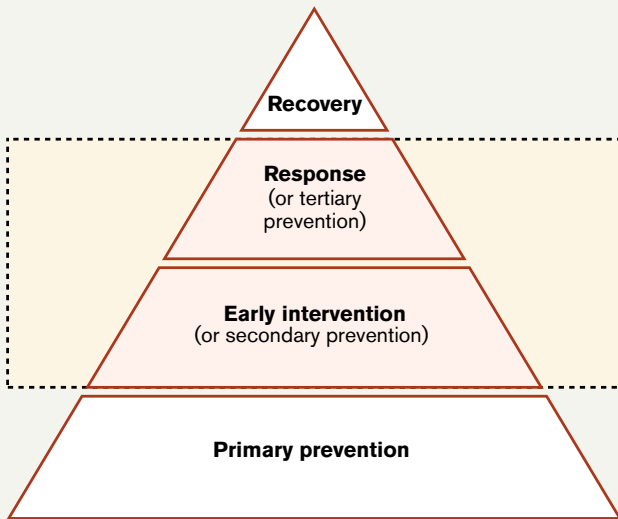
- growing the workforce
- retaining the workforce
- developing the workforce
- supporting the workforce
- connecting the workforce
- sustaining the workforce.

Across these areas, they have developed and implemented a wide range of initiatives, including an induction program developed by and for the sector, accredited and non-accredited professional development to support the transfer of research to knowledge, supervision and mentoring, scholarships for practitioners to undertake tertiary studies, and supporting services to implement the domestic and family violence practice standards and regulatory framework.<sup>3</sup> They have also developed a sector-focused capability framework to help organisations attract, recruit and manage staff.

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3 For more information on practice standards, refer to [page 39](#).





**Figure 7**

The relationship between different types of work to address violence against women

Refer to [alternative text for Figure 7](#) on page 60.

While a new service focusing on the workforce generated some initial scepticism from the sector, thorough and meaningful face-to-face consultation in the first year of the program helped to build relationships with key stakeholders and develop a shared roadmap of the sector's future. WorkUP also focused in the initial stages on their branding and strategic communications to ensure the sector could recognise and trust their approach to workforce development.

## LEARNINGS

The Healing Foundation's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership, trauma-aware and healing-informed practice also provides expertise to strengthen services' interactions with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients, as well as increasing the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff in the sector by supporting employers to create safe and inclusive places to work. This is supported by the expertise of ANROWS to facilitate evidence-based policy and practice.

Collaboration is another key principle of success. The WorkUP steering committee is supported by a [reference group](#) which is made up of stakeholders from domestic and family violence, sexual assault and women's health and wellbeing services across Queensland. WorkUP also facilitates sector connections through their Solidarity series, which focuses on creating spaces to explore opportunities for collaboration across the different response services, especially for women with disability, women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, who all face additional barriers to accessing family and sexual violence services.

## Workforce preparation and pathways

Diverse and flexible pathways to develop knowledge and skills are vitally important for any industry, to establish and maintain a skilled and adaptable workforce.

Creating and maintaining formal and informal pathways to education and employment is an important aspect of managing the supply of skilled workers. Some of these pathways start in the school years, where curriculum and career advice support the development of required employability skills and career awareness to guide the transition from school to work.<sup>33</sup> More formally, pathways can be created through the vocational education and training (VET) and higher education (university) systems, designed for young adult learners transitioning from school or between VET and higher education. They also meet the needs of existing workers who are looking to upskill or reskill from their current role.

In the short to medium term, accredited prevention training and education can be introduced and developed as a strategic component of workforce development, to increase the size and deepen the skills of the prevention workforce. Accredited training and education refers to the courses that are nationally recognised and meet quality assurance requirements, such as those provided via higher education and vocational education institutions.

This section will provide an overview of the current education and training pathways that exist in Australia for people interested in pursuing primary prevention as a career or a skill set.

### Qualifications and education pathways

Gender equality and primary prevention are increasingly seen as a skill set desired by many employers, and workers are increasingly expected to have this knowledge as part of their employability. Universities and vocational education institutions ultimately want to

ensure their students are workforce ready and qualified to meet the demands of the job.

Formal qualifications in Australia are organised in accordance with the [Australian Qualifications Framework](#) (AQF). This framework supports the development and maintenance of pathways which provide access to qualifications and assist people to move easily between different education and training sectors and the labour market.

AQF qualifications differ in the required depth of knowledge, level of skill, capacity to analyse and communicate information, ability to make independent judgments, and proficiency in organising others. Certificates I to IV are classified as ‘vocational education’. Bachelor, masters and doctoral degrees are classified as higher education. Diplomas and advanced diplomas can be classified as vocational or higher education, although most diploma students are in the vocational sector.

A Certificate I or II does not necessarily lead directly to a job and may be a pathway or preparatory program to another course, while Certificate III and IV holders have higher technical skills and can deal with a wider range of tasks. Certificate level courses support entry level employment as well as enabling existing workers to upskill in a new area. However, there is an ongoing challenge to distil complex and values-based education like primary prevention and gender equity into the competency-based format of the vocational education system.<sup>34</sup> Certificates III and IV are potentially best suited to upskill workers who have undertaken some post-secondary education or work experience, such as the settings- and sector-based prevention workforce. Compared to the upper certificates, diploma and advanced diploma holders are expected to have more specialised knowledge and solve more complex problems, and would therefore be provided a more comprehensive level of prevention training.

A bachelor degree graduate is expected to have a deep knowledge of underlying principles and concepts in a discipline, exercise critical thinking and judgment, and have more responsibility for their own learning. Given that

primary prevention concepts are influenced by social, economic and political theory drawn from academia, positioning at this AQF level may be better suited for stand-alone courses that allow the breadth and depth of knowledge and skill development of primary prevention which is required in particular for the specialist prevention workforce. There is also the opportunity to embed prevention practice more strongly into other undergraduate courses such as social work, health promotion and public health. Find more about embedding primary prevention content into existing courses on [page 36](#).

In addition to their ability to deliver specific courses, universities have shown leadership in addressing gender-based violence in their communities through the sector's partnership with Our Watch and the Victorian government to deliver Educating for Equality, a whole-of-institution approach to preventing gender-based violence. As providers of education to over 1.4 million students every year, universities can contribute significantly to developing a national prevention workforce.

## Prevention in tertiary education

Formal training and pathways for the prevention workforce are very much in their infancy, although in the last five years an increasing number of higher education and VET courses include skills, knowledge and competencies that focus on prevention of violence against women, either as stand-alone courses or as units within other disciplines.

While these have primarily been developed in Victoria and generated as a result of the family violence reforms, units are increasingly being developed in other states and territories. Much of this work is focused on training the response workforce, but there is growing interest and activity around the development of prevention units and courses. A number of university research alliances and networks focused on violence against women have also been established.<sup>35</sup>

A significant challenge in the development of accredited prevention training at the tertiary level is the uncertain degree of demand

for these courses. This includes demand and interest from potential students, as prevention as an approach to address violence against women [and](#) as a career is still largely unknown, and employment opportunities and pathways into the workforce are still emerging. In addition, it is still unclear whether organisations employing prevention workers (both currently and in the future) will require employees to have formal qualifications in prevention. Currently, most prevention roles require an undergraduate qualification in a related field of study such as gender studies, public health, health promotion, humanities, social work or community development. However, there may be a shift to a requirement for prevention-specific qualifications in the future as these are developed and promoted.

## Higher education pathways

As mentioned above, most prevention workers to date have entered the sector informally via a range of different disciplines such as humanities, law, health promotion and public health, gender studies, education, community development, youth work and public policy. This is likely because there is minimal overt teaching about gender and family violence at an undergraduate level.

More recently, universities across the country have introduced courses about family and sexual violence prevention and response. However, the majority of courses that focus on gender equality and/or violence prevention are only offered at a postgraduate level.

There are some specific units that explore gender, a gendered analysis, the gendered nature of violence and prevention theory that are situated in bachelor degrees. These units are often present in a Bachelor of Arts, or a Bachelor of Health Promotion, and are often electives that require students to self-select for enrolment and specialisation.

Victorian educational institutions have the largest offering of courses related to violence against women and family violence, likely due to the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence, the associated funding that has come from the Victorian government to

further research this topic, and the growing workforce that is increasingly requiring skills, knowledge and recognised qualifications. In 2022, the Family Violence and Sexual Assault Graduate Program (coordinated by the Centre for Workforce Excellence) trialled the inclusion of primary prevention roles. While Victoria has the largest offerings, there are also courses available at universities in Queensland, New South Wales, South Australia and Tasmania.

### **Embedding primary prevention content into existing courses**

A useful mechanism to embed primary prevention into existing courses is through professional bodies that can adapt accreditation standards to include the mandating of understanding the prevention of violence against women as a requirement into the profession. For example, the [Australian Nursing and Midwifery Accreditation Council](#) provides a set of agreed and contemporary practice standards for the profession, to ensure graduates can practice safely and competently with the required attitudes, knowledge and skills. Since 2017, its standards require the teaching of a unit 'specifically addressing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' history, health, wellness, culture and culturally safe practice'.<sup>36</sup> A similar item could be added to ensure a unit on the prevention of violence against women is included in all nursing programs.

There are significant opportunities for academic staff to incorporate primary prevention concepts into their teaching content and practice, as outlined in Our Watch's [Educators' guide to upskilling pre-service professionals to support the prevention of gender-based violence](#). This aligns with a whole-of-university approach to primary prevention, framed by the Our Watch [Educating for Equality](#) model, which recognises teaching and learning as a key domain where the prevention of violence against women can be promoted within the university context.

Undergraduate programs – for example, in primary and secondary education, health sciences, sports administration, journalism, criminology and law – lend themselves to the

inclusion of primary prevention key messaging. The [Educators' guide to upskilling pre-service professionals to support the prevention of gender-based violence](#) gives examples of how some drivers manifest in different fields and disciplines, and examples of how to address them. Practitioners in those fields can challenge the condoning of violence against women and avoid rigid gender stereotyping in their professional practice. Ongoing efforts in this area would significantly contribute to developing the size and skills of the settings- and sector-based workforce nationally.

### **Vocational education pathways**

There are few examples of prevention education currently available at VET level and there are opportunities to do more.

The Course in Gender Equity was registered on the VRQA list of accredited courses and accredited from August 2019 to July 2024. The course was developed by a consortium led by Women's Health Victoria and funded by the Victorian Department of Education and Training. The course curriculum includes knowledge about primary prevention and the gendered drivers of violence against women, and skills for responding to disclosures of violence, as well as other broader content related to gender analysis in workplace contexts. The project also developed comprehensive teaching and learning materials, student resources, a virtual workplace and a series of non-accredited micro-credentials, supported by research such as [Safe, respectful and inclusive learning environments can start with you](#), and a teaching toolkit for educators, [Supporting gender equity education: A research project to inform gender equity units of competency](#).

Prevention units aligned to the Victorian prevention capability framework are currently being developed by Swinburne University of Technology, with support from the Victorian Department of Education and Training and Family Safety Victoria.

While primary prevention is a complex subject, it is likely to align well with units and courses taught within the Community Services Training

Package, which is one of the largest training packages in Australia in terms of enrolment numbers. The Victorian Department of Education and Training strongly recommends the inclusion of specialised units relating to the identification and initial response to family violence and the identification, prevention and reporting of disability abuse (under the National Disability Insurance Scheme) within the Community Services Training Package nationally. The Australian Skills Quality Authority is supportive of this approach.<sup>37</sup>

## Strengthening educator and trainer capability

It is important that training and education delivered by higher education institutions, TAFEs and registered training organisations (RTOs) is developed and delivered by those with the necessary qualifications and a strong understanding of, and experience in, primary prevention work.<sup>38</sup>

However, research has also highlighted structural issues in engaging with staff in the higher education sector regarding embedding prevention content into their teaching. This includes the casualisation of teaching staff in the higher education sector, a culture that does not promote staff professional development, and the decentralised structure in universities.<sup>39</sup>

A capability development approach focused on teaching educators will build their skills and knowledge in primary prevention concepts and in appropriate pedagogical techniques for integrating the concepts into their teaching content and practice. This requires time and resources to allow staff to participate in professional development, as well as for ongoing coordination to scaffold and integrate key content across multiple units and years of study. In addition, leadership support, appropriate response policies, referral pathways, and support services for staff and students are essential before teaching about the prevention of violence against women in any course.<sup>40</sup>

The use of tertiary education staff to deliver content, instead of external guest teachers, facilitates whole-of-institution approaches and

enables more effective integration into the curriculum. Tertiary educators have consistent interactions and established relationships with students, and generally have the appropriate teaching skills to take new concepts and resources and incorporate them into their pedagogical practices.

However, it's estimated that the number of people with relevant qualifications and knowledge to deliver primary prevention content in universities and TAFEs across Australia is very small. For example, it's estimated that in Victoria there are only 70 trainers with the relevant skill set to deliver accredited family violence training, and there are likely to be less in other states and territories.<sup>41</sup> The investment in educator and training capability is essential to ensure that the primary prevention education and training delivered is high-quality, relevant, adheres to the evidence base, and draws from, and is informed by, current good practice in prevention.

Activities funded by the Victorian government to increase the pool of prevention trainers include:

- upskilling experienced TAFE trainers in content related to gender equality and preventing violence against women
- a program that supports specialist prevention workers to undertake a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment (through a subsidised scholarship) and participate in a specialised community of practice.<sup>42</sup>
- funding by the Victorian Government for a small number of prevention officers in TAFEs to build institutional prevention capability in the training sector.<sup>43</sup>
- funding of the Victorian development of the whole-of-institution approach [Respect and Equality in TAFE](#). Since this original phase of work, the Commonwealth Government has funded Our Watch to support a second phase working with other jurisdictions.

## In summary

- A wide range of both higher education and VET qualifications will be required to establish the education pathways necessary to support individuals to enter the prevention workforce, either as entry level courses or as specialisations for upskilling.
- There are a limited number of prevention-specific tertiary courses available, but this is slowly changing, especially at the postgraduate level.
- Thought needs to be given as to the suitable level of qualification required for different segments of the prevention workforce.
- As more prevention courses become available, consideration needs to be given to ensuring the appropriate supply of suitably qualified university and VET educators.

## Sector governance and coordination

*Tracking progress in prevention* outlines the need to implement a national workforce development strategy, ‘including processes for coordination and mechanisms to bring together key stakeholders to inform and contribute to the development of the primary prevention workforce’.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, coordination mechanisms could help to better link the primary prevention, response and gender equality sectors and workforces across the country.

There are currently no national governance or regulatory bodies that have a sole or primary focus on the prevention workforce in Australia. State/territory and national policy plans (which vary greatly according to their degree of focus on primary prevention) each have governance structures to support them. However, none of these plans are focused specifically on governance/regulation of the prevention workforce, and few have a focus on the development of skills included in their organisational and individual membership.

The following sections explore some key elements for strengthening the governance and coordination of the sector, including some relevant examples from across the country.

### Professional associations and peak bodies

A professional association is an organisation or group that acts as a peak body or umbrella for professionals working in the same or similar fields<sup>45</sup> (for example, the Australian Association of Social Workers, and the Public Health Association of Australia). They represent the interests of a particular industry and seek to further a particular profession and the interests of individuals in the profession. They can have individual and organisational members.

These associations can define the profession and assist members with ongoing professional development and research. They also seek to maintain standards within a profession, and represent and advocate for the interests

of their members to the government and community.<sup>46</sup> Most professional associations have a national leadership body providing the national advocacy and standards role, and state and territory branches providing professional development that is tailored to meet the needs in different contexts.

There is no specialist professional association for the primary prevention of violence against women or family violence response workforce. However, there may be professional associations that some workers are part of, depending on their qualifications, such as the Australian Association of Social Workers, or the Australian Health Promotion Association. In a national survey of response workers, 29 per cent of respondents said they were a member of a professional association.<sup>47</sup>

Peak bodies exist in many different Australian industries. It is a term used to describe an association of trades, groups or organisations with allied interests.<sup>48</sup> There are a number of state and territory peak bodies that address violence against women and gender-based violence, including, but not limited to, [Safe and Equal](#) in Victoria and [Domestic Violence New South Wales](#). While these organisations support primary prevention work through advocacy, training, partnerships, conferences and networking opportunities, the vast majority of their members are focused primarily on tertiary response work.

The development of a national peak body (or collective group that can act as a peak body) may be useful to support national advocacy efforts and to bring a stronger, dedicated focus on the prevention workforce, to support both a nationally consistent approach and state/territory context-specific plans and strategies. It is likely to support a common professional identity based on a stronger shared understanding of the attributes, values and aims of prevention work. The development of such a peak body would require resourcing, significant collaboration and partnership across jurisdictions and leadership over a long period of time.

## Standards to support quality practice

While *Change the story* provides a detailed conceptual framework to help understand violence against women and how it can be prevented, it is not sufficiently detailed nor designed to provide a consistent, national approach for those working as prevention professionals. As the profession expands and develops, there is a potential risk that standards and quality will be affected. Actions the sector can take to help support a consistent standard of prevention practice include the development of best practice guidelines and quality standards, systems to audit how the standards are applied, and systems to credential people who implement the activities.

Practice standards and codes of ethics not only provide clarity around the expectations and the value of the work being performed, they also help to establish a recognised professional status of the workforce. This comes about through the process of using the standards as a benchmark for monitoring and regulating the profession's practice – usually the role of the peak body.<sup>49</sup> This would be particularly valuable for the prevention workforce, which tends to be disparate, undervalued and to have an ill-defined workforce identity.

Credentialing is a process that considers the training, work experience and skill level of workers based on benchmarks that identify who is recognised as a worker in a certain occupation or role. Credentialing can be useful in professions where there are multiple training pathways and a wide variety of contexts for professional activity, and where the lived experience and personal attributes of the worker are relevant.<sup>50</sup> However, as with all workforce development activities, it is important to carefully consider any credentialing process to ensure it does not reinforce inequalities within the current and future workforce and exclude people who experience intersecting forms of discrimination from professional opportunities. This concern has also been echoed in work exploring credentialing for the health promotion workforce in Australia.<sup>51</sup>

In the absence of profession-wide standards or codes of ethics (which are usually developed at a point of maturity, when there is a clear professional identity), it is important to consider the development of targeted and fit-for-purpose standards. These could be used to guide prevention program design and delivery, education and training programs, trainer/educator capability, and potentially the provision of funding. They can be tested and evaluated, and in the future may inform the development of profession-wide standards or codes.

### **Coordination of workforce development activities**

With the increase of prevention investment and activity over the last ten years, some mechanisms have been established to support coordination across different levels of government, to ensure consistency between legislative and policy reforms, and prevention programs, communications, campaigns and other initiatives. To date, there's been no space dedicated to the coordination of a workforce development strategy at a national level, nor have there been initiatives to create an enabling environment for state- and territory-led approaches. Coordination can support connecting state and territories nationally and provide guidance for jurisdictions that do not currently have a state-led approach, or which are in the process of developing work in this area.

In a sector-based consultation conducted by Our Watch in 2020, stakeholders identified coordination as an essential element of workforce development for the prevention sector, which must be led by organisations that have credibility, influence, strong partnerships and reach. Consultation participants expressed a preference for coordination efforts to be led by non-government organisations, rather than government. These efforts would include a range of specialist expertise (including primary prevention, workforce development, lived experience of violence and inequality) and would need to be resourced to undertake this coordination role.

While there hasn't been an exclusive focus on workforce development, Our Watch has worked on connecting the prevention workforce nationally and these models can be relevant. Since 2020, Our Watch has been leading the [National Primary Prevention Hub](#) (the Hub), funded by the Department of Social Services under the *Fourth Action Plan of the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and Their Children 2010–2022*. The Hub aims to support information-sharing, enable collaboration, and facilitate connection among organisations designing and delivering primary prevention policies, programs and campaigns. Through a series of online forums, publication of evidence papers and leading discussions with key non-government stakeholders from across the country, the Hub aims to contribute to developing the prevention workforce by profiling and highlighting primary prevention work in different jurisdictions, contexts and settings, and best practice examples of intersectional approaches to primary prevention.<sup>52</sup> Our Watch is currently planning for the continuation of the Primary Prevention Hub under the National Plan.

Another example of sector coordination comes from Our Watch's work with the local government sector. The National Local Government Association Prevention of Violence Against Women Network was established in 2021, comprising the Australian Local Government Association, representatives of all state and territory local government associations, and Our Watch. The network's intention is to sustainably develop, at both jurisdictional and on a national level, a local government workforce with the capacity, support and infrastructure to engage in and promote the primary prevention of violence against women. Coordination efforts to date have included a joint [submission from the Australian Local Government Association to the 2021 Women's Safety Summit](#) and capability development resources to build awareness among local government stakeholders of opportunities to integrate primary prevention approaches into their role.



## In summary

- The development of a national peak body or alliance may be useful to support national advocacy efforts and to bring a stronger, dedicated focus on the prevention workforce.
- Flowing from the establishment of a professional governance mechanism and a clear professional identity, the development of practice standards or codes of ethics can help guide a number of other workforce development initiatives which help to establish consistent standards and quality of practice.
- Outside of formal governance mechanisms, there are many examples of sector coordination across government and non-government organisations that provide models for successful approaches to enhance the reach and effectiveness of prevention practice as well as create stronger relationships between prevention professionals and their organisations.

# CASE STUDY

## Centre for Workforce Excellence

This example from Victoria describes how a government-led mechanism is aiming to guide strategic and considered workforce planning efforts to support sustainable growth of the primary prevention workforce.

### BACKGROUND

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The Centre for Workforce Excellence (CWE) was established as part of Family Safety Victoria in July 2017. In 2022, CWE joined the newly established Systems, Reform and Workforce Division as part of the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, linking with other critical social and community services workforce programmes. CWE plays a key role in planning, coordinating and implementing comprehensive workforce development initiatives for the specialist prevention and response workforces, as well as intersecting workforces.

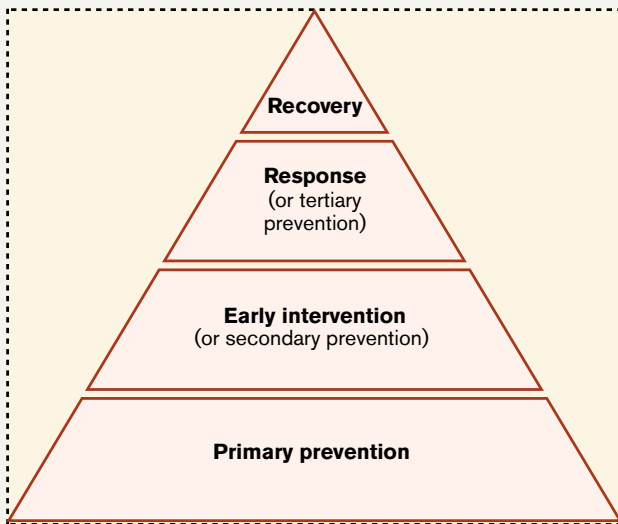
The establishment of CWE is directly linked to the recommendations and subsequent reforms stemming from the Royal Commission into Family Violence, 2016. CWE delivers on the 10-year [family violence industry plan](#) that recognises the critical role played by all workforces that assist people affected by family violence, and aims to ensure that careful, considered workforce planning is a central part of the reforms.

### APPROACH

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CWE works in partnership with the specialist family violence prevention and response sectors, the Office for Prevention of Family Violence and Coordination, Respect Victoria, workforces that intersect with family violence, the education and training sector and other government agencies. It leads development and coordinates implementation of the industry plan, [Building from strength: 10-year industry plan for family violence prevention and response](#), and related rolling Action Plans. CWE includes the following functions:

- **workforce planning** – provide advice on workforce planning and supply matters for the specialist family violence and primary prevention sectors
- implementation of the **Family Violence Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework (MARAM)**, now embedded in Victorian legislation, to build capability and understanding of the roles and responsibilities of all prescribed workforces in identifying and responding to family violence
- **capability identification and development** – research and identify core skills and capabilities of the specialist and generalist response and prevention workforces, promote best practice, and lead the development of training such as through the vocational education and training sector
- **research** – establish partnerships with universities and other organisations and commission research on current and emerging workforce needs



**Figure 8**

The relationship between different types of work to address violence against women

Refer to [alternative text for Figure 8](#) on page 61.

- **training** – play a coordination role in the sequencing and rollout of workforce development initiatives for the prevention and response sectors. Work with training providers to promote consistency across sectors, and commission and work with training providers to develop courses and training resources
- **workforce policy and practice leadership** – promote policy and practice relating to response and prevention, including updating capability frameworks, and strengthening cross-sectoral practice
- **recruitment and retention** – support the specialist family violence response and primary prevention sectors in attracting and retaining more suitably qualified staff to meet the anticipated growth in need through the management of a [Family violence jobs portal](#) and the [‘So what do you do?’ attraction campaign](#).

Family Safety Victoria has established expert groups and subcommittees to guide the implementation of the reforms, and implementation is also monitored by the [Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor](#). Respect Victoria, the state's statutory authority on preventing family violence, included a focus on workforce development in its reporting to Parliament, underscoring the importance of workforce development in the state.<sup>53</sup>

## LEARNINGS

There is an increasing awareness across CWE and the Victorian government that prevention work and response work cannot be siloed in family violence reform implementation. In fact, both areas are enriched when there is mutual visibility of the respective sectors. The industry plan recognises that it is critical that all workforces that intersect with family violence understand and are able to undertake their role in both prevention and response, in a way that is appropriate to their role. In the case of CWE, this intersection is particularly important in being tasked with overseeing workforce planning for both the response and prevention sectors. CWE recognises and seeks to address the ongoing challenge of ensuring there is sufficient space and focus given to prevention within this combined mandate.<sup>54</sup>

CWE recognises the importance in applying a gender lens and an intersectional approach when conceptualising the capabilities of both workforces, including when applied to prevention ‘contributors’ (the settings- and sector-based professionals whose roles intersect with prevention). The breadth of this scope, as well as the policy leverage of the MARAM in ensuring that universal workforces are trained in MARAM where prescribed, means that these workforces are also supported to apply prevention concepts within their work.

## Working conditions

Working conditions are the expectations, environment and terms of a job that influence employee satisfaction, and are intertwined with the other key elements of workforce development. Without organisational and sector policies, practices and cultures that support and value the prevention workforce, it is highly unlikely that any initiatives to strengthen the workforce will be sustainable, as there will continue to be high staff turnover and an inability to recruit.

There are a number of issues affecting the prevention workforce that are issues across the broader community services sector, including limited access to professional development, the gendered nature of the workforce, limited career development opportunities, low remuneration and contract insecurity.<sup>55</sup> There are other issues which are unique to the prevention and response workforce. These include potential burnout due to factors like vicarious trauma, having to deal with high levels of resistance and backlash, stress due to workload, and limited supervision and support.<sup>56</sup>

### Remuneration and contract security

Job insecurity and low remuneration have been identified as key concerns by the primary prevention and response workforce.<sup>57</sup> For jobs in prevention to be appealing and sustainable, workers need to be remunerated appropriately via a classification system that recognises their qualifications and experience, and allows for increases in remuneration that align with professional development and performance goals.

It is also important that contracts for positions are of a length that provides adequate job security and satisfaction. This is a particularly important issue for professions (including prevention and response work) that are currently occupied by a high proportion of women, for whom job security can be affected by discriminatory employment practices related to pregnancy, parental leave and family obligations. The Victorian 2019–2020

Census of Workforces that Intersect with Family Violence reported that workers in the primary prevention workforce were less likely than the average Victorian to hold a full-time role (51 per cent compared to the average of 67 per cent).<sup>58</sup> In the 2022 Victorian Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor report, focused on primary prevention system architecture, stakeholders reported that low remuneration meant that some prevention specialists have taken additional employment in sectors such as retail to continue this work.<sup>59</sup> Additionally, many employees reported that they were employed on fixed-term contracts, and many also reported working additional unpaid hours.

Underemployment and job insecurity are challenging to address within the current funding environment for primary prevention, where funding is generally for short-term projects or grants (typically for funding between 12 months to three years). This makes it harder to support and retain the current workforce, as well as to attract new people to undertake prevention work and thus grow the workforce. Job insecurity often leads to high turnover, and a significant loss of expertise and organisational and sector knowledge. The specialist prevention workforce is expected to have considerable knowledge and skills, although the pay and working conditions do not always reflect this standard.

Across Australia, support for longer-term investment in prevention across all levels of government and other funders, as well as with organisations and sectors that currently or might in the future employ prevention workers, is strong. There have also been some shifts to longer-term funding in some jurisdictions and contexts.

### Attraction and retention

Low remuneration and low visibility of the primary prevention sector are linked to difficulties in attracting suitably qualified staff, poor staff retention, and high turnover. Based on data from the Victorian family violence response sector, there is inconsistency between the salaries of specialist workers and comparable roles in other community services,

and in employment arrangements within the sector.<sup>60</sup> Challenges in attracting and retaining suitably qualified and experienced staff are greater in rural and regional areas.<sup>61</sup>

Those currently working in the sector have a high level of commitment and a values connection to their work. However, issues related to health and wellbeing, isolation, job security and low remuneration are likely to impact on their retention in the sector.

The sector can leverage off the values of prevention work to appeal to a range of workers who link job satisfaction to a sense of purpose. The Victorian 2019–2020 Workforce Census showed that people shared several positive reasons for working in the primary prevention workforce, including a strong commitment to gender equality and preventing family violence.<sup>62</sup> However, almost half of all primary prevention practitioners reported that they had plans to leave their current role in the future, either due to an end of contract or to pursue better career prospects.

The [Family Safety Victoria attraction and retention campaign](#) for the family violence sector is a response to the increased demand for family violence workers in prevention and response in the wake of the findings of the Royal Commission into Family Violence. The campaign is based on findings from the developmental research which suggested that family violence work needed a major makeover – to counterbalance a traditional focus on danger and crisis and convey the new opportunities for professional development and career progression not readily associated with the sector. It aims to do this by showcasing a series of professional profiles which highlight the variety of response and prevention roles available, the different career pathways, and the diversity of people who work in the sector.<sup>63</sup>

Opportunities exist to develop strategies and communications to attract and connect new professionals to the prevention sector in a way that helps them recognise that there are pathways for them to upskill to do prevention work within their current profession (for example, for journalists and educators).

Attraction campaigns will need to focus on the ‘hearts and minds’ as well as make an industry-specific connection for those working in settings- and sector-based fields (for example, making the case for Respectful Relationships Education as an element of professional practice for teachers, and what this means for their role in the profession and their day-to-day work). Other sectors, such as healthcare and education, have developed attraction campaigns and strategies which the prevention sector could look to.

There is a need for more research on retention and attraction in the national primary prevention workforce to understand what retention and attraction strategies are likely to be most effective (particularly for the settings- and sector-based workforces for whom this work is only a part of their profession/career).

## Health and wellbeing

Although prevention workers do not work directly with victim/survivors of violence or perpetrators of violence, they can and do experience vicarious trauma, as well as resistance and backlash to primary prevention initiatives. Prevention workers often receive disclosures of violence, both historical and current, and must be ready and able to respond appropriately. [Building from strength: 10-year industry plan for family violence prevention and response](#) notes the specific challenges for the prevention sector:

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**The primary prevention workforce experiences similar issues to the response workforce, however these workers often do not have the therapeutic training that many response workers have and can be ill-equipped to recognise and address signs of fatigue, trauma and burnout.**<sup>64</sup>

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In addition, prevention workers often experience significant resistance and backlash to their work and associated information about the gendered nature of violence and the drivers of violence against women – and

this often occurs both in their professional and personal life. These types of resistance and backlash can occur on a spectrum, from subtle resistance to more aggressive forms. Furthermore, as prevention work requires long-term societal changes in norms, practices and structures, there are often few short-term 'wins' and workers can experience burnout and become disheartened.<sup>65</sup>

The gendered nature of the workforce and the prevalence of violence against women means that many working in this sector will have their own lived experience of violence. This has the potential to exacerbate the impact of the work on their health, safety and wellbeing.<sup>66</sup> These issues are particularly relevant for those in the workforce who experience gender inequality and other forms of structural discrimination and inequalities, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and LGBTIQ people. They may experience additional health and wellbeing issues due to discrimination and/or isolation in the workplace, lack of cultural safety, the intersectional nature of violence against women, their relationships with community members they are working with, and cultural and community obligations.<sup>67</sup>

As *Changing the picture* articulates, supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's participation in leadership and decision making is an essential action that will contribute to the prevention of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. This is achieved through strategies which 'promote [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's] right to participate equally in leadership, decision making and governance processes – at all levels, and both in their own communities and in non-Indigenous organisations'.<sup>68</sup>

As many prevention workers also undertake family violence response work and/or work in family violence response organisations, the wellbeing challenges of this workforce is also important to consider. In a national survey of response workers, almost half of respondents said they feel emotionally drained by their work, with a similar proportion feeling under pressure to work harder. Almost half of respondents were worried about the future of their job, and 37 per cent did not feel they

were paid fairly.<sup>69</sup> Respondents were asked how frequently they worked additional unpaid hours. This varied significantly by role, with those in leadership positions working more unpaid overtime. However, more than three in ten frontline staff regularly worked unpaid hours.<sup>70</sup>

The 2019–2020 Victorian Census<sup>71</sup> showed that many within the prevention workforce experience stress due to high workload. However, few were dissatisfied in their current role and most felt that they made a difference to people affected by family violence. Access to ongoing professional development and career progression opportunities are also essential elements of worker health and wellbeing.

There is an opportunity for increased collaboration between the prevention and response sectors in developing guidance (including shared training or resources) for the prevention workforce around their unique role in responding to disclosures, which clearly identifies the limits of their role and the referral pathways available, tailored to specific settings and contexts. This could address potential knowledge and skill gaps as well as support prevention workers with tools to manage aspects of worker and self-care.

## **Workplace supports and supervision**

It is essential that workplaces employing prevention workers support the wellbeing of their staff through supervision and other forms of debriefing, flexible work options, and procedures that help prevention workers to respond to disclosures of violence.

As noted above, there are some unique challenges for the prevention workforce in responding to resistance and backlash and vicarious trauma. This includes the fact that few organisations employing prevention workers are specialist prevention or gender equality organisations, and that they often have a limited understanding of, and experience in, the prevention of violence against women. A lack of supervision and limited opportunities to debrief has been identified as a significant concern:

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**Clinical supervision is not a regular feature of primary prevention work, though prevention practitioners often come into contact with victim survivors and hear their stories because they are engaging with communities and creating awareness and space to discuss issues of primary prevention, violence against women and family violence. It is ... imperative that primary prevention practitioners have access to supportive supervisors who are equipped to understand the unique context of their work, and provide support or referral where required.<sup>72</sup>**

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The 2019–2020 Victorian Census found that satisfaction with the quality of support provided by supervisors or direct managers is directly linked to having regular opportunities to discuss work matters and professional development opportunities with managers.<sup>73</sup>

While many organisations will have an employee assistance program (EAP) to support staff, not all of these providers have the expertise to support workers who have vicarious exposure to violence against women and who experience backlash and resistance to gender equality.<sup>74</sup> It is important that organisations employing prevention workers ensure the EAP provider has knowledge and skills specific to the prevention of violence against women, and for organisations without an EAP to establish formal relationships with family violence services to access support and debriefing for their staff.

It is also essential that workplaces are culturally safe, appropriate, respectful and accessible. The intersection of Indigeneity, gender and caring responsibilities leads to particular vulnerability in the workplace for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women who are carers. The *Gari Yala (Speak the truth): Gendered insights* report identifies that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, especially those with caring responsibilities, have significantly less support in culturally unsafe situations such as racially discriminatory

treatment or harassment, and carry the highest cultural load.<sup>75</sup> The report found that women especially benefit from positive workplace cultures in which organisations prioritise cultural safety, authenticity and organisational activity (the number of events, initiatives and programs organisations undertake relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees and cultures).<sup>76</sup>

### In summary

- While many prevention professionals find their work satisfying as it aligns with their value system, working conditions do not always meet best practice standards or match the level of qualification and skills required of workers.
- Low remuneration in the prevention sector is closely linked to difficulties in attracting qualified staff, poor staff retention and high turnover.
- Prevention workers face unique wellbeing challenges such as resistance and backlash, vicarious trauma and burnout.
- Workplace supervision and supports, as well as further data collection around pay and conditions, need to be a focus for improving working conditions.

# CASE STUDY

## Partners in Prevention

This case comes from a prominent Victorian non-government organisation which has been leading a network for prevention practitioners for the last 15 years.

### BACKGROUND

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Partners in Prevention (PiP) is a network of more than 1,800 people working to prevent family and gender-based violence in Victoria. The PiP network, coordinated by Safe and Equal, facilitates connection, peer learning, knowledge sharing and evidence-informed approaches to primary prevention. The network is comprised of people from a range of workforce groups, as conceptualised in Figure 5, including those where prevention is only one element of their role.

The PiP network's unique value lies in the integrated nature of information-sharing and capability-building activities. Members connect and grow their networks while also developing their practice in line with emerging evidence, in a sector undergoing rapid change and expansion.

First established in 2007, PiP now supports practitioners across Victoria, working in education, early childhood and care settings, and increasingly in many other settings, such as workplaces, health and community services organisations, faith-based organisations, the arts, sport, state and local government, and more.

### APPROACH

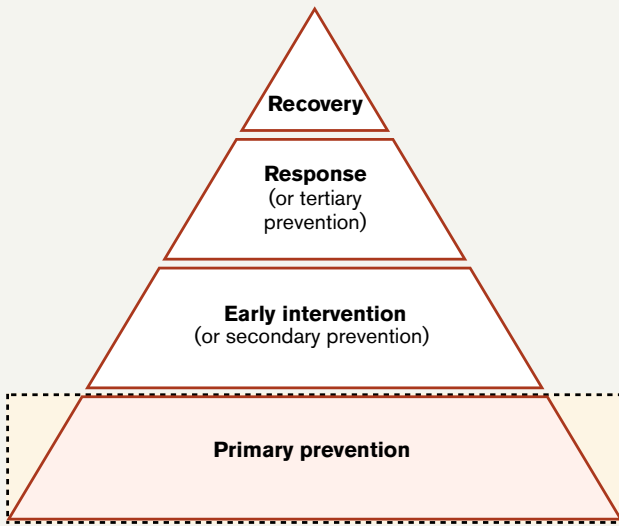
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The PiP network hosts a range of events and activities which aim to strengthen both emerging and established prevention practitioners' understanding of, and alignment to, evidence-based practice, through the provision of professional development opportunities such as webinars, workshops and online forums.

The network also has a strong focus on connection and collaboration, by facilitating networking opportunities between practitioners through their online and in-person events and resources. It supports practitioner wellbeing by creating safe and inclusive spaces where members feel comfortable to learn from one another. This is a key principle of the network's professional development approach.

To support the growing workforce as they face unique and shared challenges, Safe and Equal have also recently launched a Primary Prevention Helpdesk, where practitioners can submit an enquiry and receive information and direction to relevant resources, contacts and networks. It also supports practitioners facing resistance and backlash through ad hoc peer support.





**Figure 9**

The relationship between different types of work to address violence against women

Refer to [alternative text for Figure 9](#) on page 61.

## LEARNINGS

Embedding a large-scale prevention initiative across Victoria requires consistent, evidence-led approaches across an expert, connected workforce. PiP works to increase unity and alleviate isolation among practitioners. Safe and Equal recognises the need for the network to reflect the diversity of the state-wide prevention workforce, and to increase engagement with workers from a wide range of backgrounds. This is put into practice through partnerships with organisations and practitioners in specialised areas of prevention, such as women with disabilities, the elderly and LGBTIQ communities. Partner organisations are enabled to use the PiP platform to highlight specialist work, amplifying their voices and providing a channel for the dissemination of evidence-based, intersectional practice.

**Embedding a large-scale prevention initiative across Victoria requires consistent, evidence-led approaches across an expert, connected workforce.**

## Professional development

Professional development refers to informal and formal mechanisms to build the knowledge and skills required by both the current and future prevention workforce, outside of the formal skills pathways available through vocational education and training and the tertiary education sectors. This includes non-accredited training, in-service professional development and on-the-job learning. It's essential that training and professional development be accessible and take into account the diverse knowledge and expertise of the workforce, the diverse contexts in which prevention work is undertaken, and the importance of building a diverse workforce.

Capability development is an established approach for undertaking primary prevention practice – training or workshops are the most popular mode of delivery for primary prevention activities in Victoria<sup>77</sup> and, anecdotally, it is the same across Australia. This suggests that much of the work of specialist prevention professionals involves building the capability of settings-based professionals to understand and develop their role in the prevention of violence against women.

Therefore, activities centred on capability development not only support efforts to address the drivers of violence against women, but can also contribute to the development of the prevention workforce. Ideally, this means that participants in professional development activities integrate the essential actions to address the drivers of violence against women into their work roles, and also identify themselves as being part of the prevention workforce and become connected to others also doing this work. While the former may be a short- to medium-term outcome of their participation in prevention training, the latter is only likely to result if the many other elements of workforce development that are described above have been progressed.

There is limited and inconsistent access to quality professional development across Australia, as well as limited career development opportunities in the prevention sector. These issues affect those currently in

the workforce and make it harder to attract a capable workforce into the future. As with any profession, ongoing professional development opportunities are important for deepening and expanding the skills and knowledge of the existing prevention workforce, as well as advancing more general professional skills such as managing staff, as described in the Fast Track case study (refer to [page 55](#)), for example. This includes non-accredited training and workshops, networks, peer support, mentoring, coaching and leadership development.

As highlighted in the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence report:

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**Limited career development opportunities for specialist family violence workers is one of the key reasons for the 'major problems' employers experience attracting and retaining staff. Professional development in the sector is 'piecemeal and fragmented'. The Royal Commission found that the specialist family violence sector does not have a consistent approach to workforce training, professional development and career progression because this activity is not sufficiently resourced in existing funding models.<sup>78</sup>**

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## Skills development through non-accredited training

While most prevention practitioners have had access to pre-service and in-service gender equality and primary prevention training, the availability of prevention training is inconsistent across Australia.

According to a survey conducted by Our Watch for the *Tracking progress in prevention* report,<sup>79</sup> the majority of respondents reported attending some form of training, professional development, mentoring or supervision to support their work in the prevention of violence against women in the past ten years, with most of these taking place in a capital city or online. The emerging workforce was most likely to associate this training with positive impacts on their skills in the areas of:

- understanding primary prevention and how it can be applied to their role
- working in partnership with other organisations to prevent violence against women
- critical self-reflection.

However, a lesser proportion of those who had undertaken training or professional development in the past ten years reported attending training that had a positive impact on their skills and knowledge to support:

- advocacy for policy reform to amend discriminatory policies and practices
- taking a holistic approach to working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in prevention programming
- designing social marketing campaigns and other communications activities to prevent violence against women
- taking a healing focus in primary prevention work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Survey respondents were also asked what (if any) gaps in the available knowledge/evidence on primary prevention they would like to see addressed to support their work. The most common gaps highlighted were:

- approaches for broader systems change to enhance this work
- evidence of what works, appropriate tools, resources and practical strategies

- monitoring and evaluation tools, data, statistics and measurement
- gender analysis and engagement strategies involving men and boys
- approaches informed by an intersectional lens, including an LGBTIQ lens, and working with children and young people
- information that can guide attempts to increase and broaden reach and further influence community attitudes.

The vast majority of professional development training has been developed and delivered to the Victorian workforce, due to the early investment in primary prevention in the state. Outside Victoria, a small amount of prevention training has been developed, and delivered by women's health services, gender equality organisations, family violence services and other community organisations. This includes, but is not limited to, an introduction to primary prevention, bystander approaches to prevent violence against women, and the role of workplaces in preventing and responding to violence against women. National organisations, including Our Watch, also deliver non-accredited professional development activities.

## On-the-job learning

Because of the limited formal education opportunities or clear pathways into the prevention workforce, organisations employing prevention workers often need to support their staff through on-the-job learning or 'apprenticing' them in primary prevention, particularly those new to prevention. The need for workplaces to fulfil this role is complex, as many are not specialist prevention organisations, nor do their leaders have a high level of prevention understanding or expertise. This need has been recognised in Victoria, with the government funding an induction program for new practitioners entering the prevention sector, and training for supervisors of prevention specialists and contributors.<sup>80</sup>

## Networks, collaborations and peer support

Networks and collaborations (at local, regional, state and national levels) can be important ways to strengthen prevention practice and the prevention workforce. These networks bring together and support the workforce, strengthen worker knowledge and skills through professional development and participation in communities of practice, coordinate prevention activities, and often advocate for funding for primary prevention.

Some networks have also coordinated the development and implementation of regional prevention strategies and plans, such as [Community Respect & Equality](#) from Geraldton, Western Australia. In Victoria, there have been regional and state-wide networks for prevention over the last ten years. These networks have been largely funded by the Victorian government and led by [Women's Health Services in each region](#), as well as a small number of settings-based networks such as [Partners in Prevention](#), led by Safe and Equal since 2007.

Networks are perceived as valuable in supporting prevention practice and coordination. In a mapping of Victorian prevention activities and infrastructure, 76 per cent of organisations reported that they are involved in a network that promotes prevention. They reported these networks are most valuable when they share information, build capacity and provide timely support.<sup>81</sup>

The local government sector in Victoria has also been at the forefront of using networks to build workforce capability in primary prevention. The Municipal Association of Victoria formed the [Gender Equality and Preventing Violence against Women and All Forms of Gender-Based Violence Network](#) in 2010. It is an inclusive group of local government representatives and key community partners which aims to provide leadership for the local government sector in gender equality, and in preventing violence against women and gender-based violence. There is a focus on professional development activities, networking, peer

support and partnerships to achieve this aim. 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 delivering events and offering engagement online since 2018.

While there are fewer prevention networks in other states, a notable example is the [New South Wales Collaboration on Primary Prevention of Gender-Based Violence](#) (coordinated by [Domestic Violence NSW](#) and [City of Parramatta](#)), which played a strong role in building workforce capacity by coordinating prevention training in New South Wales, and also in advocating for the New South Wales government to join Our Watch.<sup>82</sup>

In Western Australia, [Preventing Violence Together](#) is a collaboration co-chaired by the [Centre for Women's Safety and Wellbeing](#) and [Stopping Family Violence](#), two established, state-wide family violence organisations, which aims to foster the emerging primary prevention sector in the state.

In Queensland, the [Equal and Together Alliance](#) is a partnership of organisations, businesses, clubs and networks that are working across the state to build respect and equity within their workplaces and communities. It is coordinated by [Women's Health and Equality Queensland](#). Alliance members can undertake an equity audit and be supported to implement strategies that promote equity within their business or organisation. Members also have access to a range of professional education programs to enhance equity and respect in their team or workplace, including a community of practice.

### Peer networks and support

Access to peer support can be limited for workers who experience isolation due to a range of factors including geography, cultural background or being the only prevention worker in an organisation or community. Peer support models such as communities of practice (COPs) can be useful for prevention workers at any stage of experience in prevention to learn from their peers, have a space to debrief,

create professional connections and continually improve their own practice.

Communities of practice can be defined as ‘groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis.’<sup>83</sup> COPs in the prevention sector have proven to be very positive as they contribute to improved outcomes in terms of practitioner health and wellbeing and makes the work more sustainable.<sup>84</sup>

Communities of practice are an increasingly popular method of professional development and support in the prevention sector, and have included workers with elements in common (such as setting, geographic location, or that they work with a particular community) and those who are funded by the same grants program. There is a limited but growing number of peer networks for support, learning and practice development for the prevention workforce across Australia. Prevention COPs have been funded by the Commonwealth government (attached to national prevention grants), the Victorian government, and some other state and territory governments.

While COPs have many benefits in developing peer support, reflection and debriefing opportunities, it is also important to recognise the limitations of COPs in strengthening workforce capacity. The role of COPs is not to deliver training or build technical knowledge, but rather to create peer connections and avenues for ongoing professional learning. While COPs play an important role in building prevention capability, it is important they are not seen as the only workforce development activity required.

Other mechanisms to connect the workforce and share practice and research include conferences and forums, e-newsletters, and online networks and websites.

## Mentoring, coaching and leadership development

Leaders are key to any organisation as they contribute to the delivery of successful outcomes and support staff wellbeing and retention. Every sector needs to ensure strategies are in place to develop its current and future leaders, and mentoring and coaching are often used by organisations to support and develop talent in the workplace.

These approaches are also seen as effective measures to address the underrepresentation of women in leadership roles.<sup>85</sup> Given the vast majority of prevention professionals are women, this is particularly pertinent for the sector to focus on. However, these strategies need to be inclusive of all women, including those who experience multiple forms of discrimination.

Despite the relevance of diverse leadership to a sector with an underlying commitment to intersectional feminism and a vision of systemic and social transformation, there are few examples of mentoring or other leadership programs in the prevention space. Further developing practitioners’ skills and attributes around the principles of feminist leadership is considered to be an important element for growing the sector in a sustainable way in order to continue the work of leading prevention in the community.<sup>86</sup>

In Victoria, Safe and Equal, with support from Family Safety Victoria, developed the [Fast Track intensive leadership program](#) to address the need for suitably skilled and capable practitioners available to take up mid-level prevention and senior level response leadership roles. The program is delivered using a range of methods including workshops, guest presenters, forums, networking, mentoring and a workplace project where new skills and knowledge can be applied. More about this program can be read in the [case study](#) on page 55.

An innovative approach has been taken by AMES Australia to develop community leaders around the topic of primary prevention in multicultural populations. The [AMES Australia leadership programs](#), run since 2017, target

culturally and linguistically diverse people concerned by the issue of violence against women who want to work with others in their communities to prevent it. These programs, delivered primarily in Victoria and funded by state and local governments, aim to build participants' knowledge in primary prevention concepts and then support them to contextualise the theory into culturally sensitive practice within their communities, encouraging the implementation of activities such as awareness-raising campaigns and community arts projects. Most participants have little to no experience in primary prevention practice when they start, and the program has been successful in transitioning several graduates into paid prevention roles.

### **In summary**

- Considered and comprehensive professional development initiatives are a key element of any workforce development strategy.
- A small number of organisations (primarily in Victoria) deliver training and professional development to the current prevention workforce.
- Limited career development opportunities are one of the reasons employers face challenges in attracting and retaining staff.
- Peer learning, networks and leadership programs have proven successful and could be leveraged to further support and inspire careers in primary prevention.

# CASE STUDY

## Fast Track intensive leadership program

This program encompasses a range of elements including skills development, applied learning, mentoring and networking to upskill prevention and response workers to meet the growing need for leaders in both sectors.

### BACKGROUND

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The [Fast Track intensive leadership program](#), funded by Family Safety Victoria, has been designed by [Safe and Equal](#) to increase the supply of knowledgeable and skilled mid- and senior level practitioners to undertake urgently needed leadership roles in specialist family violence response and primary prevention and response roles in Victoria.

The rationale for Fast Track is reinforced in the most recent Victorian Workforce Census, which identified that a considerable proportion of both specialist family violence and primary prevention practitioners intended to leave the workforce, citing a lack of career development opportunities, short-term contracts, or the role having an impact on health and wellbeing. The Census also identified the sector's need for more professional development and an opportunity for greater peer networking and connection.

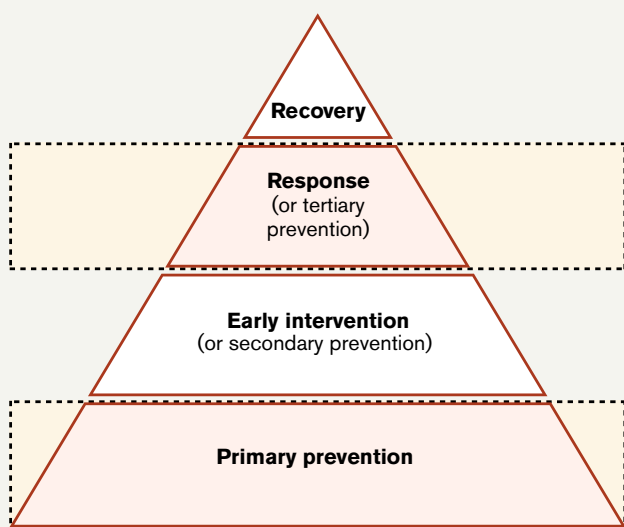
### APPROACH

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Safe and Equal have developed a practice-informed, multimodal leadership training and mentoring program underpinned by the Victorian specialist family violence response and primary prevention of violence against women capability frameworks. As of July 2022, the program has had 127 primary prevention and response practitioners graduate over the course of two years. The program includes ten weeks of scaffolded workshops on different topics, a workplace project that needs to be designed and pitched by the end of the program, and an intensive mentorship with a sector leader. The Fast Track program sets out to equip and encourage participants to take on more senior roles by:

- building the management and leadership capabilities of current practitioners
- supporting them to build relationships with their peers
- broadening their perspective across the sector.

The intention in the short term is to grow the pool of managers with the skill set required to lead highly effective organisations, mitigate workforce retention challenges, ensure crucial experience and feminist values are retained within the sector, and ultimately contribute to the development of a thriving, sustainable sector.



**Figure 10**  
The relationship between different types of work to address violence against women

Refer to [alternative text for Figure 10](#) on page 61.

## LEARNINGS

Safe and Equal have undertaken and published a rigorous [evaluation of the 2021–2022 Fast Track program](#), that demonstrates its effectiveness in building key leadership and management capabilities across the sector. The report outcomes show that participants' increased capability, confidence and connections are directly contributing to their career development, both through progression to more senior roles and through extending their responsibilities. The report also provides an insight into the specialist family violence and primary prevention workforces more broadly; what practitioners' development interests and needs are; and their individual career experiences.

The evaluation shows that Fast Track was highly relevant within the sector context and generally aligned with participant expectations. 92 per cent of participants had applied new skills in their role or workplace. 91 per cent of participants agreed that the program content was relevant for their work context. 84 per cent of participants stated that their confidence had increased when applying new knowledge and skills in the workplace. Online delivery was a strong enabler of access and reach, evidenced by an almost even split of rural, regional and metro participants. The mentoring model fulfilled its intended purpose, supporting participants to apply learnings to their workplace projects and nurturing supportive

relationships. The mentoring program proved to be a hallmark component of Fast Track; it was valued highly by participants and provided a range of additional benefits such as engaging in reflective practice, building confidence, and supporting career planning and development.

The structure and focus provided by workplace projects had contributed impetus and an opportunity for change in participants' organisations. Some projects contributed to practice or program improvements, and some organisations benefited from participants' improved skills in project planning or general development. Fast Track graduates also report an enhanced confidence to network, engage more broadly, and build relationships which has resulted in positive partnership and collaboration outcomes for individuals and organisations.

The program is also achieving positive sector recognition, evidenced by new participants being referred to the program by guest experts, mentors and past participants.

In recognition of the program's efficacy and ongoing sector need, Fast Track has recently received further funding from Family Safety Victoria to continue delivery in 2023 and 2024.



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## Conclusion

Ending violence against women requires investing in and growing the primary prevention workforce. The success of Australia's efforts to prevent violence against women depends in part on the size and strength of the national primary prevention workforce and the capacity of this workforce to plan, implement, monitor and evaluate primary prevention initiatives. There are significant opportunities to invest in developing the skills, size and coordination of the workforce across all states and territories.

Prevention work and the workforce across Australia is at various stages of depth, reach and development. Some jurisdictions have developed strategies and investment focused on workforce development, but there are opportunities to increase this across Australia. We know that while the existing workforce is mostly small, specialist, disparate and lacking in a collective professional identity, there are great strengths within the skills, experiences and expertise of the workforce, and the diverse pathways through which they enter prevention work.

Developing a comprehensive picture of the current or future national prevention workforce is important in informing workforce planning and accurately and strategically responding to future demand. While some surveys have focused entirely or in part on the prevention workforce, none of these have enabled a comprehensive or accurate understanding of the national prevention workforce.

Since it must recognise the varied strengths and contexts of each jurisdiction, a national approach to the development of a prevention workforce will be complex. Many opportunities exist to develop infrastructure or mechanisms to enable workforce planning, sector development and growth of the prevention workforce in line with the increasing recognition of, and demand for, primary prevention activity across the country. There is currently limited infrastructure cross-jurisdictionally to support workforce development. Government and non-government sectors can continue to collaborate and coordinate to lead key workforce development initiatives such as the establishment of peak bodies, practice standards, capability frameworks, education and training pathways, and professional development activities.

Alongside this we need to lay the foundations for a strong, skilled, coordinated prevention workforce. Long-term, collaborative relationships between the prevention sector and the tertiary education sectors will support the timely design and delivery of multi-level prevention training, education and qualifications.

Enhancing the professionalisation of the prevention workforce may be achieved with increased sector coordination across Australia, in partnership and collaboration with jurisdictional stakeholders. Over time, one aim would be the establishment of an independent professional body responsible for developing and regulating professional practice standards and working with governments, the tertiary education sector, and the community, to increase the public recognition and professional identity of primary prevention work.

While there is scope for employers and the sector to do more in relation to worker wellbeing, supervision, skill development and collaboration, there are a number of structural elements that must be addressed to help to attract and retain a diverse range of prevention professionals.

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## **There are significant opportunities to invest in developing the skills, size and coordination of the workforce across all states and territories.**

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As communities', leaders' and governments' ambition for primary prevention soars, including through the development of the National Plan, these ambitions must be met with increased investment in the prevention workforce. This includes long-term investment which allows for strategic workforce planning and specific resourcing for workforce development initiatives. Strategic and long-term investment in the workforce is essential to prevent violence against women.

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## Alternate text for figures

### Figure 1

Infographic showing the five interconnected elements involved in developing and growing the prevention workforce for the future. These elements are required to grow the current, relatively small prevention workforce into a larger workforce to meet prevention needs currently, and in the future. They include workforce planning; workforce preparation and pathways, sector governance and coordination, working conditions, and professional development.

Return to [text following Figure 1](#) on page 12.

### Figure 2

Infographic showing the relationship between primary prevention and other work to address violence against women. The relationship between these is depicted as a pyramid that narrows from broader whole-of-population initiatives to response services for individuals.

Primary prevention: whole-of-population initiatives that address the primary ('first' or underlying) drivers of violence against women.

Early intervention (or secondary prevention): aims to change the trajectory for individuals at higher-than-average risk of perpetrating or experiencing violence.

Response (or tertiary prevention): supports victim–survivors and holds perpetrators to account, aiming to prevent the recurrence of violence.

Recovery: ongoing process that enables victim–survivors to find safety, health, wellbeing, resilience and to thrive in all areas of their life.

Return to [text following Figure 2](#) on page 17.

### Figure 3

Infographic showing the different factors which influence the occurrence of violence against women.

The figure represents violence as the outcome of interactions among many factors at four levels.

It shows examples of structures, norms and practices found to increase the probability of violence against women, at different levels of the social ecology.

The highest level is the societal level: dominant social norms supporting rigid roles and stereotyping, or condoning, excusing and downplaying violence against women.

The second level is the system and institutional level: failure of systems, institutions and policies to promote women’s economic, legal and social autonomy, or to adequately address violence against women.

The third level is the organisational and community level: organisation and community norms, structures and practices supporting or failing to address gender inequality, stereotyping, discrimination and violence.

The fourth and final level is the individual and relationship level: individual adherence to rigid gender roles and identities, weak support for gender equality, social learning of violence against women, male dominance and controlling behaviours in relationships.

Return to [text following Figure 3](#) on page 19.

### Figure 5

Infographic showing the conceptual model to understand the prevention workforce in Australia. The figure represents four circles depicting the size of what each group of the

workforce needs to be in relation to the other, both currently and for the future.

Group 1, technical and content experts, is represented by the smallest circle. These prevention professionals are the most specialised, holding significant knowledge and experience in prevention.

Group 2, specialist primary prevention professionals, is represented as one of two medium-sized circles. This portion of the workforce are professionals where prevention is a significant part of their role and experience in designing and delivering prevention activities.

Group 3, settings or sector-based professionals, is represented by the largest circle in the figure. This forms the largest portion of the workforce with these professionals doing some prevention activity but complements their special qualification or expertise in settings, institutions and organisations where prevention activity needs to be implemented where Australians live, learn, work, play and socialise

Group 4, potential primary prevention professionals, is represented as a medium-sized circle. This portion of the workforce may be interested in addressing violence against women but require motivation, support and guidance to start a professional prevention journey.

Return to [text following Figure 5](#) on page 26.

### Figure 7

Infographic showing the relationship between primary prevention and other work to address violence against women. The relationship between these is depicted as a pyramid that narrows from broader whole-of-population initiatives to response services for individuals.

Primary prevention: whole-of-population initiatives that address the primary (‘first’ or underlying) drivers of violence against women.

Early intervention (or secondary prevention): aims to change the trajectory for individuals at higher-than-average risk of perpetrating or experiencing violence.

Response (or tertiary prevention): supports

victim–survivors and holds perpetrators to account, aiming to prevent the recurrence of violence.

Recovery: ongoing process that enables victim–survivors to find safety, health, wellbeing, resilience and to thrive in all areas of their life.

Two sections of the pyramid are highlighted: response and early intervention.

Return to [text following Figure 7](#) on page 34.

### Figure 8

Infographic showing the relationship between primary prevention and other work to address violence against women. The relationship between these is depicted as a pyramid that narrows from broader whole-of-population initiatives to response services for individuals.

Primary prevention: whole-of-population initiatives that address the primary ('first' or underlying) drivers of violence against women.

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Recovery: ongoing process that enables victim–survivors to find safety, health, wellbeing, resilience and to thrive in all areas of their life.

All sections of the pyramid are highlighted.

Return to [text following Figure 8](#) on page 44.

### Figure 9

Infographic showing the relationship between primary prevention and other work to address violence against women. The relationship between these is depicted as a pyramid that narrows from broader whole-of-population initiatives to response services for individuals.

Primary prevention: whole-of-population initiatives that address the primary ('first' or underlying) drivers of violence against women.

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experiencing violence.

Response (or tertiary prevention): supports victim–survivors and holds perpetrators to account, aiming to prevent the recurrence of violence.

Recovery: ongoing process that enables victim–survivors to find safety, health, wellbeing, resilience and to thrive in all areas of their life.

One section of the pyramid are highlighted: primary prevention.

Return to [text following Figure 9](#) on page 50.

### Figure 10

Infographic showing the relationship between primary prevention and other work to address violence against women. The relationship between these is depicted as a pyramid that narrows from broader whole-of-population initiatives to response services for individuals.

Primary prevention: whole-of-population initiatives that address the primary ('first' or underlying) drivers of violence against women.

Early intervention (or secondary prevention): aims to change the trajectory for individuals at higher-than-average risk of perpetrating or experiencing violence.

Response (or tertiary prevention): supports victim–survivors and holds perpetrators to account, aiming to prevent the recurrence of violence.

Recovery: ongoing process that enables victim–survivors to find safety, health, wellbeing, resilience and to thrive in all areas of their life.

Two sections of the pyramid are highlighted: response and primary prevention.

Return to [text following Figure 10](#) on page 57.

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