

# 1 Introduction

Too many Australian women experience violence every day. The emotional, physical and social cost is enormous.

But while violence against women generates daily media coverage in Australia, what is sometimes missing is an understanding of the links between sexism, gender inequality, community attitudes and gendered violence. In fact, some reporting perpetuates attitudes and myths that give rise to the violence in the first place.

VicHealth's 2013 National Community Attitudes towards Violence Against Women Survey<sup>2</sup> showed that the majority of Australians believe:

- Violence against women is unacceptable.
- Women should be supported when escaping violence at home.
- Coercive and controlling behaviour constitutes violence.

However, some troubling attitudes were also evident:

- Around one in four think that 'domestic violence is a private matter', contributing to a culture of silence.
- Around one in five believe a woman is partly responsible for rape if she is intoxicated.
- Around one in five believe violence can be excused if the offender later regrets it.
- Around one in six support the notion women say no to sex when they mean yes.

While these attitudes are in the minority, they show that victim blaming and a tendency to excuse or downplay violence still exists.

The media have an important role to play in helping shape these attitudes. More informed media commentary will help promote respect, equality and non-violence, and ultimately lead to changes in public perceptions and public policy.

The responsibility for improving media reporting does not lie with the media alone. Violence prevention agencies and people with expert knowledge and personal understanding of the issue can encourage journalists to report in an ethical and balanced way and include context on the drivers and prevention of violence.

There is growing willingness in the media and the community to understand and prevent violence.

The voices of women who have experienced violence, supported by Media Advocacy Programs, can help drive this change.

Assisting agencies to develop Media Advocacy Programs for women who have experienced violence to contribute to the debate in a confident and safe manner is an important part of a national, coordinated strategy to prevent violence against women.

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***Journalists, editors and others working in the media are in a unique and powerful position to reach a wide-ranging audience, many of whom will be victims of violence themselves.***

Megan, Media Advocate

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***Too often the expectation remains that victims and survivors of sexual violence will stay silent. As a community we don't expect to hear victims' voices and we aren't accustomed to taking them seriously.***

***But media advocacy offers us a way to change this. Media advocacy challenges our habitual approaches to victim survivors and insists that we do better. Media advocacy says to the community: these voices, these stories matter. Media advocacy says: listen and take seriously what victim survivors have to tell us.***

***When we listen to rape survivors tell their stories we see where the problem lies. Gender inequality, the power gap between perpetrator and victim and the abuse of trust to create a situation where exploitation and abuse can be enacted become all too clear.***

***To hear from survivors of sexual violence, to really hear what we have to say, is to recognise that things need to change. It is to learn where we have gone wrong, as individuals, as families, as communities and cultures and systems. It is to accept that we are not doing enough and that it is time all of us stepped up to take responsibility for creating a culture of equality, respect and safety for all.***

***If through the media we can honour and respect the voices and stories of women then we will also, as a community, learn to do so in our courts, in our police stations, in our homes, in our workplaces, in public and in our parliaments.***

Kate Ravenscroft, Media Advocate

Our Watch has, therefore, partnered with Women's Health East and VicHealth, two organisations with experience in the development of Media Advocacy Programs, to create *Voices for Change: A Media Advocacy Program for the Prevention of Violence Against Women*. The Centre for Non-Violence and safe steps, two other organisations with significant experience of running media advocacy programs, have shared their knowledge and experience.

Together, we aim to shift the national conversation on violence against women in the media. We hope the public will recognise that violence against women is an urgent social issue and that we all have the power to help prevent and end violence against women.

## **1.1 What is a Media Advocacy Program?**

Women directly affected by violence have a unique understanding and insight into what needs to change in order to end violence in our society. A Media Advocacy Program enables women who have experienced violence to share their stories with the public through the media and community advocacy engagements. The program trains and supports women in this important advocacy role. It assists women to be able to understand their experiences in the context of a society-wide, preventable issue.

Media advocacy is about actively engaging journalists and media organisations to transform the reporting of violence against women in the media.

To ensure that women's stories are shared in a safe, sensitive and responsible way, Media Advocacy Program staff act as an intermediary between media or community advocacy organisers and the women. This guarantees appropriate matching of opportunity to advocate, responsiveness to the media or organiser's needs, the maintenance of the advocate's privacy and attention to her physical and emotional wellbeing. Women are supported through all stages of the advocacy; before, during and after their media or community advocacy engagement.

Advocacy engagements can include interviews with the media, speaking at public events, meeting with politicians, contributing to family violence or sexual assault enquiries and submissions, or other forms of activism.

Throughout the *Voices for Change Implementation Guide*, the term 'community advocacy opportunities' is used to describe and encompass opportunities that do not directly involve speaking to the media but may be reflected in the media.

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***"Media advocacy shifts the focus from the personal to the social, from the individual to the political, from the behaviour or practice to the policy or environment."***<sup>3</sup>



# Key roles in a Media Advocacy Program

## Role of organisations



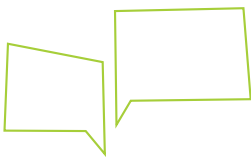
- To form partnerships and relationships that enable the program's success
- To provide direction to the planning and delivery of the program
- To provide media and public speaking training to all advocates prior to any advocacy engagement
- To provide training and information on the evidence base relevant to violence against women and its prevention
- To employ appropriately skilled program staff
- To ensure policies, procedures and practices are in place to ensure the safety and wellbeing of advocates and program staff
- To protect the confidentiality and privacy of advocates at all times.

## Role of advocates



- To attend media and public speaking training prior to any advocacy engagement
- To provide accurate information, to the best of their ability, about violence against women when acting as a volunteer advocate
- To liaise with the Media Advocacy Program coordinator in the preparation of speeches and media engagements
- To attend scheduled media interviews, public speaking engagements and other commitments as agreed.

## Role of program coordinators



- To adequately prepare and support advocates to engage with the media or speak publicly about their experiences of violence
- To provide ongoing support to advocates who actively engage with the Media Advocacy Program
- To facilitate access to debriefing for advocates
- To act as the intermediary between advocates and the media or event organisers and others organising advocacy opportunities
- To support the media to report in a timely, ethical and sensitive way.

## References

- 1 Council of Australian Governments 2011, *The National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022*, retrieved 11 August 2014, [http://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/05\\_2012/national\\_plan.pdf](http://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/05_2012/national_plan.pdf)
- 2 VicHealth 2014, *Australian's attitudes to violence against women*, retrieved 5 October 2014, <http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/Publications/Freedom-from-violence/2013-National-Community-Attitudes-towards-Violence-Against-Women-Survey.aspx>
- 3 Wallack, L 1994, Media advocacy: A strategy for empowering people and communities, *Journal of Public Health Policy*, 15 (4), 420-436.