

Putting the  
**prevention**  
of violence against  
**women**

into practice:

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*How to Change the story*

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**Our**  
**WATCH**  
End violence against  
Women **And** Their **Children**

Our Watch 2017

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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 people past and present, and we value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures, and knowledges.

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### *Building on a history of Australian women's leadership in primary prevention*

Good prevention strategies already exist across Australia and signs of progress are emerging. This Handbook builds on the valuable work by individuals and organisations in many sectors. Our Watch would like to acknowledge the numerous women and women's organisations across Australia that pioneered the work in the prevention of violence against women, in particular our colleagues in the women's health, gender equality, family violence and sexual assault sectors. We would also like to acknowledge the important leadership and work of women in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and culturally and linguistically diverse communities in working to end violence against women across Australia. Their collective leadership, commitment, efforts and advocacy – which are underpinned by a feminist, social justice and human rights approach – have put the primary prevention of violence against women at the forefront of the national agenda in ending violence against women. This has provided an important basis upon which this work can continue.

# 3

## Section 3: What is primary prevention?

## In this section you will find:

- an overview of how primary prevention differs from other actions to address violence against women
- the essential actions required to prevent violence against women
- an overview of the need to address harmful gender norms, practices and structures across multiple levels of our society to prevent violence against women.

Primary prevention of violence against women is an emerging area of work. Some of the ideas related to primary prevention might be new to practitioners. It is important that practitioners are clear about how primary prevention is different to response work and early intervention. This section will guide you through this.

## Learning from the public health approach to prevention

Much of the work to prevent violence against women has been informed by public health and health promotion theory and practice. Health promotion recognises that there are three key stages at which actions can be taken to address poor health:

- Actions can be taken *after* a negative health outcome to avoid it happening again. This is known as tertiary prevention or response.
- Actions can be taken at moments of *risk* to stop the negative health outcome from happening or to reduce the severity. This is known as secondary prevention or early intervention.
- Actions can be taken *before* the negative health outcome occurs to stop it from happening at all. This is known as primary prevention or simply prevention.

These three stages of prevention can be used to guide work to prevent violence against women, just as they can for other health issues, as shown in Figure 2.

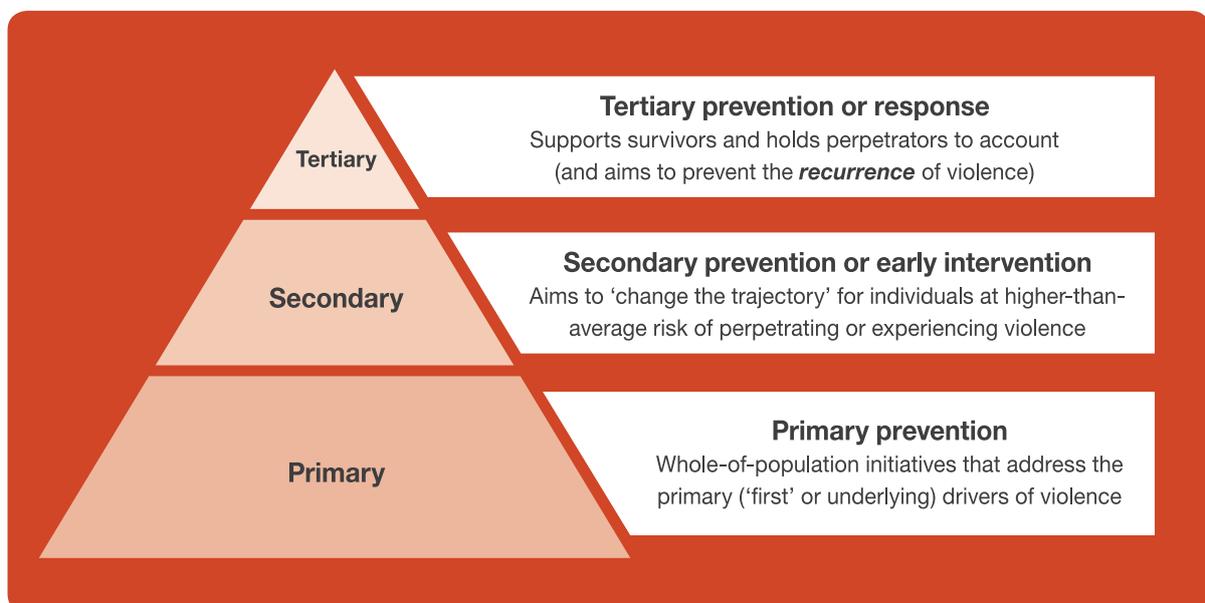


Figure 2: The relationship between primary prevention and other work to address violence against women

Primary prevention is not about working with people at risk of either perpetrating or experiencing violence against women. Rather, primary prevention works with all people, across all levels of society, to change and transform the social context in which violence against women is able to flourish.

Primary prevention is significant because of the three levels of prevention, it is the one that will have the largest impact on the prevalence of violence against women. Tertiary and secondary prevention, while essential, are unlikely to significantly reduce the rates of violence against women on their own.

Australia has been leading the way in the prevention of violence against women. Australia has a [national plan](#),<sup>40</sup> and two national organisations, Our Watch and Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) providing leadership for this work. All states and territories have local plans and there are a growing number of regional level plans. [Our Watch](#), [ANROWS](#) and [VicHealth](#) worked together to produce [Change the story](#).<sup>41</sup>

## Primary prevention means social change

There are many ways we try to reduce the rates and impacts of violence against women and their children in our communities. This includes increasing police numbers, providing more lighting and CCTV in public spaces and firmer criminal sanctions for perpetrators. Such strategies, as well as direct work with women victims of violence and men who perpetrate violence, are an essential part of society's efforts to reduce violence against women. They are not, however, primary prevention strategies, but rather responses to violence that is already occurring, as they do not seek to address the underlying social conditions that allow violence against women to occur in the first place, primarily gender inequality. As noted in the introduction and outlined in *Change the story*, the gendered drivers of violence against women that primary prevention addresses are:

1. **condoning of violence against women**
2. **men's control of decision-making and limits to women's independence in public and private life**
3. **rigid gender roles and stereotyped constructions of masculinity and femininity**
4. **male peer relations that emphasise aggression and disrespect towards women.**

Primary prevention aims for social transformation on a scale that will create a safe and equal world for women and girls. Primary prevention makes preventing violence everyone's responsibility and asserts that we all have a role to play in changing the culture, structures and attitudes that drive violence against women. It questions and challenges our beliefs and seeks to change the practices and behaviours of all of us.

*Change the story* outlines the five areas of social change – essential actions – that are required if we are to prevent violence against women before it occurs:

1. **challenge condoning of violence against women**
2. **promote women's independence and decision-making in public life and relationships**
3. **foster positive personal identities and challenge gender stereotypes and roles**
4. **strengthen positive, equal and respectful relations between and among women and men, girls and boys**
5. **promote and normalise gender equality in public and private life.**

More information and examples about these essential actions can be found in Section 6 of this Handbook, as well as in *Change the story*.

To prevent violence against women, prevention initiatives must address at least one of the essential actions identified in *Change the story*. At the same time, prevention work must also be consistent with the other essential actions. For example, even if an initiative does not aim to directly challenge gender stereotypes and roles (as identified in action 3), at a minimum it should ensure it is not unintentionally promoting rigid gender stereotypes.

# Norms, practices and structures

As detailed in Section 2, when thinking about social change it is important to remember that we all live in a complicated social system of interdependent:

- norms: things which represent our knowledge about what other people do and we think we should do
- practices: the way these norms are usually or habitually performed
- structures: systems such as organisations or rules that arrange our norms and practices in particular ways.

To prevent violence against women, we need to address norms, practices and structures. If we only work on changing norms without also working to change structures, the changes to our norms are unlikely to stick. If we change structures without changing practices, the new structures will have little impact. If we change practices but don't tackle the underlying norms, the changed practices will not last.

Of course, not every prevention strategy can promote changes to norms, practices and structures. However, in our project planning and implementation we should be mindful of what type of change we are aiming for and the ways in which our work will align with, and be reinforced by, other prevention projects.

Norms, practices and structures can be further described as occurring at different levels of our lives, from individual to community to institutions to society as a whole.

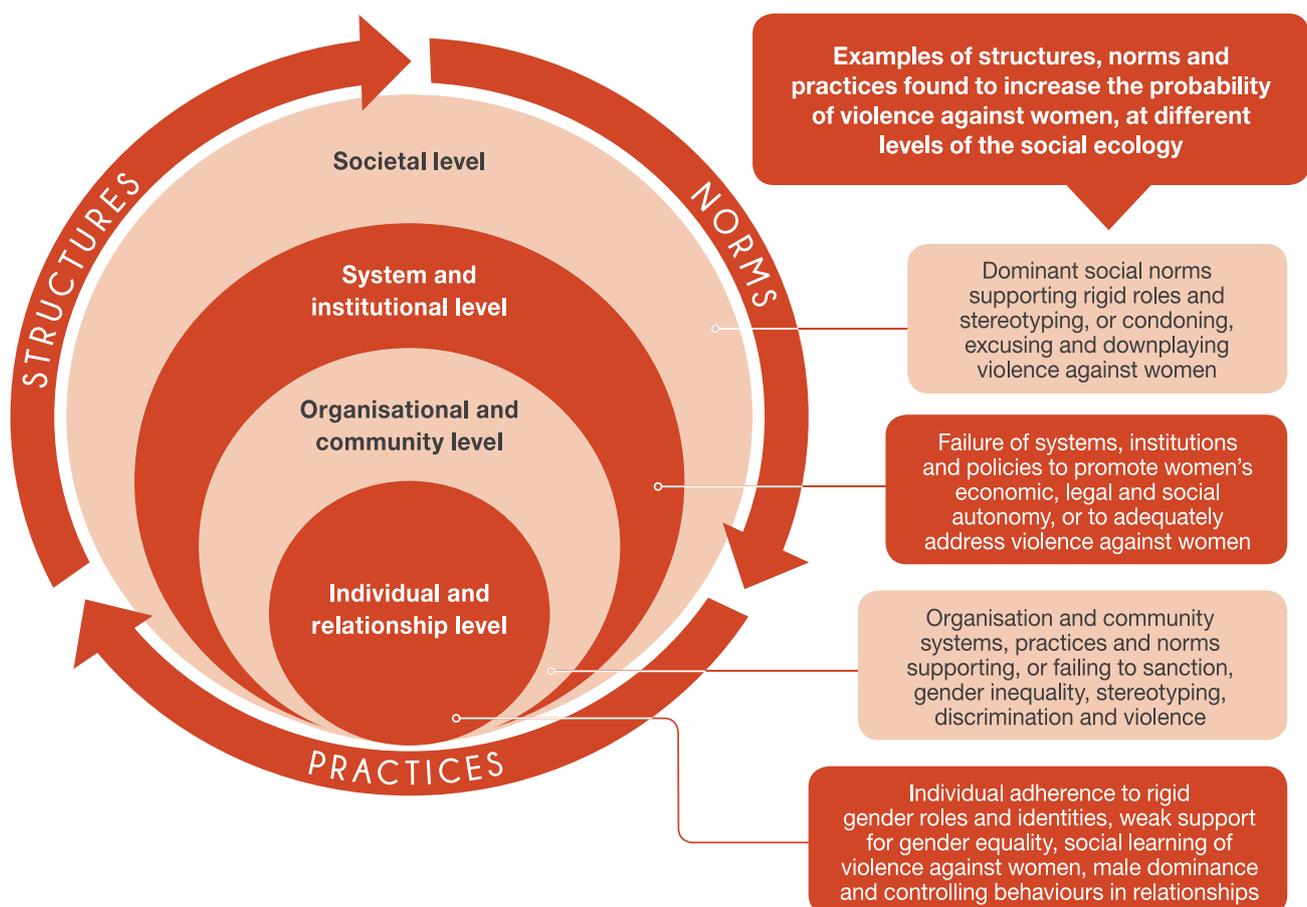


Figure 3: A social ecological model of violence against women.

This ecological model shows the inter-relationships of norms, structures and practices. For example, organisational norms shape individual norms, but are themselves shaped by institutional norms. Again, most prevention practice will not have the capacity to promote change at all levels of the ecological model. But in developing and implementing prevention strategies, practitioners should be conscious of which levels of the ecological model the work is operating at, and of the ways in which it aligns with other work.



### Norms, practices and structures in prevention work in sport

Work that promotes and encourages women's and girls' participation in sport addresses a number of essential actions to prevent violence against women by:

- promoting women's independence and decision-making in public life and relationships
- fostering positive personal identities and challenges gender stereotypes and roles
- strengthening positive, equal and respectful relations between and among women and men, girls and boys.

To work across all of these levels, initiatives need to include work that considers the norms, practices and structures that influence lower participation rates for women and girls in sport.

What are the **norms** about girls and women's participation in sport? Are there barriers in how we think of girls' and women's participation? Do we value girls' and women's participation in sport? Are women and girls who are sports people held in as high regard as men and boys?

How do we see this in **practice**? Are women and girls participating at your club/in your sport?

What are the **structures** that support or discourage girls' and women's participation? Are sport facilities available and accessible for women and girls? Are sporting clubs and environments welcoming and respectful? Is sport available at times and in places which suit women and girls?

Primary prevention also looks at how these structures, norms and practices operate across all levels of our society. What does this look like at individual, community and organisational level, and larger social levels? In sport this includes investigating what it looks like across grassroots sporting clubs, elite level sport, government funding and support, media coverage and sports programs in schools as well as for individuals.

For further information about sport and recreation as a key setting to prevent violence against women, including examples and further resources to support work in this setting, see Section 6.

When we understand what is meant by preventing violence against women, we can see that there are numerous activities both large and small that can be part of the solution to preventing violence against women. Examples of different types of prevention practice are contained in Section 6 of this Handbook. Having a clear understanding of what makes primary prevention different from secondary and tertiary prevention is also important so that our efforts to prevent violence will be effective in the long term.

## **Appendix 5: Alternative text for figures**

## Section 3

**Page 34.** Figure 2. The relationship between primary prevention and other work to address violence against women. This image shows a triangle with a flat base cut into three sections. The largest section at the base of the triangle refers to primary prevention: whole-of-population initiatives that address the primary ('first' or underlying) drivers of violence. The middle section refers to secondary prevention or early intervention which aims to 'change the trajectory' for individuals at higher-than average risk of perpetrating or experiencing violence. The top part of the triangle refers to tertiary prevention or response which supports survivors and holds perpetrators to account (and aims to prevent the recurrence of violence).

**Page 36.** Figure 3. Socio-ecological model of violence against women. This image shows the different factors which influence the occurrence of violence against women and their children. 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 systems, practices and norms supporting, or failing to sanction, 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.

# Endnotes

# Endnotes

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