



MUNICIPAL ASSOCIATION OF VICTORIA

**Australian Government
Department of Social Services**

**Developing the next National Plan to Reduce
Violence against Women and their Children**

Submission

July 2021

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The MAV is the statutory peak body for local government in Victoria. The MAV would like to acknowledge the contribution of the councils who responded to our request for their comments and advice during this consultation. While this submission aims to broadly reflect the views of local government in Victoria, it does not purport to reflect the exact views of individual councils.

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1 Acknowledgements

The MAV acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the traditional custodians of the land, and we offer our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging.

The MAV appreciates the feedback and input provided by councils who were able to review the draft submission.

2 Responses to the 'Have your say' survey

The following are the MAV's responses to Questionnaire B – Organisational Response

B.1. What does your organisation see as the major issues for people experiencing family, domestic, and sexual violence?

Impact of pandemic on victim survivors, includes:

- increased risk during lockdowns due to outdated safety planning, drastic changes in service use and availability, and ability to relay information to victim survivors;
- understanding safe telecommunications practice and increased ways for perpetrators to track victim survivor on apps and smartphones, review logs or monitor video calls under lockdown;
- increased risk of family violence for pregnant and new mothers not able to access specialist support in a safe and private way;
- working from home and home-schooling in a potentially unsafe environment without the protective settings of workplace and school, compounded by services like Child Protection reducing face to face contact.

Access to necessary supports for victim survivors, includes:

- knowing where to go, what's available and who to seek assistance from;
- lack of consistency and equity in resources available, particularly evident in rural communities;
- due to referral bottle necks to access services with timely appropriate support and intervention, risk and responsibility falls to victim survivors, councils and staff while waiting;
- challenges of leaving with children and the long-lasting impacts of trauma on child development and mental health of victim survivors;
- council services, prescribed under Victoria's risk assessment management framework, stretched for timing and capacity to effectively engage, validate, screen, identify and share information in amongst other responsibilities.

Lack of safe, appropriate, affordable and accessible housing, evidenced by:

- family violence is the leading cause of homelessness for women and children;
- older women are the fastest growing cohort experiencing homelessness.

B.2 How relevant are the below outcomes and priorities for a strategy to prevent family, domestic and sexual violence for all Australians?

5	4	3	2	1
Highly relevant	Relevant	Neutral	Less relevant	Not relevant

5	Communities are safe and free from violence
5	Relationships are respectful
5	Indigenous communities are empowered to strengthen their own responses to family, domestic and sexual violence
5	Services meet the needs of people experiencing family, domestic and sexual violence
5	Systems supporting people experiencing family, domestic and sexual violence work effectively together
4	Justice responses are timely and effective
5	Perpetrators are held to account and perpetrator intervention systems enable accountability
5	People who experience family, domestic and sexual violence are heard and have their experiences acknowledged
4	Building the evidence base for family, domestic and sexual violence around what works in support
4	Strengthen the evidence base, monitoring and reporting through a coordinated system
5	Build on primary prevention initiatives and research to promote safe relationships and build gender equitable values.
4	Understanding individual experiences of violence across diverse groups and individuals

B.3. Are there any other priorities that your organisation feels would make a difference to prevent family, domestic and sexual violence beyond those listed in Question 2?

The MAV's top priority is for greater recognition and investment in local government because local government:

- is the tier of government closest to the community providing unrivalled reach to where people live, learn work and play, from coast to coast;
- has an existing infrastructure that can be effectively engaged to promote primary prevention of violence against women (PVAW) including family violence, leveraging councils' role as a workplace, service provider and, particularly through the unique role of elected local councillors, civic leadership in the community;
- knows and works with their communities to identify and address their diverse and intersectional needs, for example supporting mental health and community connection, supporting children and young people, working with diverse cultures and LGBTIQ+ communities, promoting healthy masculinities;
- offers an opportunity for capacity and capability building of councils' mainstream services to prevent violence against women and family violence and respond/refer appropriately when needed;
- is well placed to provide access to support through mainstream services and places contributing to needed cultural change and normalisation around accessing support, particular for men;
- has existing and can develop new partnerships across the spectrum of primary, secondary and tertiary prevention;
- is a significant workforce with almost 200,000 people employed in 537 councils across Australia, the majority of which (55%) are rural, regional or remote. Most people employed in councils also live locally and have capacity to influence change beyond their workplaces in their communities, such as sports clubs, schools, faith-based settings and neighbourhoods.

Other priorities include:

- greater focus on all forms of violence against women and family violence and compounding, intersectional factors (see B.7.), including sexual harassment and street harassment;
- a whole of system, coordinated approach to prevention (see B.5.);
- improving local government sector awareness, skills, knowledge and collaboration in family violence screening and intervention, including an intersectional lens.

B.4. What are the most important things we can do to support people who are experiencing family, sexual and domestic violence?

5	4	3	2	1
Highly relevant	Relevant	Neutral	Less relevant	Not relevant

5	Psychological and emotional support which is accessible and affordable
4	Community support
4	Support from employers
5	Safe housing
5	Financial security
4	Being heard, supported by others and better understood by others
4	Receiving an appropriate response from authorities (an educated, trauma-informed response, i.e. not over or under reporting)
4	Removing perpetrators from victim/survivors' homes
4	Perpetrator intervention programs
3	Moving victim/survivors to a new area
4	Specialist counselling programs for victim/survivors
4	Counselling programs for perpetrators
3	Employment programs
3	Spiritual counselling
3	Installing home security systems and/or getting personal alarms
	Other (please specify) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Moving perpetrators to a new area - Making it easier, safer and less traumatic to report incidents to authorities - Support for children witnessing family violence - Support for community around bystander/intervention strategies - Resources to assist victim survivors recognise 'red flags' in new relationships earlier - Support for men and healthy relationships - Support for early years and young people

B.5 What is working well to prevent family, domestic, and sexual violence in Australia?

Implementation of Australia's first National Plan provided critical infrastructure for developing a consistent national framework, evidence-base and profile to support prevention efforts. This includes establishing national entities and frameworks:

- Our Watch and *Change the Story* provide a roadmap for a whole of setting/organisation socio-ecological approach to prevention at a national, state and local level;
- ANROWS provides all levels of government, policy makers and innovators access to evidence-informed research of what interventions work, emerging promising practice and where evidence gaps remain;
- and the 1800 RESPECT crisis support line.

In Victoria, the recognition and infrastructure that supports the role of local government in preventing family violence has been a significant enabling factor. In particular, funding from the Victorian Government over a decade has allowed the MAV to employ a PVAW Policy Adviser who established and supports the *PVAW Network*. This Network along with a wide range of activities undertaken by the MAV supports capacity and capability building within and across councils. Most Victorian councils are actively engaged with this Network, only 7 of 79 councils are yet to attend.

Changes to the Victorian legislative and policy landscape encourages and/or requires councils to take action creating an authorising environment. For example:

- *Free From Violence and Safe and Strong Strategies* include specific targets for elected council leadership;
- introduction of new and changes to existing legislation which specifically address councils such the *Gender Equality Act*, the *Municipal Health and Wellbeing Act*, and the *Local Government Act*;
- MARAM Framework strengthens service collaboration, providing further opportunities for disclosure and improved response as a deterrent to potential perpetrators knowing they will be held in view and to account.

B.6. What should be done to improve the prevention of family, domestic, and sexual violence in Australia?

Formally recognise local government in the next National Plan and associated Evaluation Plan and action plans. (see B.7.)

Invest in each State and Territory Local Government Association and national peak body, the Australian Local Government Association, to employ dedicated primary prevention officers. (See B.7.)

Increase focus on underrepresented/under-researched forms of family violence and address the needs of vulnerable cohorts who are at higher risk of violence due to compounding and intersecting forms of discrimination and disadvantage. (see B.7.)

Build on the Local Government Toolkit. While the generic nature of this toolkit makes it accessible to councils and other organisations starting out on their journey to prevent family violence, there is an opportunity to build on and further tailor the toolkit and resources to reflect the unique role of local government in primary prevention.

Improved data frameworks with gender disaggregated data collected and accessible at the LGA level whenever data is collected.

Improvements to the national legislative and policy environment that will promote gender equality and measurable action to prevent violence against women e.g., introduction of new specific legislation to end family violence and amendments to existing legislation to improve outcomes and remove barriers, new legislation to prevent, address and improve the reporting of sexual harassment and street harassment.

Ensure the next National Plan links to other high-level policy initiatives e.g., National Disability Strategy and findings of the Royal Commission into Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability, and National Quality Framework for early childhood education and care.

A coordinated, whole-of-system approach to ending family violence, that recognises the reach and unique role of local government, is needed to support prevention workforce development, research and evaluation, and the overall coordination of implementation across all settings.

B.7. If you could recommend three priorities for a strategy to prevent domestic, family and sexual violence for all Australians, what would it be?

1. Formally recognise local government in the next National Plan and associated Evaluation Plan and action plans as a level of government and a significant workplace setting, provider of critical community infrastructure and services, as well as municipal-wide civic leadership.
2. Investment in each State and Territory Local Government Association and national peak body, the Australian Local Government Association, to employ dedicated primary prevention officers. This would support coordination and capacity building with councils in each jurisdiction to promote and support the leadership role of councils and partnership opportunities to prevent violence against women in local communities. This model of investment would:
 - be value for money with high impact across the whole country
 - strengthen existing national partnerships and coordination through the recently established *National Local Government Association Prevention of Violence Against Women Network*
 - support use and promotion of the Local Government Toolkit and contribute to its evolution
 - sustainably embed PVAW in councils nation-wide.
3. Increased focus on underrepresented/under-researched forms of violence against women and family violence such as sexual harassment, street harassment, elder abuse, family violence against LGBTIQ+ people, and violence against people with disability, in addition to family violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, is needed. As is a focus on the long lasting and intergenerational impacts of family violence on women and their children.

The new National Plan should also more comprehensively address the needs of vulnerable cohorts who are at higher risk of violence due to compounding and intersecting forms of discrimination and disadvantage. This would enable local government to better meet the needs of everyone in their diverse communities through delivery of their universal and mainstream services

B.8. Is there anything else you would like us to know?

Local Government is in a unique position (e.g., through Information Privacy Principles and staff training on privacy) to work with local family violence specialists to offer women escaping violence things such as:

- Silent rate notices
- Animal Registration waivered and silent
- Family Services implementation of silent childcare registrations
- Elder Abuse screenings
- Silent addresses etc.

B.9 Which of the following statements best describes your organisation?

	Family, domestic and/or sexual violence service (local community)
	Family, domestic and/or sexual violence service (state-wide)
	Family, domestic and/or sexual violence service (national)
	State/territory government
	Federal government
	Service for children and/or young people
	First responder (e.g. police, ambulance)
	Research organisation
	Education facility (e.g. university)
	Health (e.g. hospital, GP)
	Housing/Homelessness Services
	Corporate Sector
	Legal or judicial
X	Other (specify if you wish) The MAV is the peak body for Victoria's 79 councils.

B.10. Which state or territory does your organisation operate in?

	Australian Capital Territory
	New South Wales
	Northern Territory
	Queensland
	South Australia
	Tasmania
X	Victoria
	Western Australia
	National

B.11. Does your organisation specialise in working with specific cohorts?

	People who have experienced violence (victim/survivors)
	Aboriginal
	Torres Strait Islander
	Cultural and Linguistically Diverse
	LGBTIQA+
	People with disability
	Women
	Men
	Children
	Young People
	Age care
	Perpetrators
	None of the above
X	Other (specify if you wish) The MAV is the peak body for Victoria's 79 councils. MAV specialises in policy and advocacy, whilst our council members also develop and provide whole of community approaches to primary prevention, early intervention, as well as some response-related activity. Local government's work intersects will all the above cohorts, in particular through delivery of community and universally based services.

B.12. Does your organisation specialise in any of the below types of support service?

	Sexual violence
	Family violence
	Domestic violence
	Crisis response (e.g. first responders)
	Mental Health
	Safety and wellbeing
	Housing
	Financial counselling
	Legal services
X	Other (specify if you wish) . The MAV is the peak body for Victoria's 79 councils. MAV specialises in policy and advocacy, whilst our council members also specialise in developing and providing whole of community approaches to primary prevention, early intervention, as well as some response-related activity. Local government's work intersects across all the above issues to varying degrees, in particular, community safety and wellbeing.

B.13. Your organisation's Postcode

3001