Putting the prevention of violence against women into practice:

How to Change the story
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.
Section 1: Introduction
In this section you will find:

• an overview of who this Handbook is for and how to use it
• an overview of the scope and terminology used in this Handbook
• an overview of the national commitment to prevent violence against women at a federal, state and territory, regional and local levels.

Together we can change the story

Violence against women and their children in Australia is preventable. Together we can choose a future where all women and their children live free from violence, where women are not only safe, but respected, valued and treated as equals in public and private life.

To achieve this, we need social change. We need to change the norms, practices and structures that produce gender inequality and underpin the drivers of violence against women. To achieve equality and safety for all women, it is vital that we also address other forms of social, political and historical discrimination, inequality and disadvantage. This social transformation is an ambitious, long-term goal. It will involve us all working together on prevention projects small and large, in our communities and across a range of different settings, such as schools, sporting clubs and workplaces, and contributing to a national conversation where violence against women is no longer condoned, excused or trivialised, and where equal and respectful relationships become the new norm.

By picking up this Handbook, you have joined a community of Australians working to create a future free of violence for all women, regardless of their race, religion, ability, sexuality, geographic location, gender identity, age, class or cultural background. Thank you for joining this movement, and for your commitment to creating a safer, more equal society.
How to use this Handbook

This Handbook is a companion to Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia\(^1\) (Change the story). The different sections of this Handbook are interlinked, but it is designed for you to use in the way that suits you best. You may choose to read the entire Handbook from start to finish, or prefer to only read the sections that you need at different times. However, we recommend reviewing the Table of Contents so that you are familiar with what information is available in each section and can consult it when needed. Throughout this Handbook you will find:

- tips for best practice based on the experience of practitioners in Australia
- case studies and examples that illustrate important points for prevention
- links to further resources and tools (all web links are current as of May 2017).

Change the story is the national framework for the prevention of violence against women and their children. It outlines the national and international evidence that explains how certain factors consistently predict, or drive higher levels of such violence. These drivers of violence include:

- individual beliefs and social norms that condone or excuse violence
- men’s control of decision-making and limits to women’s independence
- adherence to rigid stereotypical gender roles, relations and identities
- male peer relations that emphasise aggression and disrespect for women.

All these drivers are produced in the broader context of gender inequality.

Because gender inequality is at the core of the problem, gender equality must be at the heart of the solution.

There is also a clear understanding and acknowledgement in the framework that there are a number of factors that can increase the probability, frequency or severity of violence against women. These are the factors that often have a high profile in discussions about violence against women, that people might see in their personal lives and that we, as practitioners, often get asked about. These factors include harmful use of alcohol, drug use, exposure to violence as a child and socio-economic inequality. These are referred to as ‘reinforcing factors’ throughout this Handbook. While we encourage and support initiatives that aim to address these additional factors such as reducing harmful alcohol use, we know that to have the greatest impact on ending violence against women we need to address gender inequality as a priority. Because gender inequality is at the core of the problem, gender equality must be at the heart of the solution.
What actions do we need to take to prevent violence against women?

This Handbook is focused on the essential actions that address the drivers of violence against women described above and are based on promoting and normalising gender equality in both public and personal relationships. They are to:

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

Whilst this Handbook primarily focuses on the gendered drivers of violence, it also pays particular attention to one of the supporting actions, which is to promote broader social equality and address structural discrimination and disadvantage. A focus on this action comes from recognising that gender inequality cannot be separated from other forms of inequality, and in all our prevention work we must consider other forms of discrimination and disadvantage such as racism, ableism and homophobia.

The consideration of how people experience multiple, intersecting forms of discrimination and disadvantage is referred to as ‘intersectionality’. We have woven this principle throughout the Handbook, together with suggestions on how to apply it in your prevention work. The aim of this ‘intersectional’ approach is to illustrate how these other, intersecting issues must be considered alongside any consideration of gender inequality in order for prevention work to address violence against all women.

This Handbook does not restate the detailed evidence and analysis in *Change the story*, rather it translates that ‘big picture’ framework into ‘on-the-ground’ action with detailed, step-by-step guidance, tips, tools and resources. *Change the story* outlines the ‘what’ and ‘why’; this Handbook presents the ‘how’ of primary prevention. This Handbook and other resources and toolkits produced by Our Watch aim to support both the current prevention workforce, and to provide guidance to new, emerging and potential primary prevention practitioners across Australia.

Our Watch is committed to regularly reviewing and updating this Handbook to ensure that case studies, resources and links are up to date. As prevention knowledge grows, it is anticipated that new sections will be added to the Handbook so up-to-date examples of quality practice and experience can be shared across Australia.

This Handbook draws on an enormous body of valuable work undertaken by many different individuals and organisations. A reference list at the end of the Handbook acknowledges all sources used in developing this Handbook, and there are links and references to relevant resources and tools throughout the Handbook.

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**Change the story: a shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia.**

*Change the story* was developed by Our Watch, Australia’s National Research Organisation for Women’s Safety (ANROWS) and the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth) in 2015. It presents a conceptual framework for understanding violence against women and sets out the key elements of a coordinated, evidence-informed national approach to prevention policy and practice.

A good place for practitioners to start is by viewing the Our Watch videos, *Let’s change the story* and *It’s time to act on Our Watch*, www.ourwatch.org.au/Media-Resources?c=Video.

The four-page summary of *Change the story* which appears in the following pages is also available to download – https://www.ourwatch.org.au/getmedia/244371d8-23fb-4769-ac64-14e4692e4355/Framework_4pp_A4_Online_AA.pdf.aspx?ext=.pdf
Violence against women is serious, prevalent and driven by GENDER INEQUALITY.

GENDERED DRIVERS of violence against women:

- Condoning of violence against women
- Men's control of decision-making and limits to women's independence
- Stereotyped constructions of masculinity and femininity
- Disrespect towards women and male peer relations that emphasise aggression

Gender inequality sets the NECESSARY SOCIAL CONTEXT.

Every week one WOMAN IS MURDERED by her current or former partner.

657 DOMESTIC VIOLENCE MATTERS ARE DEALT WITH EVERY DAY BY AUSTRALIAN POLICE.
Violence against women IS PREVENTABLE if we all work together

ACTIONS that will prevent violence against women:

CHALLENGE condoning of violence against women

PROMOTE women’s independence & decision-making

CHALLENGE gender stereotypes and roles

STRENGTHEN positive, equal and respectful relationships

Promote and normalise GENDER EQUALITY in public and private life

MUTUALLY REINFORCING ACTIONS ARE NEEDED THROUGH LEGISLATION, INSTITUTIONAL, POLICY AND PROGRAM RESPONSES:

- by governments, organisations and individuals
- in settings where people live, work, learn and socialise
- tailored to the context and needs of different groups.

Section 1: Introduction
Putting the prevention of violence against women into practice: How to Change the story

The evidence highlights four gendered drivers of violence against women and five reinforcing factors.

### Gendered drivers

Particular expressions of gender inequality consistently predict higher rates of violence against women:

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.**

### Reinforcing factors – within the context of the gendered drivers

- Condoning of violence in general
- Experience of, and exposure to, violence
- Weakening of pro-social behaviour, especially harmful use of alcohol
- Socio-economic inequality and discrimination
- Backlash factors (increases in violence when male dominance, power or status is challenged).

### Higher probability of violence against women

The following five essential and five supporting actions together address these drivers and reinforcing factors.

#### Essential actions to reduce the gendered drivers of violence against women

The five essential actions address the gendered drivers of violence against women described in Element 1 in the Framework. They are essential because, without all these actions, violence against women cannot be sustainably reduced or prevented.

To be effective, these actions require both specialised policy support and mainstream implementation in the diverse settings where people live, work, learn and play.

For each action, prevention activities that address norms, structures and practices at all levels need to be considered. For example, work addressing attitudes towards violence and gender at the community or organisational level needs to be accompanied by legislative, institutional and policy support that promotes gender equality and accountability for violence and discrimination. Activity under each action should also be designed, implemented and monitored to take into account the diversity of women’s experiences and identities and ensure equality in outcomes for all women, as discussed in Element 3 in the Framework.

1. **Challenge condoning of violence against women**
   - Shift social support for attitudes, beliefs, behaviours, systems and practices that justify, excuse, trivialise or downplay violence against women and their children, or shift blame from the perpetrator to the victim.

2. **Promote women’s independence and decision-making in public life and relationships**
   - Equalise access to power and resources between women and men, including by strengthening women’s economic security, independence and social, political and economic participation and decision-making in public life.
   - Challenge men’s use of controlling behaviours in relationships and the subtle normalisation of male dominance in relationships.
   - Promote social and cultural networks and connections between women to provide sources of peer support.
   - Support women’s collective advocacy and social movement activism to prevent violence and promote gender equality.

3. **Foster positive personal identities and challenge gender stereotypes and roles**
   - Encourage and support children, young people and adults to reject rigid gender roles and develop positive personal identities that are not constrained by gender stereotypes.
   - Challenge aggressive, entitled and dominant constructions of masculinity and subordinate or sexualised constructions of femininity.
   - Promote and support gender-equitable domestic and parenting practices, including through workplace initiatives.

4. **Strengthen positive, equal and respectful relations between and among women and men, girls and boys**
   - Challenge peer relations between men that involve hostility or disrespect towards women, and attitudes that relationships between men and women are oppositional, or inevitably based on conflict.
   - Promote positive, equal and respectful relationships between women and men, girls and boys, in all contexts.
   - Work with children and young people to counter the early development of negative peer relationships and to promote respect and gender equality.
Supporting actions to address reinforcing factors

The five supporting actions address the reinforcing factors shown in the image above – those that can contribute to or exacerbate violence against women in the context of the gendered drivers. Specialist violence prevention and gender equality expertise will be essential to inform these supporting actions. However, the supporting actions should also engage those working across other areas of social policy, advocacy and practice, such as child protection, alcohol and drug harm minimisation, and those addressing socio-economic disadvantage. The prevention of violence against women has common cause with these other areas of work, and establishing or strengthening partnerships for cross-learning and capacity building will lead to shared or complementary outcomes.

Actions to address these reinforcing factors will not prevent violence against women in a sustainable way if undertaken in isolation from the broader prevention agenda outlined here. However, if implemented in gender-sensitive ways, and in conjunction with the essential actions that address the gendered drivers of violence described above, these supporting actions can make a significant contribution to overall prevention efforts.

Challenge the normalisation of violence as an expression of masculinity or male dominance

- Counter the construction of masculinity as violent and the learning of violence in gendered ways.
- Challenge the normalisation, valorisation and glorification of male violence through strategies that focus on the socialisation of boys and young men, and that challenge the construction and expression of masculinity as violent, both in public and private life, and through media and popular culture.

Prevent exposure to violence and support those affected to reduce its consequences

- Strengthen efforts to promote non-violent parenting and prevent child abuse, and all other forms of violence (such as race-based, community, public or lateral violence), especially through the provision of expertise on the gendered dynamics of these broader forms of violence.
- Support and advocate for healing strategies and other efforts to mediate the impacts of past occurrences of violence, such as child abuse, racially motivated and colonial violence experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, war-related trauma and torture experienced by refugees, or violence occurring in prisons or detention centres.

Address the intersections between social norms relating to alcohol and gender

- Challenge drinking cultures that emphasise male conquest and aggression, and social norms and attitudes that position men’s drinking as an excuse for violence, or women’s drinking as a form of victim-blaming.
- Improve the regulation of alcohol by considering violence against women in policy debates about the promotion and physical and economic availability of alcohol.

Reduce backlash by engaging men and boys in gender equality, building relationship skills and social connections

- Consider backlash, or resistance to personal and social change, as a normal and expected part of the change process.
- Challenge excuses for violence, including those driven by a backlash to change, and maintain the need for individual accountability for violence.
- Develop positive ways to engage men and boys in the change process, encouraging them to challenge restrictive and rigid gender roles and identities for both men and women.
- Work to build relationship skills and social connections in communities experiencing rapid social and economic change, especially when this change challenges existing gender norms and hierarchies. This includes when women’s increasing social and economic independence and participation and/or men’s unemployment places them in roles that differ from gendered expectations.

Promote broader social equality and address structural discrimination and disadvantage

- Address intersecting forms of inequality, recognising that gender inequality cannot be separated from other forms of inequality.
- Ensure all prevention work has an inclusive and intersectional focus in order to prevent violence against all women.
- Form partnerships and coalitions that build collective challenges to gender inequality, racism, ableism, ageism, classism, homophobia and transphobia; address the legacies of colonisation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people; challenge other forms of social and structural discrimination and disadvantage; and promote social and economic justice.
This Handbook draws on an enormous body of valuable work undertaken by many different individuals and organisations.
Who is this Handbook for?

Because we all have a role to play in preventing violence against women and their children, this Handbook uses a broad definition of ‘practitioner’.

Prevention practitioners are people engaged in activities (practice) that contribute to the prevention of violence against women by addressing the gendered drivers of that violence. Practitioners may have prevention as part or all of their work focus and they may be working in range of settings or contexts. Practitioners may be:

- employed in roles where these activities are the sole focus of their work, such as in women's health centres and services, specialist prevention agencies, or in local government
- employed in roles where prevention practice is an element of their work, such as educators, or human resources specialists
- engaged in these activities in a voluntary capacity in a specific program, such as champions of change or ambassadors
- employed or engaged in other roles, such as a sports coach.

In any of these circumstances, practitioners are people committed to changing society’s gendered norms, practices and structures, and addressing factors that reinforce them so that women and their children are free from violence.

The primary prevention workforce is evolving and each setting/context is unique. Existing practitioners are continuing to innovate and improve the evidence based on what works to prevent violence against women, new practitioners are emerging and all practitioners are at different stages in developing their prevention knowledge, expertise and practice. Therefore, some sections of this Handbook may be more or less relevant for individual readers and it may not always provide sufficient guidance to meet the needs of all communities, contexts or population groups.

Whatever your experience and knowledge of prevention work, this Handbook aims to share current best practice guidance and provide a consistent tool to ensure all practice is based on the same theory of change so that the work that we all do is mutually reinforcing. When prevention practice is happening in different settings, in different ways and in every part of Australia, we really will change the story.
Some notes on this Handbook

Violence against people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex or gender diverse

While this Handbook focuses on preventing violence against women, violence is also experienced by people whose identity does not conform to standard, binary definitions of sex and gender including those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex or gender diverse people. The definition of ‘women’ we use in this Handbook includes anyone who identifies and lives as a woman.

It is also important to note that this Handbook does not include strategies specifically aimed at preventing violence in same-sex relationships, or among or against transgender, intersex or gender diverse people, as some of these forms of violence have significant and distinct drivers and contributors other than gender inequality, such as transphobia and homophobia.

However, as these forms of violence share some similar drivers to violence against women — particularly rigid, binary and hierarchical constructions of gender, sex and sexuality, control and the condoning of violence, as well as processes of discrimination — the techniques and approaches outlined in this Handbook are likely to support initiatives to address other forms of gendered violence.

We also believe our work to prevent violence against women — particularly in promoting positive, equal and respectful relationships, and challenging gender stereotypes and roles — aligns with the outcomes that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and gender diverse communities are also advocating for. In this way we see ourselves as allies in the work to reduce all violence in our communities.

It is also important to note that most of the existing evidence on the drivers of violence against women relates to women in heterosexual relationships. There is currently work underway to build evidence on what drives other forms of violence. This will be incorporated into this Handbook as the evidence emerges.

As an important extension of, and complement to, the strategies outlined in this Handbook, we encourage practitioners to consider the practical ways they can acknowledge and support lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, gender diverse and intersex people in their initiatives. For example, on forms that ask people to specify their gender, provide ‘other’ as a response option and avoid language and imagery that assume heterosexuality in publications and materials.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, gender diverse and intersex services and organisations and peak bodies in your state are a good place to start to find information on messaging and working respectfully with these communities.

The terms ‘violence against women’ and ‘violence against women and their children’

Our Watch was established to drive nationwide change in the culture, behaviours and power imbalances that lead to violence against women and their children. The inclusion of ‘their children’ in Our Watch’s work is due to the understanding that many women who experience violence have children in their care.

Exposure to violence against their mothers or other caregivers causes profound harm to children, with potential impacts on attitudes to relationships and violence, behavioural, cognitive and emotional functioning, social development, and through a process of ‘negative chain effects’ education and later employment prospects. Because violence against women has such direct and significant impacts on children, preventing it will also prevent associated harm to and consequences for children.

To make this Handbook as reader-friendly as possible, we have chosen to omit ‘and their children’ in the text, but with the understanding that prevention of violence against women does include their children as well.
Why we talk about violence against women and don’t address all violence, including violence against men

All violence is wrong, regardless of the sex of the victim or perpetrator. But there are distinct gendered patterns in the perpetration and impact of violence. For example both women and men are more likely to experience violence at the hands of men, with around 95 percent of all victims of violence in Australia reporting a male perpetrator.

While men are more likely to experience violence by other men in public places, women are more likely to experience violence from men they know, often in the home. The overwhelming majority of acts of family and domestic violence, and sexual assault are perpetrated by men against women and this violence is likely to have more severe impacts on female than male victims.

Recognising the gendered patterns of violence doesn’t negate the experiences of male victims. But it does point to the need for an approach that looks honestly at what the research is telling us and addresses the gendered dynamics of violence. This is what Our Watch seeks to do. Our specific mandate is to prevent violence against women and their children, but promoting gender equality and respectful and non-violent relationships benefits the whole community, including men.

Section 2 of this Handbook has more information on the gendered nature of violence against women and Change the story discusses why we focus on women in our work. The Speaking publicly about preventing men’s violence against women: Curly questions and language considerations resource from Women’s Health West also has additional evidence that you can use in your work in response to the question, ‘what about violence against men?’.

While men are more likely to experience violence by other men in public places, women are more likely to experience violence from men they know, often in the home.
Australia’s commitment to prevent violence against women

Australia has a significant commitment to the prevention of violence against women at federal, state/territory and regional levels, which is expressed in various plans and strategies. These commitments provide an important foundation for prevention work and can support your advocacy for funding and support the development of your plans and strategies. This section provides a brief overview of these commitments as of May 2017.

Commonwealth: the *National Plan to reduce violence against women and their children* was launched in 2010 and is a 12-year plan that runs to 2022. The Plan is being implemented through four three-year action plans. The *third of these action plans* was released in 2016.

Australia is a signatory to the *Sustainable Development Goals*. There are 17 universal goals and 169 targets that aim to address inequality, injustice and sustainability around the world that all United Nations member states are expected to work towards over the next 15 years. Gender equality is one of the goals, with a key target of eliminating all forms of violence against all women and girls in public and private spheres.


New South Wales: the *NSW Domestic and Family Violence Prevention and Early Intervention Strategy 2017-2021* sets out a direction for the implementation of strategies. The Strategy is a commitment under the *NSW Domestic and Family Violence Blueprint for Reform 2016-2021*.

Northern Territory: *Domestic and Family Violence Reduction Strategy 2014-17: Safety is Everyone’s Right* operates to achieve change in the Northern Territory.

Queensland: there is the *Queensland Violence against Women Prevention Plan 2016-22*, along with the *Queensland says: not now, not ever. Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Strategy 2016-2026*. The strategy is currently being implemented under the second action plan, 2016-19. There is also the *Queensland Women’s Strategy 2016-2021*, which is being implemented under a community implementation plan.

South Australia: *A Right to Safety: The next phase of South Australia’s Women’s Safety Strategy 2011-2022* guides the work in South Australia. This is complemented by *Achieving Women’s Equality: South Australia’s Women’s Policy*, which was launched in 2015.


Victoria: is in the midst of a significant increase in work to prevent violence against women that has flowed from the Royal Commission into Family Violence, conducted in 2015 and 2016. *Ending Family Violence: Victoria’s Plan for Change* outlines the scope of this work which includes a 10-year investment plan and a primary prevention strategy released in 2017, *Free from Violence: Victoria’s Strategy to Prevent Family Violence and All Forms of Violence Against Women*. Alongside this there is also *Safe and Strong: A Victorian Gender Equality Strategy: Preventing Violence Against Women through Gender Equality* released in 2016.

Western Australia: has *Western Australia’s Family and Domestic Violence Prevention Strategy to 2022: Creating Safer Communities* which is currently being implemented under the *Freedom from Fear: Working toward the elimination of family and domestic violence in Western Australia Action Plan 2015*.

Many regional areas are now also developing action plans, most often based on the appropriate State Plan and/or National Plan. For example, *Safer Families, Safer Communities Kimberley Family Violence Regional Plan 2015-2020* or *Together for Equality and Respect: A Strategy to Prevent Violence Against Women in Melbourne’s East 2013-2017*. In Victoria, many local governments have undertaken prevention initiatives and plans, with leadership and support provided by the *Municipal Association of Victoria*. 
Appendix 5: Alternative text for figures
Section 1


Current state:

- Violence against women is serious, prevalent and driven by gender inequality.
- Gendered drivers of violence against women: condoning of violence against women; men’s control of decision-making and limits to women’s independence; stereotyped constructions of masculinity and femininity; disrespect towards women and male peer relations that emphasise aggression.
- Gender inequality sets the necessary social context.
- 657 domestic violence matters are dealt with every day by Australian police.
- Every week one woman is murdered by her current or former partner.

Desired future:

- Violence against women is preventable if we all work together.
- Actions that will prevent violence against women: challenge condoning of violence against women; promote women’s independence and decision-making; challenge gender stereotypes and roles; strengthen positive, equal and respectful relationships.
- Promote and normalise gender equality in public and private life.
- Mutually reinforcing actions are needed through legislation, institutional, policy and program responses: by governments, organisations and individuals; in settings where people live, work, learn and socialise; tailored to the context and needs of different groups.


Particular expressions of gender inequality consistently predict higher rates 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.

Reinforcing factors – within the context of the gendered drivers – can increase frequency or severity of violence:

5. Condoning of violence in general.
6. Experience of, and exposure to, violence.
7. Weakening of pro-social behaviour, especially harmful use of alcohol.
8. Socio-economic inequality and discrimination.
9. Backlash factors (increases in violence when male dominance, power or status is challenged). These gendered drivers can interact with reinforcing factors that create a higher probability of violence against women.

Page 17: Figure 1: Who is this handbook for? The image shows four people with different labels, those being: Potential prevention practitioners looking for starting point; Emerging prevention practitioners looking for further information and guidance; Experienced prevention practitioners looking for further direction; and Policy makers and others responsible for funding, coordinating and providing system support to prevention practice.
Endnotes
Endnotes


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