



White Ribbon Australia Position Paper

Primary Prevention

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About White Ribbon Australia

White Ribbon Australia is part of a global social movement dedicated to ending gender-based violence. We aspire to live in a country where all women and children are safe. White Ribbon is the world's greatest movement of men and boys working to eradicate male violence against women and girls, promote gender equality, and provide new chances for men to have good, healthy, and respectful relationships. In communities, schools, and workplaces across Australia, the White Ribbon Australia campaign uses a primary preventive strategy. We involve men in the societal change necessary to end men's violence against women and children through our programmes and campaigns¹².

Australia and Primary Prevention

The National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022-2032 serves as a framework for Australia. The Commonwealth, states, and territories collaborated to create the National Plan, which lays out a framework for our common commitment to prevent gender-based violence and help women and children who are victims. White Ribbon Australia believes that the Commonwealth Government needs to prioritize, fund and support primary prevention.

Primary Prevention

Violence by men against women can be avoided. Men and boys are less likely to use violence against women and girls when primary preventive measures are carried out. This is addressed through addressing the root causes of violence and taking preventative measures.

By identifying and treating the core causes of the behaviours, attitudes, and practises that drive violence, Primary Prevention advocates for and impacts societal structures that enable gendered violence and abuse. Gender stereotypes in the office and at home, wage parity, men's power and privilege, and male peer connections are all examples of this.

Men's violence against women encompasses a wide range of acts of violence, abuse, and coercion committed by men against women.

Primary Prevention sits on a continuum of prevention (see Table 1). Primary Prevention sits as part of a continuum of engagement. All areas of prevention are important but White Ribbon Australia focuses on whole-of-population initiatives. Primary Prevention addresses the root causes of men's violence against women, from a 'whole of population perspective. Early Intervention addresses a specific source of threat and/or vulnerabilities of women and shifting the trajectory of violence. Tertiary Prevention focuses on holding perpetrators accountable and supporting victims.

¹ Flood, M. (2010). *Where Men Stand: Men's Roles in Ending Violence Against Women*. Sydney: White Ribbon Foundation of Australia.

² Global Men's Alliance (2022) *Backlash and Fundamentalism: A discussion paper of the Ubuntu Symposium*.
<https://menengage.org/resources/backlash-and-fundamentalism-a-discussion-paper-of-the-ubuntu-symposium/>

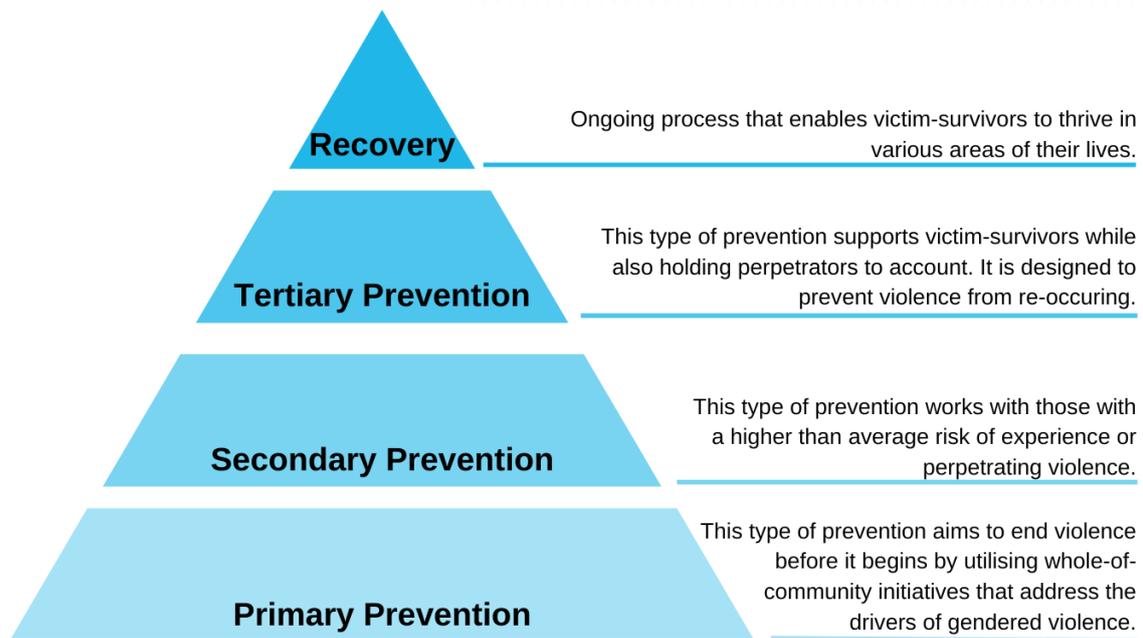


Table 1. Prevention continuum.

Primary Prevention and Theory of Change

From a basic prevention standpoint, the Social-Ecological Model³ provides a framework for understanding the elements that support and drive men's violence against women and children. The approach examines the points where the individual, social, communal, and societal levels meet. The relationship between violence and power is fundamental. Men's aggression serves to preserve and demonstrate men's dominance over women and children. At every level, realising the power and influence that males have had and continue to have over women is critical to addressing violence against women initiatives. Gender disparities, first and foremost, shape men's violence against women.

Gender roles, gender norms, and gender relations all have significant linkages to violence against women, and they are connected to violence at the individual, interpersonal, communal, and societal levels. Second, there are connections between different types of violence and the acceptability and perpetration of violence against women. Third, violence against women is determined by the material and social resources available to individuals and groups, notably patterns of disadvantage impact the equal distribution⁴.

³ Dahlberg LL, Krug EG. Violence: a global public health problem. In: Krug E, Dahlberg LL, Mercy JA, Zwi AB, Lozano R, eds. World Report on Violence and Health. Geneva, Switzerland: World Health Organization; 2002:1-21.

⁴ Flood, M. (2020). Engaging Men and Boys in Violence Prevention. Palgrave.

Social-Ecological Model



Individual-level strategies aim to strengthen a person's knowledge and skills. These strategies are not a one-size fits all solution, but rather should consider the bio-psycho-social and cultural factors of a person. These strategies aim to target changing the attitudes, thoughts, and behaviours that the individual upholds across various settings, acknowledging that as an individual moves between different systems and settings, they adopt attitudes, thoughts, and behaviours within those settings.

Strategies at this level include:

- Initiatives designed to encourage individual reflection on male power and privilege
- Engaging in individual learning such as E-learning
- Understanding the issue of violence and abuse towards women and challenging assumptions through community education
- Adopting a lifespan approach to prevention activities in schools and communities.



Peer and social networks for men are one of the strongest forces that can enforce and/or endorse individual behaviours and attitudes. These strategies include:

- Promoting community education through targeted education initiatives across civic and corporate activities where boys and men engage with peers and networks
- Developing initiatives that cultivate conflict resolution and problem-solving skills, while promoting healthy relationships. Examples of this include mentoring and peer programs.



Community-level strategies aim to support men to make better behavioural choices. These strategies work best when men and boys are engaged in a number of different environments. Community strategies should aim to change organisational practices, as well as foster coalitions and networks.

Community-level strategies include:

- Assertive community outreach approaches, such as Community Action Groups, to design community response plans based on an evidence-based framework

- Create accessible written documents and tools to increase awareness and action to prevent violence against women
- Systematise bystander training
- Co-designed initiatives with community stakeholders to prevent violence through the development of Community Response Plans
- Develop communities of support, where individuals are encouraged to sustain their commitments to anti-violence work.



Strategies at a social level focus on changing laws, legislation, systems, cultures, and governance to set men and boys up for success. These strategies include:

- Nationwide community campaigns
- Mandated respectful relationships education within schools
- Supporting workforce engagement
- National engagement in awareness and take action days
- Strong messaging that violence against women is always unacceptable across all social settings including political, media and corporate settings
- Identify opportunities to embed gender equality measures in government procurement and grant and funding agreements
- Apply a gender lens to industrial relations reforms to ensure any proposed reforms improve and promote women's rights at work, increase security in employment, and address women's circumstances and working patterns.

Primary Prevention Implementation

Primary prevention must be a national commitment and adopt a generational approach. Primary prevention must reach boys and men where they are, and digital solutions must be a consideration for implementation.

Primary prevention activities need to be systematized and coordinated between Commonwealth, State and Local Governments and Community Organisations.

As part of establishing a national response for Australian Men and Boys and connecting them to a global movement, White Ribbon Australia offers a suite of Primary Prevention Activities. Primary prevention for White Ribbon Australia involves strategic relationships, grassroots operations, a solution-focused approach, and meeting men where they are.

Many of the interconnected systems that protect women, such as those at the individual, family, community, and societal levels, may become less capable of performing their protective function without adequate long-term programming. This is because short-term interventions do not have the ability to disrupt a wide range of systems affecting big areas and populations.

Recognize that no single programme will be sufficient to eliminate violence against women. The primary prevention sector needs dedicated funding to guarantee that activities can be offered across a variety of contexts where people live, work, and play in order to sustain and grow the work of preventing and eliminating all forms of violence against women over a generation

Building Social Change

To effect social change, it is not enough to impart knowledge and raise awareness. We must transform deeply rooted attitudes, beliefs, and actions that contribute to the problem of domestic violence in order to realise this peaceful vision for the future. It takes time, practise, and numerous opportunities for skill development and communication with others during the learning process to do this.

A public health approach to prevention draws on a variety of strategies and sends out numerous positive signals throughout time through leaders and role models, both individuals and organisations. Other preventative issues, such as seatbelts, car seats, helmets, and smoking, have been successfully handled using this technique, resulting in safer, healthier communities. We strive to understand the core causes of behaviours, the situations in our communities that condone or promote domestic violence, and the measures that could improve those conditions when we take a public health approach to domestic violence.

It will take time for social change to occur, and successful primary prevention requires a shift in the attitudes, understanding, and behaviours of all Australian menmales to have a beneficial influence. Primary prevention necessitates long-term funding.

Engaging Men and Boys

Men and boys are not one and the same. Primary preventive programmes that are targeted and customised to demographical, environmental, historical, and cultural characteristics should be established⁵ and must be embedded in policy and practice⁶.

When individual men take action in their daily lives to oppose men's violence against women, it makes a difference. A small but rising body of evidence suggests that a variety of individual activities might influence the degree of violence against women or the factors that fuel it. Various studies have indicated that persuading people to be "active" or "prosocial" bystanders, or persons who intervene to prevent or reduce violence, is achievable. Bystander interventions have been shown to enhance men and women's motivation to intervene, ability to intervene, and actual intervention involvement.

Shame or guilt should not be used to coerce males to comply. We must not regard males to be the root of the problem without appreciating their agency in order to approach the social-ecological model of prevention with a solution-focused perspective. Males are tempted to be singled out, yet they are left out of the solution-making process. We must hold guys accountable across the social ecological model to ensure that they don't just "talk the talk, but do the walk⁷."

When it comes to engaging men and boys, we must meet them where they are, which means employing media that they are already familiar with. We will use a health promotion strategy when engaging men and boys, as

⁵ John L. Oliffe, Mary T. Kelly, Gabriela Gonzalez Montaner, Zac E. Seidler, Brendan Maher, Simon M. Rice, Men building better relationships: A scoping review, *Health Promotion Journal of Australia*, 10.1002/hpja.463, 33, 1, (126-137), (2021).

⁶ Waling, A., James, A. & Fairchild, J. Expert Stakeholders' Perspectives on How Cisgender Heterosexual Boys and Young Men Navigate Sex and Intimacy in Australia: A Case for "Heterosexual Intimacies" in Policy and Practice. *Sex Res Soc Policy* (2022).

⁷ Flood, M. (2020). *Engaging Men and Boys in Violence Prevention*. Palgrave.

well as "unexpected allies," to ensure that we engage to and with males in a way that drives behavioural change. We must consider creating circumstances in which boys and men may engage and use language that they understand. Despite the perceived and real reaction, we must support boys in elementary school to understand the drivers of violence, and we must support men in contexts where they feel comfortable engaging other males and allies.

Whole-of-community system changes

White Ribbon Australia recognises that developing a sustainable eco-system necessitates a community-wide commitment to primary prevention. White Ribbon Australia employs the following strategic approach to primary prevention that improves gender equality and stops men's violence.

STEP 1

Learn about risk and protective variables in the context of historical circumstances, culture, current unfavourable impacts, and needs and capacities to prepare for preventative measures.

STEP 2

Assess risk and protective factors in context and develop targeted tactics to choose sub-groups and/or sub-populations of men.

STEP 3

Develop and implement appropriate population-level programming strategies based on forceful outreach at all levels of the social ecology.

STEP 4

Carry out the plan and keep track of it.

STEP 5

Evaluate programme efficacy and learn from it in order to enhance advocacy and programme design, add to the evidence base, and influence policy formation that benefits gender equality.