Policy Brief 2

An emerging theory of change

Our WATCh

End violence against
Women And Their Children

Change is possible

This policy brief outlines an early or 'emerging' theory of change to guide the work of Our Watch – with our partners – to prevent violence against women and their children (VAWC).

A theory of change is a way of stepping through the actions that need to be taken for complex and long-term social transformation, and the principles or assumptions behind such actions.

This 'emerging theory of change' is designed to align with the outcomes and objectives of the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022*. It will be refined through an upcoming research and consultation process for a new national framework, being developed to guide the collective work of stakeholders in the area of primary prevention.

Key points

Our Watch's theory of change highlights our role in the prevention of violence against women and their children, as well as the key partnerships required to achieve the vision of an Australian community free from such violence.

It is based on six inter-related principles

1. We cannot create change alone – we need to work with others and 'build a movement' to prevent violence.

2. Change comes from identifying and addressing the root causes of a problem.

3. Different approaches are needed to create change at individual, community and institutional levels.

4. A multi-faceted, long-term program, with activities that reinforce each other – will maximise change.

5. Whole-of-population work and tailored approaches for different groups are required.

6. Continuous evaluation and testing will guide the work.

Development of Our Watch's Theory of Change

Our Watch exists to end violence against women and their children – our ultimate vision is an Australian society where such violence is a thing of the past. We share this vision with governments across the country, as expressed in their bipartisan support of the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022*, and with numerous organisations who have been working to this same end for many years. We know that achieving such change will not be easy, will not be quick, and will not be possible unless we all work together.

The evidence tells us that prevention of violence against women and their children requires deep societal transformation, and this can only happen when a critical mass becomes dissatisfied with the status quo, and comes together to create change. Building such a 'movement for prevention' is our core task. A theory of change helps us work out how to build this movement, and – more importantly – how to support and sustain such collective action over the long term.

A theory of change 'explains how a group of early and intermediate accomplishments sets the stage for producing long-range results'. It is a way of stepping through the actions we think need to be taken for complex and long-term social change to occur, and make transparent the principles or assumptions that underlie such actions. Recognising its utility, stakeholders recommended that Our Watch develop a theory of change during the national consultations that informed our establishment phase.

The theory of change is not only about what Our Watch does, but also about activities that rely on others – that is, the steps we all need to take, and why, in order to achieve our collective vision of an Australian community free from violence against women and their children. It starts from the current Australian context and projects forward over ten years.

At its centre are the four work areas that frame Our Watch's strategic plan

Lead a sustained and constructive public conversation

Design and deliver innovative programs that engage and educate individuals and the community

Enable organisations, networks and communities to effect change

Influence public policy, systems and institutions

Our Theory of Change

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The emerging theory of change comprises the following diagram, with narrative text and further illustrations outlining its underlying principles. This is designed to be a living and collaborative document open to input from key stakeholders. It will evolve as research and evaluations mature, and our understandings develop. The next stage for this document will be consultation and refinement at the national level as part of the development of the national framework for primary prevention, being actioned through a three-way partnership between Our Watch, VicHealth and Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS).

With the ultimate outcome of

Women and their children live free from all forms of violence

Over 10 years

Incidents of VAWC begin to fall.
There is an increase in the community's intolerance of VAWC.
Women and men enjoy measurably increased equality on economic, social, health and political indicators.

Over 5 years

There is a measurable shift in the public debate towards an increased understanding and intolerance of VAWC, and greater support for gender equality. A visible and credible community movement and authorising environment is created that helps drive prevention – people are more receptive, supportive and involved in prevention strategies.

Attitudes and behaviours contributing to VAWC are more widely recognised and considered unacceptable. When expressed, such attitudes are more confidently challenged by peers, friends and families, across private and public settings. Young people have improved knowledge and skills for respectful relationships.

Effective responses to sexism, harassment, discrimination and VAWC are the norm in organisations of all sorts. Women's participation and representation in decision-making positions begins to increase across the organisations, networks and communities with whom we work.

Drawing on greater community awareness and support, all levels of government invest in comprehensive and multi-sectoral policies that work to ensure the prevention of VAWC. They measure national progress using data of greater detail, accuracy and depth. Reporting of VAWC increases as violence is better identified and less tolerated in communities. The promotion of gender equality is integrated into institutions and systems across settings and sectors.

then...

The media reports VAWC (incidents, causes and impacts) with greater sensitivity and accuracy. Public conversation (parliamentary, academic, cultural etc) demonstrates greater dissatisfaction with the extent and nature of VAWC, and awareness of its drivers.

More individuals are empowered to challenge violence-supportive attitudes and behaviours, promote gender equality, and form respectful, equal relationships – personally, professionally and socially.

Schools, workplaces, other organisations and communities will promote gender equality, encourage proactive bystander behaviour in incidents of sexism, harassment, discrimination and VAWC. The creation of safe, respectful environments will become core business across settings.

Civil society organisations, federal, state/territory and local governments agree to a nationally consistent approach to preventing VAWC, collecting data and measuring progress, based on a shared understanding of the evidence.

if we...

Engage media and contribute to public conversation on the drivers of VAWC and raise awareness of the role of media in shaping gender norms.

Design and deliver innovative community education and social marketing campaigns that engage people and build skills for them to challenge violence-supportive attitudes and behaviours.

Provide organisations, networks and communities with the tools and support they need to effect change.

Develop and support implementation of frameworks and data collection systems for a coordinated national approach to prevention of VAWC.

Our Watch works independently and with partners in planned and evaluated effort to prevent violence against women and their children by addressing its underlying causes – across multiple settings, and tailoring activity to specific community needs.

Principles of the
Theory of Change
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1

**We cannot create change alone – we need
to work with others and 'build a movement'
to prevent violence**

A single organisation cannot achieve the complex
social change required to prevent violence against
women and their children. Our Watch needs to
build a movement for prevention – with partners
at all levels of government, civil society, research
organisations and academia, the response sector,
schools, workplaces and other organisations. All
have different and complementary roles, and
all must play their part if we are to address the
complexities of this deeply-entrenched issue.

Shifts in attitudes and behaviours require people
being engaged where they live, learn, work
and play. Organisations and entities such as
workplaces, schools, sports clubs and community
groups represent a largely unharnessed force
for the promotion of change through their own
settings. Our Watch sees its role as one of an
intermediary or 'go to' organisation, providing
tools, training, technical assistance and standard-
setting to leverage the existing skills and
infrastructure of other sectors or organisations
to prevent violence against women and
their children. We will work both with peak
organisations and governments for systemic
change, while at the same time piloting and
testing new approaches at a more grassroots
level, to build evidence and resources in gap areas.

Our Watch is also well placed to take the lead
on specific activities, such as developing national
social marketing strategies or informing an active
public conversation through media, academia
and other channels. However, to be effective,
such work will need to be supported by policy,
legislative, regulatory and/or system change.
This responsibility lies with governments at the
federal, state/territory and local levels.

The theory of change highlights the importance
of these partnerships. While the first 'layer' of the
change pathway could and should be initiated by
Our Watch (represented by the row of actions that
align with the box entitled 'if we'), all subsequent
outcomes will depend on others engaging with
our work, and us engaging with the work of others.

It is important to recognise that none of the
'change pathways' demonstrated in the theory
of change diagram can be realised without the
crucial role played by services responding to
existing violence against women and their children.
Effective – and sustainably funded – service, police
and justice responses are a fundamental building
block for prevention. They send a message that
violence is not acceptable, establish a standard
of perpetrator accountability, and protect women
and their children from further violence. However,
without significant and distinct investment in
primary prevention, we will never 'turn off the
tap' of violence against women and their children,
and the significant economic and social costs it
entails. Ending violence means ensuring that both
prevention and response strategies are funded
fully, and not in competition with each other.
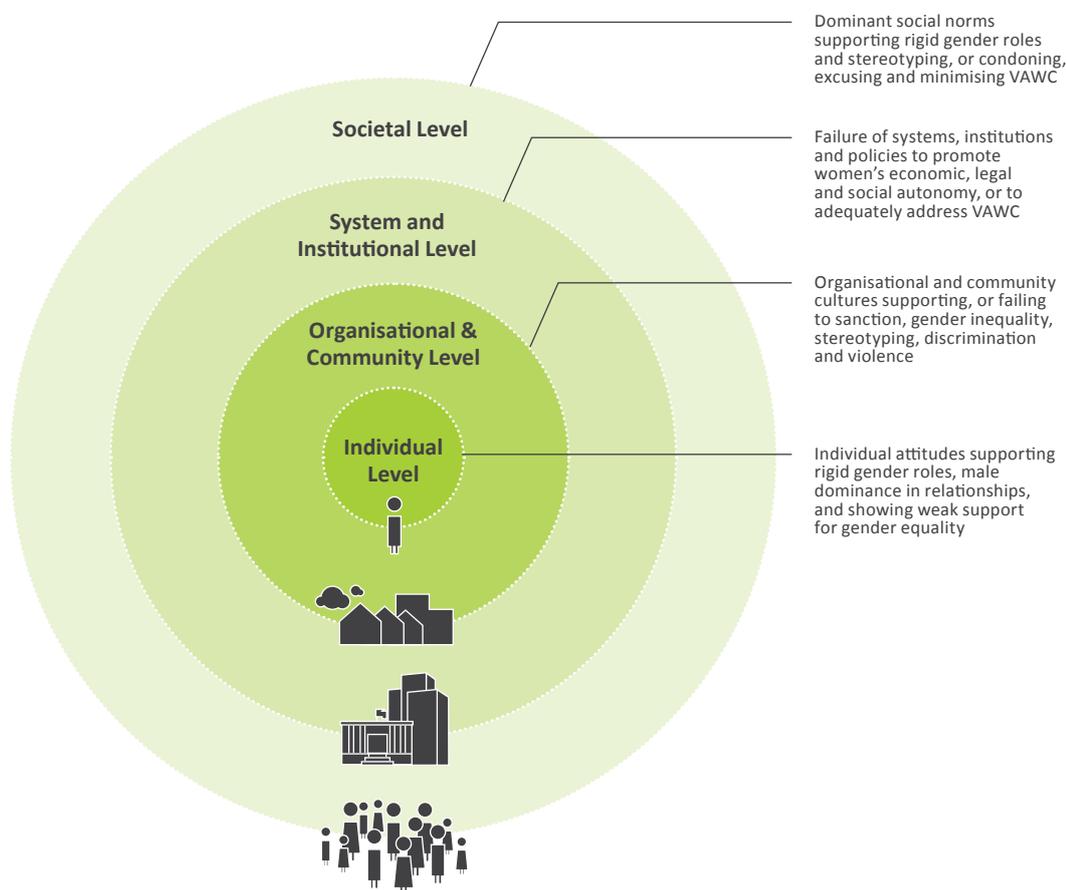
Principles of the Theory of Change

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2

Change comes from identifying and addressing underlying causes

To date, most national and international activity has been directed to responding to existing violence. While this activity provides the crucial foundation on which to build a movement for change, research has shown that good responses alone cannot significantly shift the culture which allows the violence to happen in the first place. Our Watch's second key principle in constructing a theory of change is that we will only achieve long-term or sustainable change if we go to the root causes of the problem of violence against women and their children.

A significant national and international research base has informed our understanding of the core drivers of violence against women and their children. Policy Brief 3 outlines the international evidence identifying the factors contributing to violence against women and their children as complex and embedded in the broader social practices and cultural values of society. The key underlying factors – found across numerous studies – were the unequal distribution of power and resources between women and men and adherence to rigid or narrow gender roles and stereotypes. Broader attitudinal and cultural support for violence also contributed.

Figure 1. A socio-ecological understanding of the drivers of violence against women and their children

Societal Level

System and Institutional Level

Organisational & Community Level

Individual Level

Dominant social norms supporting rigid gender roles and stereotyping, or condoning, excusing and minimising VAWC

Failure of systems, institutions and policies to promote women's economic, legal and social autonomy, or to adequately address VAWC

Organisational and community cultures supporting, or failing to sanction, gender inequality, stereotyping, discrimination and violence

Individual attitudes supporting rigid gender roles, male dominance in relationships, and showing weak support for gender equality

Principles of the
Theory of Change

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This was true in different ways at individual, community, institutional or societal levels – known as a 'socio-ecological model' (see Figure 1). At the individual level, research and surveys such as the 2009 *National Survey on Community Attitudes to Violence against Women 2009: Changing Cultures, Changing Attitudes – Preventing Violence against Women: A Summary of Findings* (NCAS), found that men who held sexist, patriarchal and/or sexually hostile attitudes were more likely to condone or perpetrate violence against women. At the organisational and community level, NCAS and the 2010 World Health Organisation (WHO) report, *Preventing Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence: Taking Action and Generating Evidence* both found the most consistent predictor of attitudes supporting, justifying or excusing the use of violence against women was the broader acceptance of gender norms and inequality. Similarly, at the systemic and societal levels, countries where there were greater economic, social or political differences in power between men and women, had significantly higher levels of violence against women.

These findings reflected what could already be observed in surveys, police and hospital data – that there were gendered patterns of violence prevalence and perpetration. The research found that other factors, such as alcohol and drug use or childhood exposure to violence, while not negligible, were neither necessary nor sufficient conditions for predicting future perpetration or experience of violence. While these may be identified as risk or contributing factors, they become significant only where they intersect with norms and social practices relating to gender roles, identities and stereotypes.

It is not possible to end violence against women and their children without addressing the systemic inequalities of power between men and women, along with the construction of narrow and stereotypical gender roles that support and are reinforced by these inequalities. *What Will It Take to Prevent Violence against Women and Children? Raising Voices Strategy 2012-2016*, developed by a non-profit organisation in Uganda in 2012, suggests that we need to address gender norms and belief systems about power: who has it; how it is used; and how relationships and communities are shaped by those beliefs. Change will only come about when these underlying determinants are actively challenged through a fundamental shift in gendered power dynamics at the individual, relationship, community and societal levels.

The Our Watch Theory of Change attempts to capture these underlying determinants of violence against women and their children.

The four vertical channels of action represented in the theory of change correspond to the individual, community/organisational, system/institutional and societal levels of the socio-ecological model.

Principles of the
Theory of Change
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3

Different approaches are needed to create change at individual, community and institutional levels

Each channel of action in the theory of change will need to draw on specific disciplines of research/practice and further theories of change.

At the level of individual change, strategies will need to 'drill down' into the factors that contribute to the creation and reinforcement of individual attitudes and behaviours, and how these may differ across age and other demographic groups. They may draw on a number of conceptual models and build on the learnings from diverse fields of practice (such as social marketing). Specific research may need to be commissioned to determine the best way to target, sequence and implement individual attitudinal and behavioural change campaigns.

At the community or organisation level, our understandings of how change happens will need to be informed by fields of practice such as organisational development and change management, as well as community change, development and mobilisation models. The role of Our Watch as an 'intermediary organisation' that strengthens and harnesses the work of others also needs to be considered as an element of the change pathway itself. Our Watch does not simply initiate and observe change, we are an integral part of the process, and our ability to create change is strengthened as we develop as an organisation and are able to better drive our own work and support others.

At the system/institutional and broader societal levels, approaches or models of change become more complex as they need to take into account change pathways at all other levels. Public health models in recent years have expanded notions of health promotion and literacy to build capacity of individuals, organisations and societies to better overcome socio-structural barriers to health – and so engender broader social change. As such, these approaches have evolved to inform complex change across fields beyond those concerned uniquely with health or disease. Such inter-disciplinary approaches, drawing on a range of theories and models and bringing them into coherent frameworks, are useful for conceptualising change on complex issues like violence.

Most recently, the development of the national framework for primary prevention has begun examining frameworks and models for prevention of violence against women and their children at the broad social level. A number of interdisciplinary models of change have been identified. All such models will be considered as Our Watch and its partners, VicHealth and ANROWS, enter the next stage of drafting the national framework's conceptual model.

Principles of the
Theory of Change

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4

A multi-faceted long-term program with activities that reinforce each other will maximise change.

Large-scale shifts in complex social problems like violence against women and children could only be achieved through engaging people across the many environments where they live, learn, work and play. It is not enough to implement one-off initiatives, no matter how well-conceptualised. A schools based program, for instance, may well change participating students' attitudes and behaviours around gender and violence, but if they receive sexist and/or violence-supportive messaging from the media, broader peer groups or in their home environments, that change is less likely to 'hold' over time. The UN Women Report of the Expert Group Meeting on Prevention of Violence against Women and Girls noted in 2012 that the impact of initiatives is 'dampened' when they occur in isolation, and broader community or social level practices and norms do not support their messaging.

On the other hand, the effectiveness of a prevention initiative is reinforced and strengthened when it is carried out with initiatives occurring in other settings. For example when a schools based program is accompanied by a social media campaign, community initiative, and/or sports based program.

Our change strategy therefore aims to reach the largest possible number of people with quality, sustained and meaningful interventions that encourage shifts in the way people think about and behave in relation to gender and violence.

The four channels of action include:

1. Engagement of the media and promotion of a sustained public conversation

2. Design and delivery of integrated social marketing initiatives

3. Enabling organisations, networks and communities to create change through their own settings and populations

4. Influencing public policy, systems and institutions.

Together these form a multi-faceted, long-term program of work with activities designed to mutually-reinforce each other to strengthen outcomes.
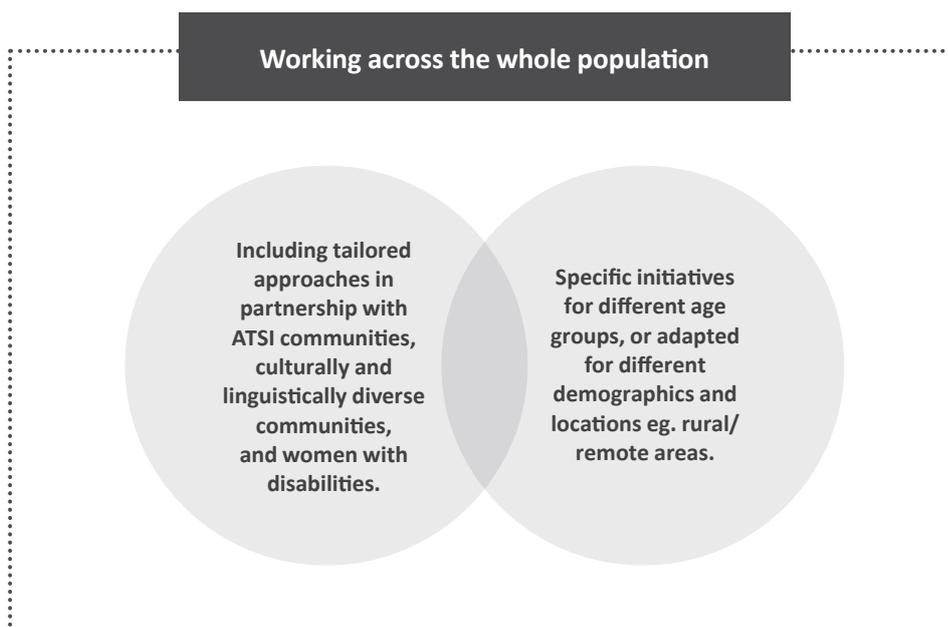
Principles of the
Theory of Change

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5

We need to work across the whole population, and tailor approaches for different groups

The evidence base tells us that violence against women and their children occurs across the Australian community, in all of its diversity. As such a whole-of-population approach is needed to end it. Strategies need to be tailored to meet people where they are, which means responding to their different experiences, backgrounds, contexts and circumstances. For example, many attitudes, beliefs and behaviours are formed in childhood and adolescence. A report for the White Ribbon Foundation, _An Assault on Our Future: The Impact of Violence on Young People and Their Relationships,_ found this is a crucial time to educate and build skills for respectful relationships through strategies specific to such age groups.

Historical and existing socio-structural forms of discrimination and disadvantage may contribute to violence. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, the effect of colonisation, amongst other factors, plays a significant role in understandings, experiences of, and responses to violence against women and their children. Work to prevent violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their children cannot be separated from efforts to address racism, dispossession and the intergenerational impact of colonisation and its associated policies. Culturally competent strategies that incorporate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history, values and experience are therefore critical, and Our Watch will need to work in a long-term partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to jointly develop such work.

Figure 2. Through each stream of action we will include both universal 'whole-of-population' initiatives, as well as those tailored to different groups

Working across the whole population

Including tailored approaches in partnership with ATSI communities, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, and women with disabilities.

Specific initiatives for different age groups, or adapted for different demographics and locations eg. rural/ remote areas.

Principles of the Theory of Change

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Across all Australian communities, the likelihood and impact of violence against women and their children can be made worse by existing discrimination and disadvantage associated with factors such as age, ethnic origin, religion, disability, sexual identity and orientation, age, geographic location and socio-economic circumstance. When coupled with gender inequality, sex discrimination and gender stereotyping, the intersection of these factors can compound the experiences and impacts of violence.

What this means for our theory of change is that while our strategies must address the key drivers of violence against women and their children – gendered power inequalities, discrimination and stereotyping – they must simultaneously challenge negative stereotypes and socio-structural discrimination based on Aboriginality, or other identity characteristics such as disability, ethnicity, sexual identity, or refugee status. We need to ensure – at each step – that all our strategies incorporate diversity, and are based on consultation with, participation and consideration of the needs and ideas of different groups, and are evaluated on the principle of achieving equality of outcomes.

But it also means that we need to undertake specific and tailored initiatives with our priority populations: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, culturally and linguistically diverse communities and women with disabilities. These cannot be stand-alone initiatives. They should link to whole-of-population strategies as part of a holistic effort. They must be based on the principles of meaningful participation, promoting self-advocacy and capacity building based on understandings of diversity, cultural respect and sensitivity.

More and more people will feel confident to step up in the face of attitudes that support violent behaviours and say that they do not agree.

Principles of the
Theory of Change

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6

We need to continually test and evaluate our approaches, and undertake further research, to refine our work

To understand what works, what does not, and why, Our Watch will need to design and conduct evaluations across all our work areas. Along with broader research undertaken in partnership with ANROWS and others, these evaluation findings will help refine and build evidence-based models to guide future work. Emphasising participatory and action research methodologies will also help increase the capacity of stakeholders for ongoing evidence-building.

If we design and deliver well-conceptualised, quality initiatives based on the learnings from previous practice, we envisage our activities will result in measurable shifts in the factors known to contribute to violence against women and their children. These might include participants' attitudes or beliefs about gender and violence, changes in organisational or institutional practices or increases in participant skills that promote gender equitable and non-violent social norms. Continuous evaluation is the means through which we both test our theory of change and guide our future work. Figure 3 highlights the role of evaluation in our method of work, and its interaction with other principles above.

The international evidence base is now strong on the attitudes, behaviours and practices that contribute to violence against women and their children, so we can be confident that shifts in such factors will in turn lead to a reduction in levels of violence. As individual and community attitudes towards violence and gender become more respectful and equitable, and as our organisations and institutions promote and encourage respectful relationships and gender equality, societal tolerance of violence against women and their children will decrease. Fewer people will find excuses for perpetrators or engage in victim blaming or minimise violence. More and more people will feel confident to step up in the face of attitudes that support violent behaviours and say that they don't agree.

This is a long-term goal. It is important to remember that violence against women and their children is a deeply entrenched social problem, with intersecting drivers and contributing factors. Evaluations of programs can only provide us with learnings – and indications of progress – for the individuals, communities and organisations engaged by these programs. It may take decades for relatively small changes at the program level, for example in schools or workplaces, to translate into impacts at the population level. This translation is unlikely to happen if programmatic approaches are not expanded and systematised. To date, prevention of violence against women and their children has largely been limited to the program level. While indications of effectiveness in creating change within individual organisations, schools or communities are highly positive, this work is yet to be taken to scale.

Creating change at the national, or whole population level, will be a long-term and complex exercise, engaging partners at all levels of government and across civil society. Our Watch will work with such partners to create a broader program of work, along with an associated evaluation framework that assesses shifts on high-level indicators. These will include measures of gender equality in economic, social and political terms, as well as community attitudes to, and the prevalence of, violence itself. This will provide an important touchstone that we can review at regular intervals, allowing us – collectively – to measure and demonstrate national level progress against the underlying causes of violence against women and their children, and, ultimately, to end such violence.

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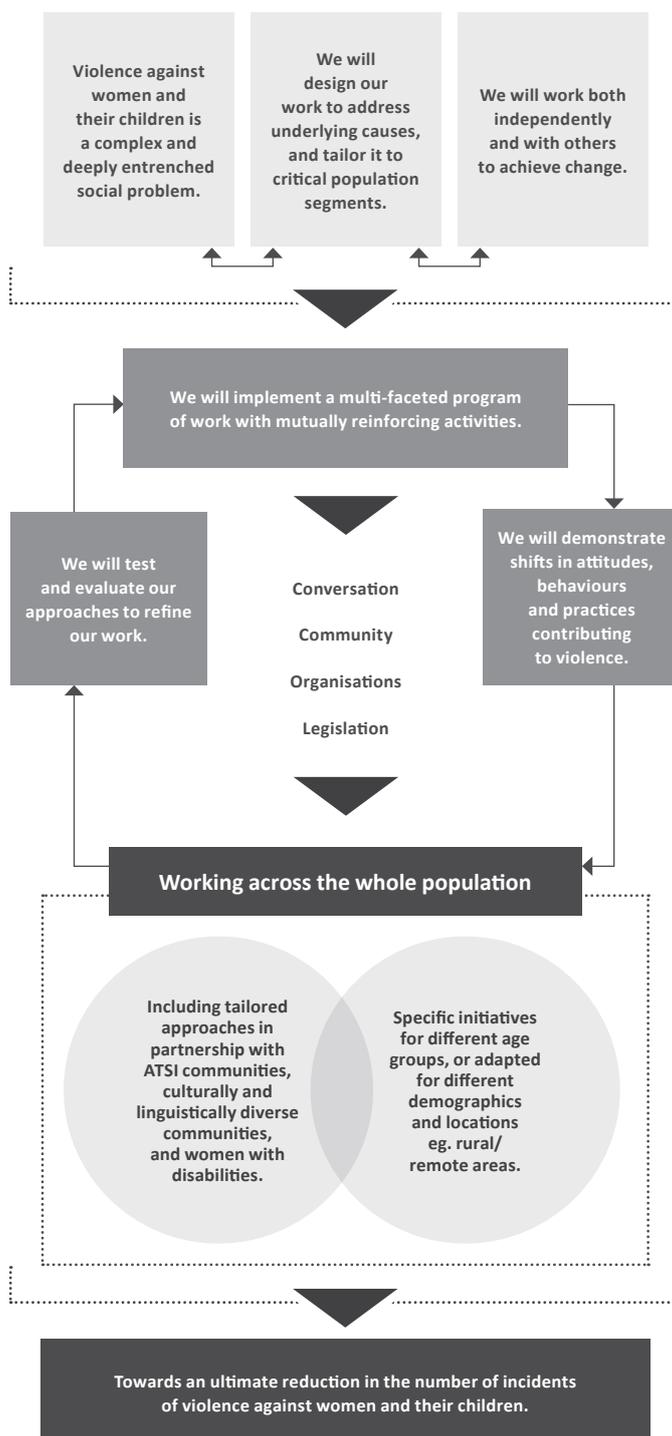
About
Our Watch
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Our Watch is an independent, not-for-profit organisation, working to raise awareness and engage the community in action to prevent violence against women and their children.

Our Watch has four members: the Commonwealth, Victorian, Northern Territory and South Australian Governments. Remaining states and territories have been invited to join as members.

Since its incorporation, Our Watch has commissioned a series of policy briefs to assist in the development of the strategic program. The briefs are not designed to be comprehensive or definitive, but rather to provide a 'point in time' summary of issues and evidence in particular areas. They will be published progressively over the next 6 months, and available at ourwatch.org.au.

Figure 3. The Our Watch Method of Work

Violence against women and their children is a complex and deeply entrenched social problem.

We will design our work to address underlying causes, and tailor it to critical population segments.

We will work both independently and with others to achieve change.

We will implement a multi-faceted program of work with mutually reinforcing activities.

We will test and evaluate our approaches to refine our work.

Conversation

Community

Organisations

Legislation

We will demonstrate shifts in attitudes, behaviours and practices contributing to violence.

Working across the whole population

Including tailored approaches in partnership with ATSI communities, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, and women with disabilities.

Specific initiatives for different age groups, or adapted for different demographics and locations eg. rural/remote areas.

Towards an ultimate reduction in the number of incidents of violence against women and their children.

ourwatch.org.au