

2 History and current context

2.1 History

In Australia, the increased attention on preventing violence against women has been greatly influenced by the groundbreaking work of VicHealth. In 2003, VicHealth put its research focus on violence against women, its impacts, costs, drivers and effective interventions. This work highlighted the most significant drivers of violence against women as:

- the unequal distribution of power and resources between men and women
- an adherence to rigidly defined gender roles.

VicHealth's National Community Attitudes towards Violence Against Women Survey, conducted in 1995, 2009 and 2013,^{2,3} highlighted the many harmful attitudes and beliefs held by Australians about violence against women.

In 2007, *Preventing Violence Before it Occurs: A Framework and Background Paper to Guide the Primary Prevention of Violence Against Women in Victoria*⁴ put violence against women on the agenda as a public health issue.

Meanwhile, a rural partnership, also in Victoria, began to raise concerns with the way the media was reporting the issue. In early 2004, Child & Family Services Ballarat and Pact Community Support established the Family Violence in the News Project to address the portrayal and misrepresentation of family violence in the media. Together they developed a media toolkit, strategic framework and research into the reporting of family violence.^{5,6,7}

*Family Violence Reporting: Supporting the Vulnerable or Reinforcing Their Vulnerability?*⁷ published in 2009, analysed articles about family violence in five Australian newspapers over 15 weeks, and raised concerns over the way the issue was being reported.

It was through this partnership that Media Advocacy Programs in Australia had their early beginnings. The partnership engaged Dr Lisa Waller to deliver a workshop to a small group of men and women who had experienced family violence, some of whom later went on to be involved in public speaking activities.

Over 2007 to 2012 VicHealth provided funding to a range of projects to implement and evaluate activities to prevent violence against women under their Respect, Responsibility and Equality Program.⁸ This included two projects of particular relevance: funding to the Women's Domestic Violence Crisis Service (now safe steps) for a Media Advocacy Project and seeding funds to Domestic Violence Victoria (DVVic), in partnership with the Victorian Centre Against Sexual Assault (CASA) Forum and No to Violence (NTV), for the Eliminating Violence Against Women Media Awards (EVAs). The EVAs honoured journalists for excellence in the reporting of violence against women and celebrated news media contributions to the prevention of violence against women. The funding from VicHealth built on the earlier work of the Family Violence in the News: Strategic Framework, developed by Child & Family Services Ballarat and Pact Community Support with funding from the Helen Macpherson Trust who initiated the first EVAs. The seed funding from VicHealth was followed by funds from the Victorian Department of

Human Services from 2010 to 2013 during which time the Victorian Centre Against Sexual Assault (CASA) Forum joined as a partner.

In 2012 the *Victoria Print Media Coverage of Violence Against Women in the Media*⁹ study was published by VicHealth and the University of Melbourne and focused on how violence against women has been represented by parts of the Victorian print media. The study found that Victorian media coverage of the issue rated well from a global perspective in terms of accurate and responsible reporting, and identified opportunities to improve community understanding of the drivers and opportunities to prevent violence:

- Media professionals could incorporate statistics on the prevalence of violence against women, or include comments from violence against women experts in all reports.
- Media outlets should communicate that violence against women is a serious and systemic social problem that is preventable.
- Reports should always include information on victims' services when reporting cases of domestic violence and sexual assault.
- Media professionals are encouraged to mention the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator when legally able to do so. Where the relationship is unknown, it would be useful to state this explicitly.⁹

At a national level, another influence on the development of media strategies to address violence against women has been the work of MindFrame. MindFrame developed a successful range of resources and guidelines for media professionals and for journalism education on the sensitive and responsible reporting of mental illness and suicide.

The MindFrame approach was picked up by the New South Wales Government to educate journalists about the impacts their reporting could have on victims. *Respectful Reporting: Victims of Violent Crime Media Strategy 2011–2012*¹⁰ included training for journalists and journalism students to instil greater awareness of the re-traumatisation of victims through media reporting.

Internationally, the DART Center for Journalism & Trauma, a project of Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism School, is educating journalists about what they need to know to ensure the sensitive reporting of family violence and sexual assault. They aim to support news organisations to put violence against women and its prevention onto the public agenda.¹¹

Action to prevent violence against women is now supported at the state and national level of government, with a number of projects aimed at addressing media representations of violence.

*The National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022*¹² illustrates Australia's long-term commitment, with improving media representations of violence against women listed as a prevention action in the First Action Plan phase. The Second Action Plan¹³ identifies a range of activities to improve media engagement with the use of Media Advocacy Programs, the establishment of national media awards that would build on the EVAs, and the development of training and reporting guidelines for journalists as priority actions. The third Action Plan is due for release in 2016.

The media activities that are identified in the *National Plan* now sit with Our Watch as part of their National Media Engagement Project, including the national successor to the EVAs, the Our Watch Awards for exemplary reporting to end violence against women, administered by the Walkley Foundation.

Our Watch's role is to provide national leadership to prevent all forms of violence against women and their children and its work is based on sound research and strong and diverse partnerships. In 2015 it published *Change the Story: A Shared Framework for the Primary Prevention of Violence against Women and their Children in Australia*.¹⁴ *Change the Story* was developed in partnership with VicHealth and Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS). It builds on the VicHealth framework and is the first national framework of its kind in the world. It outlines a consistent and integrated national approach to preventing violence against women and their children.

Change the Story brings together the international research and nationwide experience on what drives violence against women and what works to prevent it. It presents a shared understanding of the evidence and principles of effective prevention, outlines ten broad actions that should be taken, and provides a guide to assist governments and other stakeholders to develop appropriate policies, strategies and programs to prevent violence against women and their children. The need to address the attitudes and beliefs that drive violence through positive engagement with the media, who play a powerful role in shaping or reinforcing these beliefs, is mentioned.

In 2016, Our Watch and ANROWS conducted a study on the representations of violence against women and their children by the Australian media to establish a baseline to inform future strategies for change.¹⁵ Findings from the report established the powerful role of the media and identified a number of ways that the media could more accurately reflect the reality of women's experience of violence and contribute to prevention. [Section 7](#) provides more information on the findings of this report, and on responsible reporting of violence against women.

The National Media Engagement Project and the *Voices for Change* media advocates training align with the overarching principles of effective practice described in *Change the Story*.

The National Media Engagement Project

- Key elements of the National Media Engagement Project include:
- media capacity training for both future and practising journalists
- a website portal with resources for journalists
- the Our Watch Awards, administered by the Walkley Foundation, to recognise and encourage exemplary reporting to end violence against women.

Supporting and informing these initiatives are:

- a national toolkit for the sector to guide engagement with the media in the prevention of violence against women
- a media advisory group to inform the National Media Engagement Project and act as champions for change
- formative research to develop an evidence base on the media representation of violence against women and their children.

2.2 Current context

2.2.1 Case studies of Media Advocacy Programs

The use of media advocacy to prevent violence against women is relatively new in Australia and predominantly Victorian-based. At the time of development of *Voices for Change*, there are three Media Advocacy Programs at a statewide, metropolitan and regional level:

- Media Advocacy Project – safe steps Family Violence Response Centre
- Speaking Out: Media Advocacy to End Family Violence and Sexual Assault – Women’s Health East
- Loddon Campaspe Media Advocacy Project – Centre for Non-Violence.

2.2.1.1 Media Advocacy Project – safe steps Family Violence Response Centre

Overview

This statewide project was established in 2007 at a time of growing awareness by governments and agencies of the seriousness and prevalence of family violence in Victoria.

safe steps (formerly Women’s Domestic Violence Crisis Service) has led the Media Advocacy Project for almost eight years with funding from the Victorian Government and VicHealth.

The project provides training and ongoing support to women with a lived experience of family violence, equipping them with the skills to effectively engage with the media and be spokespeople for media interviews and at public events. It ensures that the voices of women who live with or who have survived violence are heard in a range of public settings to influence social attitudes, behaviours and beliefs.

As the statewide service in Victoria for women and children experiencing violence and abuse from a partner or ex-partner, another family member or someone close to them, safe steps has traditionally been a point of contact for media comment with frequent requests to speak with survivors of family violence. The project not only meets this need but empowers women to share their story.

Survivors interested in the project are sensitively screened and interviewed to ensure readiness as volunteer advocates and to ensure there are no legal issues pending. Not every woman is suitable. Interested survivors either self-refer or are referred by various agencies across the state.

The project consists of a three-day training program that focuses on:

- building confidence
- how to tell your story
- staying safe
- exploring the social and political drivers of violence against women
- key messaging
- preparing for an interview
- how to engage with media – responding to and deflecting questions, establishing boundaries.

A crucial element of the project is the level of one-on-one support each advocate receives, which includes:

- initial contact to discuss engagement opportunity
- media brief
- connecting volunteer advocate with media

- attending the engagement with the advocate
- debrief following media engagement
- debrief with media
- follow up wellbeing check.

Project aim

The project aims to educate the public through the media to create social change in attitudes and behaviours and to promote gender equality and respectful relationships to end violence towards women and their children.

Partnerships

safe steps has trained survivors from various local government areas and has assisted in establishing programs with Women's Health East and Centre for Non-Violence.

Outcomes

Advocates found that the training was an empowering experience that helped them to overcome nerves about speaking out, and encouraged them to say yes to advocacy opportunities. Some advocates have gone on to a career in training and public speaking.

The involvement of advocates in media reports has improved reporting on family violence. Reports featuring advocates are more likely to include information on support services, and rather than focusing on one act of violence, they look at the bigger picture of power and control. The media is slowly making the connection between gender inequity and violence against women.

The media has reported more extensively on issues of family violence since the project's inception. safe steps advocates have been featured in a myriad of local, metropolitan, statewide and national papers, television, publications and radio. An example is the *Herald Sun's Take A Stand* campaign in 2013. Three years ago it would have been unthinkable that a tabloid newspaper would have given as much attention to the issue.

The project was independently reviewed in December 2013 with the findings validating its success and future directions to:

- continue to develop the capacity of journalists and media to produce more commentary and stories about the broader issue of violence against women and its drivers and prevention over only reporting on single events
- expand social media strategies to further generate community conversations in response to media and violence against women issues
- partner with relevant organisations to design and implement education programs on responsible reporting and approach to working with advocates
- recruit Indigenous and culturally and linguistically diverse advocates to support the project

- train a 'senior' advocate to take on the role of peer advocator to mentor new advocates across the state
- continue to train advocates and expand the broader community engagement opportunities
- develop a community of advocates statewide including sector partners, survivor advocates, other advocates and empowerment literature.

2.2.1.2 Speaking Out: Media Advocacy to End Family Violence and Sexual Assault – Women's Health East

Overview

Established in 2011, the Speaking Out Program (previously the Eastern Media Advocacy Program) is the only program to be designed with two specialised streams – one for women who have experienced family violence and one for survivors of sexual assault.

Speaking Out provides training and support to women to speak at public events, in the media and at a range of other advocacy opportunities at a regional level, with some state and national advocacy work. The training portions of the program are Media Advocacy Training – Speaking Out to End Sexual Assault and Media Advocacy Training – Speaking Out to End Family Violence.

Speaking Out was developed using a health promotion approach and framed within a primary prevention of violence against women framework. The program includes a prevention focus in the advocate training, and in public speaking and media opportunities. Messages about gender inequality are used alongside raising awareness of the impact of violence.

Speaking Out has also trained workers in Melbourne's east on how to work with journalists to encourage responsible reporting on violence against women and its prevention.

Program aim

The aim is to shift the public discourse on violence against women, and its prevention.

Partnerships

Women's Health East, one of nine regional women's health promotion organisations across Victoria, is the lead organisation for the program. Women's Health East is committed to working to improve the health, safety and wellbeing of women in Melbourne's east by addressing the social, political and environmental factors impacting women.

Partnerships have been key to the inception and success of Speaking Out. Speaking Out grew out of discussions at the Preventing Violence Against Women working group of the Regional Family Violence Partnership in 2011 when Jane Ashton, advocate and project worker from safe steps (previously Women's Domestic Violence Crisis Service), was invited to speak about its media advocacy project.

A collaborative decision was made to develop the Speaking Out Program based on the safe steps model, with Women's Health East identified as the lead.

Key partners are the Eastern Domestic Violence Service and the Eastern Centre Against Sexual Assault, who are represented on a steering committee, participate in the recruitment, screening and training of advocates and provide follow up counselling for advocates as required. Advocates also participate in the steering committee.

Women's Health East leads and coordinates Speaking Out through employment of a program coordinator who is responsible for development and evaluation, liaison with media and advocates, and the provision of ongoing support for advocates.

Speaking Out is also an integral part of *Together for Equality & Respect: A Strategy to Prevent Violence Against Women in Melbourne's East 2013-2017*,¹⁶ and the corresponding Action Plan, which involves partner organisations across the eastern region of Melbourne undertaking complementary work in primary prevention. The shared and integrated approach to the planning and evaluation of primary prevention initiatives has brought a stronger regional focus to the importance of listening to the voices of women and the value of working with the media in the prevention of violence against women.

Outcomes

While originally established as a time limited project, the effectiveness of the program, including the positive outcomes for women and a continual flow of advocacy opportunities, has led to it becoming an ongoing program of Women's Health East. The lack of dedicated funding has meant that the time devoted to it has varied depending on competing organisational priorities.

Since its inception Speaking Out has worked with 33 advocates and currently supports 20 active advocates. Speaking Out has supported advocates in 69 community advocacy opportunities and 59 media opportunities across print media, television and radio from August 2011 to April 2015. Advocacy activities have included local media stories, online articles, White Ribbon Day events, community health days, involvement in relevant steering committees and a range of consultations including with politicians.

Advocate messages were used in a broad regional social media and social marketing campaign for the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Based Violence in 2013 and 2014 – 'Listening to and Learning from Women'. The campaign messages are subject to ongoing demand, with organisations in Melbourne's east continuing to share the messages via posters at organisational events and workplaces, and on social media sites.

An independent evaluation of the Speaking Out Program¹⁷ in December 2013 also showed that the program has been successful in supporting the advocates' empowerment and personal development. It found that the media produced with input from the program fared well when compared to responsible reporting guidelines. Recommendations from this evaluation included the need for the development of an advocacy community. The report is informing the ongoing development of the Speaking Out Program (see Section 6.2.7).

2.2.1.3 Loddon Campaspe Media Advocacy Project – Centre for Non-Violence

Overview

The Loddon Campaspe Media Advocacy Project was established in 2014 and has engaged local and regional women survivors of violence, the media and the community in developing a media advocacy project and key messages to talk about violence against women. One of the key aims is to develop a rural and regional model of media advocacy representing rural and regional women's experiences of family violence.

The project recruited a broad and diverse group of women as media advocates, providing training in working with the media, public speaking and community education. Advocates are trained and supported to use the media to talk about their experiences of family violence and to develop key messages to work towards the prevention of violence against women. The project enabled the development of rural and regional key prevention messages and has a strong rural and regional focus that reflects the experiences of the women involved.

Recruitment guidelines included that women are aged over 18 years and are not experiencing current or recent incidents of violence (over the previous 12 months).

Program aim

The aim is to:

- empower and support local survivors of family violence and sexual abuse to become advocates for change
- develop and implement a rural and regional model of media advocacy from rural and regional women's experiences of family violence
- develop partnerships and training to build the skills, knowledge and capacity of women's specialist family violence services to effectively use the media to raise awareness of violence against women and its prevention (Media Support Workers)
- raise community awareness about gendered representation and support media in accurate reporting of family violence and sexual abuse, with every media contact and advocacy request taken as an opportunity to provide information, education and promote responsible reporting of violence against women guidelines
- contribute to the knowledge and evidence base for the prevention of violence against women in the media.

Partnerships

Led by the Centre for Non-Violence based in Bendigo, the project works in partnership with Annie North Women's Refuge and Loddon Campaspe Centre Against Sexual Assault.

The Centre for Non-Violence has services across the Loddon Campaspe region, a large rural and regional geographical area in Victoria, with women and children's rights, safety and empowerment at the centre of its work.

It provides a range of support programs for women and children experiencing family violence and/or homelessness and risk of homelessness, and programs for men who use violence against family members. There is a strong emphasis on women and children's safety and men's accountability.

The Loddon Campaspe Media Advocacy Project was implemented by the Centre for Non-Violence in consultation with and through funding support from the Central Victorian Prevention of Violence Against Women in our Community Project Plan in 2013, supported by a project worker. safe steps supported the implementation of the project and provided guidance by sharing their tools and resources. The project was supported by senior representatives from the Loddon Campaspe Family Violence Consortium, a representative from safe steps, media, communication and local government representatives and an internal working group, to develop tools and resources and deliver training.

This approach has helped build relationships and the shared vision across all of the partner agencies, and increased the confidence and skills within all groups. Commitment from partners and Media Advocate Support Workers help sustain the project.

Outcomes and key learnings

The work of the project is consistent with best-practice frameworks and is informing the state and national vision for the most effective ways to work with the media to prevent violence against women.

Fourteen advocates have been trained to speak or develop their stories about their own experiences and promote a broader focus in the media on the prevention of violence against women. Advocates participated in a three-day education and training program, focused on gender equity, working with the media and public speaking.

The key learnings from working with advocates are:

- The safety and wellbeing of the advocates is the most important consideration. Risk and safety assessment, establishing guidelines and boundaries for privacy, confidentiality and technology safety are important considerations.
- It is essential to have in place a comprehensive screening process, including ongoing assessment of advocates' safety and wellbeing and trained support workers for media advocate support.
- Using the Power and Control Wheel to explore tactics of violence in the training, it was identified that some of the advocates were still experiencing risk through contact with the perpetrator of violence (through contact with children), even though the relationship had ended.
- An identified gap in the training was the potential use of social media as an advocacy tool and the risk for rural and regional women in regard to technology safety.
- Working with key media and community stakeholders in training and education is a key part of the work to educate and ensure that advocates are treated respectfully.
- Media and community need to understand there is a strong focus on violence prevention, rather than just women sharing their stories.
- The advocates need opportunities for support and to come together to share their experiences in advocacy work.

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