

The Royal Commission into Family Violence has invited written submissions on how the response to family violence and its prevention can be improved in Victoria. The Royal Commission is encouraging solution focused submissions to assist in identifying and solving system-wide issues and gaps, and to identify good practice. Making recommendations about the *prevention* of family violence is a core part of the work of the Royal Commission.

How you can get involved:

- As a signatory of Together for Equality & Respect (TFER) Regional Strategy you may provide input into a regional response by TFER in conjunction with the Regional Family Violence Partnership.
- Submit a response on behalf of your own organisation. The more the better! Your response can be as long or as short as you wish.

This is a great opportunity to advocate for prevention and the importance of a coordinated, long term approach to preventing family violence, and more broadly, violence against women. We hope to encourage as many submissions as possible to strengthen the case for a long-term investment in primary prevention.

Follow this link www.rcfv.com.au/ to access a full version of the Terms of Reference and the Issues Paper. The Issues Paper is designed to help guide your responses however you are NOT required to address the themes or the related questions in this document. There is no particular length or format required for a submission - it can be as short or as long as you wish! The preferred method for submitting your response is electronically (online or via email). All submissions require a cover sheet which can be downloaded from the official website listed above.

All responses are due: Friday 29 May 2015 (by close of business).

WHE have developed prevention focused key messages that you may wish to include in your submission. We encourage you to use these – to add to, tweak, cut and paste or insert you own case studies / programs. Any work you are doing that has been evaluated and is showing positive results is worth including.

A note on the use of language:

'Family violence' is used throughout this document in line with the language specified by the Royal Commission. It should be noted however that family violence sits along a broader continuum of violence perpetrated against women. This document draws on evidence around good practice for the broader area of preventing men's violence against women, as the vast majority of all family and sexual violence is perpetrated by men against women.¹

'Gender equality' is the absence of discrimination based on your gender impacting on your opportunities, and access to power and resources. 'Gender equity' is about fairness. A 'gender equity approach' recognises that the playing field is not currently level and so treating everyone the same will not get us to equality. In fact, it will perpetuate existing inequalities. A gender equity approach usually involves different strategies for men and women and aims to rectify the imbalances in order for us to move toward an outcome of equality.

Key points to include in your submission:

The points below relate specifically to the primary prevention of men's violence against women within a family violence context, and are supported by a strong evidence base.

1. Gender Equity is key to prevention

While family violence impacts on everyone, evidence has clearly established family violence as a gendered issue. We know that addressing the primary determinants of men's violence against women – namely gender inequality and adherence to rigidly defined gender roles² – will help to prevent all forms of violence against women before it occurs, including family violence. A gender equity focus needs to be central to any efforts aimed at preventing family violence.

2. Long term, coordinated action across society

The prevention of violence against women is a long term undertaking. Family violence will only stop when community norms and societal structures that perpetuate unequal relations between men and women are changed.^{2,3} As seen in other successful campaigns, such as SunSmart and Road Safety initiatives, changes to attitudes and behaviours require long-term, coordinated action.

One off or short term projects will not prevent family violence. Effective prevention requires a range of mutually reinforcing, evidence based strategies reaching out to the whole of the community.^{2,3} We need both structural and cultural change which result in gender equality in our

- personal relationships – partners, family and friends,
- community – at school, at work, in community groups, faith based groups, sporting clubs, and
- society – in the media, advertising and popular culture, in those holding positions of leadership / power, including in our governments, and in regulatory or legislative frameworks that support gender equity.

In order for this to occur, active engagement of a range of sectors is required e.g. local government, health, community, education, workplaces, sports, media.⁴ Action needs to be planned and coordinated to ensure that the whole of community is being reached, strategies are evidence informed, evaluation is occurring and learnings are being documented and shared. Coordination also results in avoidance of duplication and thus enables efficiencies of effort. Together for Equality & Respect is an example of a coordinated approach – see case study below.

A Case Study - A Regional Approach to Prevention in the East

[Together for Equality & Respect \(TFER\): A Strategy to Prevent Violence Against Women in Melbourne's East 2013-2017](#) is an example of regional integrated effort to prevent violence against women. TFER was developed with the input, enthusiasm and commitment of organisations across the 7 local government areas in the Eastern Metropolitan Region of Melbourne (EMR) - including **all** Local Governments, Community Health Services, Women's Health, Medicare Locals, Primary Care Partnerships and the Regional Family Violence Partnership. Led by Women's Health East, the Strategy brings together more than 25 agencies working on a shared regional priority to prevent violence against women through an evidence-informed approach. This work has been guided by VicHealth's Framework for Action⁴. The Strategy describes a uniting vision to prevent men's violence against women.

The regional approach promotes the prioritisation, coordination and integration of effort, and supports accountability, efficiency (through shared resources/tools), and consistency in messaging and peer-learning opportunities among Partner organisations.

Examples of local initiatives taking place in the EMR include:

- Gender Equity training being delivered to TFER Partner organisations
- Organisational Gender Audit Tool being utilised by TFER Partners
- Social marketing capacity building – and the use of shared messaging to promote gender equity
- Consultations with Chinese and Indian communities to build knowledge on effective prevention
- Gender equity initiatives focused on specific populations groups eg early years providers, young women, primary and secondary school children, first time parents, Aboriginal young people and sporting clubs

Why TFER is unique:

- TFER has a focus on rigorous evaluation at a regional level of the impact of TFER to prevent violence against women across a range of settings and population groups.
- This evaluation has been enabled through the development of shared objectives, shared indicators of success and shared evaluation tools.
- It addresses an identified gap in knowledge around the impact of mutually reinforcing primary prevention initiatives within a designated area across multiple settings. A key outcome will be to generate data that captures the impact of an integrated regional Strategy, including barriers and enablers to good practice.

Achievements to date (as identified through a partnership evaluation):

- The prioritisation of the prevention of violence across the region – on everyone's plans, and consistency across plans, giving credibility, strength and backbone to the issue.
- The development of a Regional Strategy, a Regional Action Plan and Evaluation Plan

- Common objectives and evaluation tools.
- A growing momentum, engaging more people as the project moves along.

This evaluation also identified success factors so far. These include:

- The planning work was done within the partnership, freeing organisational resources to focus on implementation.
- The inclusive approach – the partnership is open to any organisations who are interested and the number of partners continues to grow over time.
- Having an organisation (Women's Health East) that is expert and prepared to lead.

For more information contact Dr Sue Rosenhain, srosenhain@whe.org.au TFER website: <http://whe.org.au/tfer>

3. Increased and sustained funding and policy emphasis on prevention

Violence against women is a serious human rights abuse, placing an obligation on government and funders to take action to prevent it. An increased focus on prevention is critical to halt the escalating incidence of family violence and to prevent family violence in the future.

The primary prevention of violence needs to be strongly supported by government policy. A whole of government long term commitment is required. This must be matched with a substantially increased and sustained funding allocation in order to effect long term change. The current investment in prevention is vastly inadequate. This increase must be in addition to adequate funding of services which respond to family violence.

Funding needs to include:

- Support for leadership and coordination – Victoria has paved the way in guiding and informing evidence based primary prevention practice. At both government and local levels, should be acknowledged and built upon to further strengthen Victoria's efforts to prevent family violence. As outlined in point 2, leadership and coordination of on the ground work is essential and requires funding support. A coordinated state-wide response should make use of established plans, networks and infrastructure at the regional and local level. Women's Health Services in every region of Victoria are leading and coordinating regional action. The role of women's health services in leading, coordinating and supporting organisations to undertake primary prevention work is resource intensive and requires funding support. Our experience in the East is that bodies such as local government and community health organisations also have important leadership roles and reach at a local level.
- Funds to support local action – while commitment across Victoria to the prevention of violence against women is growing, specific funds to support organisations and others to undertake sustained local action is crucial.
- Investment in evaluation – The prevention of violence against women remains an emerging area of practice. While there is evidence to support the need for action to address the key determinants of violence (gender inequality and adherence to rigid gender roles) and while information is known about some specific interventions, there are still gaps in our knowledge. In particular, the evidence base would benefit from greater investigation of what works with specific population groups and in particular settings. One area where evidence is missing relates to the impacts of undertaking a range of mutually reinforcing activities at a population level. Well evaluated regional action plans have the capacity to add to this gap in evidence.

4. Recognising the intersection of different forms of discrimination faced by women

Factors such as Aboriginality, class, age, sexuality, ethnicity and disability intersect with gender to shape the experience and risk of family violence, as well as access to appropriate responses. Women's diverse backgrounds, contexts and life experiences demands a sophisticated, long term commitment to addressing the diverse and intersecting forms of discrimination faced by women and ensure an approach to both prevention and response that is accessible, inclusive and relevant. One example is a current gap in the evidence base around effective and culturally relevant prevention approaches for culturally and linguistically diverse communities in Victoria. This is an area that needs more attention.

5. Importance of women's voices

Any action to prevent family violence needs to ensure an explicit focus on gender equity. This means paying attention to the important leadership role of women in prevention. Women who have experienced violence have a wealth of knowledge and insight into both the service sector and primary prevention. Women's voices need to be represented in important conversations about family violence and its prevention. The Eastern Media Advocacy Program is a powerful example of this – see case study below.

Case study - The Eastern Media Advocacy Program

The [Eastern Media Advocacy Program](#) (EMAP) supports women who have experienced family violence and/or sexual assault to talk with the media and at public speaking engagements about their experience of violence. Advocates participate in a 3-day training program and are provided with ongoing support to speak out about their stories. The program is led by Women's Health East, in partnership with the Eastern Domestic Violence Service and the Eastern Centre Against Sexual Assault.

Through media and public speaking opportunities, the project:

- ensures that the voices of women who have experienced sexual assault and family violence are heard.
- seeks to bring about change in community attitudes, systems and legislation in order to prevent violence against women.

EMAP recognises the strong role of the media in effecting change in community attitudes and beliefs and thereby in influencing public policy. Through EMAP, advocates challenge misconceptions and stereotypes around sexual assault and family violence, encouraging responsible reporting and a more informed public discourse.

Critically, the voices of women who have survived violence are powerful. They need to be listened to, heard and acknowledged as part of the important public and political dialogue around this issue.

An independent evaluation of EMAP was conducted in 2013. Findings included that:

- Advocates reported increased self-confidence, enhanced knowledge and skills and a sense of empowerment that has "assisted all advocates to move forward in one way or another on their personal journey". Other positive impacts described by advocates included an increased sense of health and wellbeing, a reduced sense of isolation and an increased feeling of social connectedness.
- Media outlets and organisations who had engaged with the program demonstrated a heightened awareness around the issue of family violence and sexual assault.
- Media produced through the program demonstrated more accurate and sensitive reporting on the issue when compared with responsible reporting guidelines.
- Advocates reported positive experiences when dealing with the local media, using words such as sensitive, helpful and sympathetic when describing their interviews.

For more information about EMAP, contact Kate Gibson, kgibson@whe.org.au

References

¹ Victoria Police 2009, Crime Statistics 2008-09, Corporate Strategy and Performance, Victoria Police.

² VicHealth 2007, *Preventing Violence Before it Occurs: A Framework and Background Paper to Guide the Prevention of Violence against Women in Victoria*, VicHealth, retrieved 16 April 2015, <http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/~media/ProgramsandProjects/DiscriminationandViolence/PreventingViolence/framework%20web.ashx>

³ VicHealth 2011, Preventing violence against women in Australia: research summary, VicHealth, retrieved 17 April 2015, <https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/media-and-resources/publications/violence-against-women-in-australia-research-summary>

⁴ VicHealth 2009, *Preventing Violence Against Women: A Framework for Action* VicHealth, retrieved 17 April 2015, https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/~media/ResourceCentre/PublicationsandResources/PVAW/VAW_framework_2009.pdf?la=en