

Family violence and municipal public health and wellbeing planning

Guidance for local government, August 2024

OFFICIAL

Context

This document outlines the department's guidance for local government, originally developed in 2017, to support the implementation of Recommendation 94 of the Royal Commission into Family Violence. In partnership with the Municipal Association of Victoria, minor updates have been incorporated to align with current context and supporting resources.

In 2015, the Victorian Government established Australia's first Royal Commission into Family Violence (the Royal Commission). The Royal Commission heard directly from the community to find out what the government needed to do to prevent family violence, improve support for victim survivors and hold those who use violence to account.

Ending Family Violence: Victoria's 10-Year Plan for Change followed in 2016 and committed government to producing three rolling action plans setting out how the 227 Royal Commission recommendations would be delivered. All recommendations have now been implemented and the next stage of Victoria's work to end family violence is underway with a third and final rolling action plan in development, scheduled for release in 2024.

In line with the legislation passed to support Recommendation 94 that will enable a sustained focus on family violence prevention, this guidance provides examples of practical measures councils can take to reduce family violence and respond to the needs of victims in preparing their municipal public health and wellbeing plans (MPHWP) for the 2025-2029 planning cycle.

Councils and family violence

Preventing all forms of violence is one of 10 priority areas in the *Victorian public health and wellbeing plan 2023-2027*, that councils are required to give regard to when preparing their municipal public health and wellbeing plan as required by the Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008.

Most councils already proactively work towards preventing family violence in their local communities, partnering with women's health services and community organisations to coordinate plans and action.

This guidance provides examples (table 1) of practical measures that councils have implemented through their role across the domains of influence as detailed in the Local government guide for preventing family violence and all forms of violence against women:

- Council as a workplace
- Council as a service provider
- Council as a connector
- Councillors as leaders and decision makers

Definitions and key concepts

The Victorian Family Violence Protection Act 2008 defines family violence as:

'(a) behaviour that is physically, sexually, emotionally, psychologically or economically abusive; threatening or coercive; or in any other way controls or dominates the family member and causes them to feel fear for the safety or wellbeing of that family member or another person; or (b) behaviour by a person that causes a child to hear or witness, or otherwise be exposed to the effects of, behaviour referred to in paragraph (a)'.

Free from Violence, Victoria's Primary Prevention Strategy to prevent family violence and all forms of violence against women and Change the Story frameworks define primary prevention approaches that address the primary, or underlying, drivers of violence. They also reinforce the importance of integrating primary prevention approaches with early intervention and response initiatives to enable a comprehensive and holistic approach to family violence.

Several key definitions and concepts referenced in *Free from Violence* are listed below.

Primary prevention: A primary prevention approach is a long-term agenda that aims to prevent violence from ever happening in the first place. Primary prevention works by identifying the deep underlying causes of violence – the social norms, structures and practices that influence individual attitudes and behaviours – and acting across the whole population to change these, not just the behaviour of perpetrators. Primary prevention is distinct from early intervention and crisis response activities (also known as secondary and tertiary response) that aim to stop violence from escalating or recurring. Primary prevention is focussed on preventing violence before it occurs. The population as a whole, and the range of settings in which inequalities and violent behaviour are shaped, to address factors that lead to or condone violence. An effective primary prevention approach build social structures, norms and practices that prevent violence from happening or reduce the risk of it occurring. These approaches will support and complement early intervention and crisis response efforts and activities by reducing pressure on these other parts of the system.

Gendered drivers: The specific elements or expressions of gender inequality that are most strongly linked to violence against women. They relate to the particular structures, norms and practices arising from gender inequality in public and private life. The gendered drivers are the underlying causes required to create the necessary conditions in which violence against women occurs. They must always be considered in the context of other forms of social discrimination and disadvantage.

Structural discrimination and disadvantage: The norms, policies and systems present in politics, the legal system, education, workplaces and health care that are intended to be neutral, but in effect present obstacles to groups or individuals in achieving the same rights and opportunities available to the majority of the population.

Family violence: as described in *Ending family violence: Victoria's plan for change*, occurs when a perpetrator exercises power and control over another person. It involves coercive and abusive behaviours by the perpetrator that are designed to intimidate, humiliate, undermine and isolate, resulting in fear and insecurity. It can include physical, sexual, psychological, emotional and spiritual violence, and financial/economic abuse and control. While both men and women can be perpetrators or victims, intimate partner violence by men against women is the most common form of family violence.

Figure 1. Whole of Council model, Council’s Domain of Influence (Local government guide for preventing family violence and all forms of violence against women)

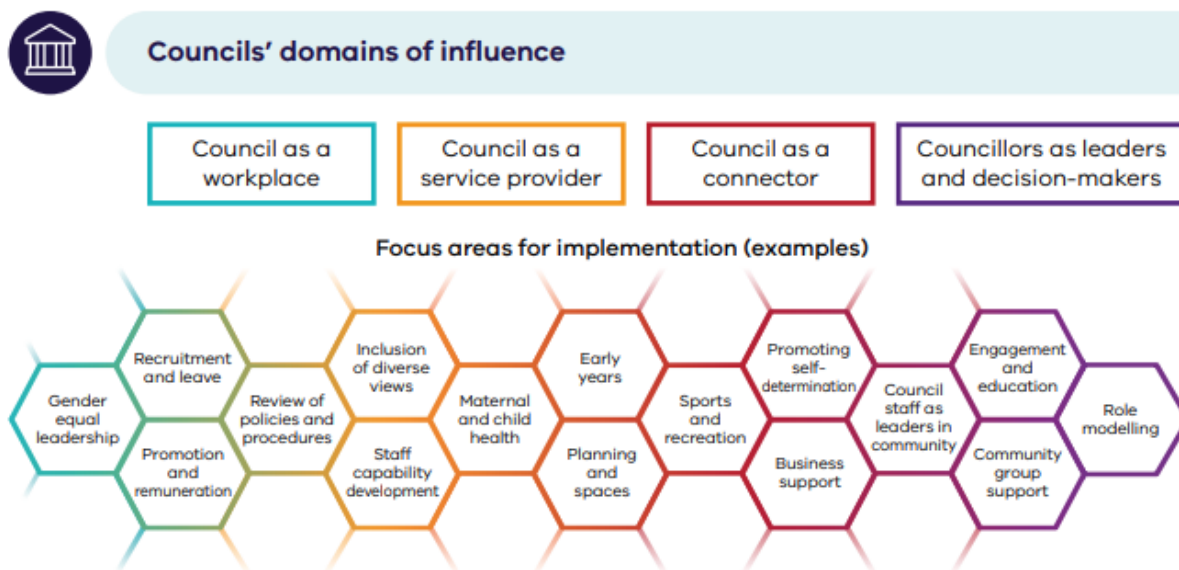


Table 1. Including family violence measures in the preparation of MPHWP’s

Council role	Example
<p>Domain one: Council as a workplace</p> <p>Councils as employers and workplaces with the opportunity to promote cultures of non-violence, respect and gender equity.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Corporate and human resource services Community facilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement Human Resource arrangements to support employees impacted by family violence. For example, develop a staff family violence policy and incorporate a Family Violence Leave Clause in Enterprise Bargaining Agreements. This should include staff affected vicariously as well as those affected directly. Provide development and training opportunities to support all relevant council employees, with a focus on relevant front line services, to support family violence risk identification, assessment and management, consistent with the Family Violence Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework (MARAM). Support workplace-based initiatives and capacity building opportunities to build a respectful and gender-equitable workplace culture, for example, professional development opportunities offered by the MAV, and the Our Watch Workplace Equality and Respect program.
<p>Domain two: Council as a service provider</p> <p>Councils can incorporate family violence considerations across organisational policy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Health, early years, youth, aged and social planning Strategic and statutory planning Communications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Address the drivers of gender-based violence in policy and programming across council business units. Incorporate the factors contributing to family violence (such as including financial pressures, harm from gambling, alcohol and other drugs, mental illness and social and economic exclusion) in the municipal public health and wellbeing profile. Consider the impact of family violence on the community more broadly by applying a diversity (including gender) and disadvantage lens to councils work across business units and community partners. Engage stakeholders using family violence advisory and partnership mechanisms providing a structure for councils to work with partners in developing and delivering a co-ordinated and integrated approach to preventing and responding to family violence. Consult with relevant community stakeholders including: Aboriginal people, people with a disability, people from diverse culturally and linguistically and

Council role	Example
	<p>faith backgrounds, lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and gender diverse and intersex people, young and older people and people living in rural, regional or remote areas, and pregnant women and parents in post-natal period.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use existing evidence-base strategies to guide the range of approaches and measures selected.
<p>Domain three: Council as a connector</p> <p>Councils as providers of safe and inclusive public facilities and spaces</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Urban planning and facility design • Community safety • Community facilities • Sport and recreation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sport and recreation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – promote and support the participation of girls and women (across all life stages) as part of all council sport and recreation programs and policies – undertake prevention work with men by promoting gender equity and challenging conservative gender norms to create a culture where women and girls feel safe and welcome. • Consider urban planning and design of public buildings and spaces to create safe public environments and community facilities, using Safer Design Guidelines. • Provide public information and awareness raising, for example, promoting family violence support services through council websites and across community facilities including Neighbourhood Houses, community groups and sport and recreation services.
<p>Domain four: Councillors as leaders and decision-makers</p> <p>Councils can demonstrate commitment and lead change by taking action to support the development and coordination of local strategies and initiatives with community partners and within their organisation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mayors and Councilors • All Council business units 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate a commitment of leadership to addressing family violence within their community at multiple levels of decision-making across all council business units. • Develop equity and inclusion policies and practice promoting women's leadership both within council and through their work with community partners, and opportunities for increasing workplace diversity. • Recognise November 25 as the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women • Participate in the 16 Days of Activism against gender-based violence from 25 November (International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women) to 10 December (Human Rights Day), including recognising 3 December (International Day of People with Disability) to raise awareness of family violence, • Recognise March 8 as International Women's Day by celebrating the social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women and calling to action to celebrate gender equality. • Endorse or re-endorse the Victorian Local Government Women's Charter. • Build collaborative partnerships to support and contribute to whole of community actions to prevent and respond to family violence (for example, Women's Health Services, Police and Family Violence Response Services, Indigenous Services, Community Health Services, Legal Aid, Respectful Relationships in Schools). • Provide an enabling policy framework (through municipal public health and wellbeing planning processes) integrating family violence prevention and response measures across organisational policy.

Reporting on progress

In line with the requirements of the *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008*, the Department of Health seeks a report from every council on the measures specified to prevent family violence and respond to the needs of victims of family violence in the local community.

Councils are required to report every 2 years. This reporting, timed to coincide with councils' annual review of their municipal public health and wellbeing plan, presents a summary analysis of the responses submitted by councils about the measures (or strategies and actions) they are implementing within the previous 2 year period.

For councils, the next reporting is scheduled for June 2025. Further details on this progress reporting will be made available in 2025.

Other relevant legislative requirements

There are relevant other pieces of legislation that impose requirements on municipal public health and wellbeing plans and/or councils.

Requirements of the Gender Equality Act 2020

The *Gender Equality Act 2020* commenced on 31 March 2021 and seeks to improve workplace gender equality in the Victorian public sector, universities and local councils.

The Act applies to certain organisations ('defined entities'), that have 50 or more employees, including the public sector, universities and local councils, which have specific obligations under the Act.

Local councils with 50 or more employees will be required to publicly report on their progress in relation to workplace gender equality and promote gender equality in policies, programs and services that impact the public. For further advice refer to the [Commission for Gender Equality in the Public Sector](https://www.genderequalitycommission.vic.gov.au/advice-local-government) website, Advice for local Government <<https://www.genderequalitycommission.vic.gov.au/advice-local-government>>

Targeted strategies and resources

- [Ending Family Violence: Victoria's 10-Year Plan for Change](https://www.vic.gov.au/ending-family-violence-victorias-10-year-plan-change) <<https://www.vic.gov.au/ending-family-violence-victorias-10-year-plan-change>>
- [Free from violence – second action plan 2022–2025](https://www.vic.gov.au/free-violence-second-action-plan-2022-2025) (third action plan 2024-2026 in development) <<https://www.vic.gov.au/free-violence-second-action-plan-2022-2025>>
- [The National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032](https://www.dss.gov.au/ending-violence) <<https://www.dss.gov.au/ending-violence>>
- Victorian primary prevention of elder abuse framework (for release in 2023–2024)
- [Dhelk Dja: Safe Our Way – Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families 2018–2028](https://www.vic.gov.au/family-violence-reform-rolling-action-plan-2020-2023/priorities-for-2020-2023/dhelk-dja-safe-our-way) <<https://www.vic.gov.au/family-violence-reform-rolling-action-plan-2020-2023/priorities-for-2020-2023/dhelk-dja-safe-our-way>>

Other evidence-based guidance, polices, strategies and plans that can be used across all settings, particularly local councils who have a responsibility to prepare Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plans

- Visit [MAV](https://www.mav.asn.au/what-we-do/policy-advocacy/social-community/family-violence-prevention/resources) for family violence prevention resources specific to local councils <<https://www.mav.asn.au/what-we-do/policy-advocacy/social-community/family-violence-prevention/resources>>
- For guidance on family violence and violence against women, visit [Respect Victoria](https://www.respectvictoria.vic.gov.au/) <<https://www.respectvictoria.vic.gov.au/>> and [Family Safety Victoria](https://www.vic.gov.au/family-safety-victoria) <<https://www.vic.gov.au/family-safety-victoria>>
- [Our Watch resources](https://www.ourwatch.org.au/) including Change the Story frameworks for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia <<https://www.ourwatch.org.au/>>
- Gender inequality is a driver of violence against women. Access [Our equal state: Victoria's gender equality strategy and action plan](https://www.vic.gov.au/our-equal-state-victorias-gender-equality-strategy-and-action-plan-2023-2027), Victoria's roadmap for the next four years of action in gender equality. <<https://www.vic.gov.au/our-equal-state-victorias-gender-equality-strategy-and-action-plan-2023-2027>>

- Visit the [Department of Families, Fairness and Housing](https://safeandequal.org.au/) and [Safe and Equal](https://safeandequal.org.au/) for information on family violence support services and violence prevention programs for people who have experienced family violence. <<https://safeandequal.org.au/>>
- For guidance on elder abuse, visit [Seniors Online Victoria](https://www.seniorsonline.vic.gov.au/services-information/elder-abuse-what-it) <<https://www.seniorsonline.vic.gov.au/services-information/elder-abuse-what-it>>
- Resources are available for multicultural and multifaith communities from [Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria](https://eccv.org.au/) <<https://eccv.org.au/>> and [Multicultural Centre for Women's Health](https://www.mcwh.com.au/) <<https://www.mcwh.com.au/>>
- Resources for LGBTIQ communities [Pride in Prevention: A guide to primary prevention of family violence experienced by LGBTIQ communities](https://rainbowhealthaustralia.org.au/news/launch-pride-in-prevention-evidence-guide) <<https://rainbowhealthaustralia.org.au/news/launch-pride-in-prevention-evidence-guide>>

Useful targeted data sources:

- [Crime Statistics Agency's Family Violence Data Portal](https://www.crimestatistics.vic.gov.au/family-violence-data-portal) <<https://www.crimestatistics.vic.gov.au/family-violence-data-portal>>
- [Prevention of Family Violence Data Platform](https://files.crimestatistics.vic.gov.au/Prevention-of-Family-Violence-Data-Platform.html) hosted by the Crime Statistics Agency with support from Respect Victoria (variable) <<https://files.crimestatistics.vic.gov.au/Prevention-of-Family-Violence-Data-Platform.html>>
- [Women's Health Atlas](https://victorianwomenshealthatlas.net.au) <<https://victorianwomenshealthatlas.net.au>>
- [ANROWS National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey](https://www.anrows.org.au/research-program/ncas) (NCAS) (every four years) <<https://www.anrows.org.au/research-program/ncas>>
- Sexual assault statistics by LGA, provided by [SASVic](https://www.sasvic.org.au/news/raising-the-alarm-about-sexual-offence-statistics-in-victoria) <<https://www.sasvic.org.au/news/raising-the-alarm-about-sexual-offence-statistics-in-victoria>>
- [Global Gender Gap Index](https://www.weforum.org/publications/global-gender-gap-report-2023/) <<https://www.weforum.org/publications/global-gender-gap-report-2023/>>
- Refer to [OurWatch](https://www.ourwatch.org.au/change-the-story/tracking-progress-in-prevention) for Tracking progress in prevention and report card <<https://www.ourwatch.org.au/change-the-story/tracking-progress-in-prevention>>

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