

WHITE RIBBON AUSTRALIA

RESPONSE TO THE GOVERNMENT OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA'S DISCUSSION PAPER ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

September 2016

Response to Topic 8: Fostering Supportive Environments

1. Introduction

In this response, White Ribbon Australia, in consultation with the White Ribbon South Australia Committee, addresses *Topic 8: Fostering Supportive Environments* of the South Australian Government's *Domestic Violence Discussion Paper*.

Specifically, we focus on:

- The importance, and influence, of a whole-of-government and cross-portfolio commitment to ending men's violence against women and fostering supportive environments.
- Workplaces promoting gender equality as a mechanism for preventing men's violence against women.
- Holding perpetrators to account as key to fostering supportive environments.
- The important role of data in determining the outcome of initiatives that are the topic of this consultation, and the promise of large existing data sets.

2. South Australian Government: leaders in adopting whole-of-government and cross-portfolio workplace violence prevention initiatives

As identified in the *Domestic Violence Discussion Paper*, 11 agencies of the South Australian Government have participated in the White Ribbon Workplace Accreditation Program.

This has facilitated a whole-of-government and cross-portfolio approach to the prevention of men's violence against women¹. Through the Workplace Accreditation Program, these agencies have developed streamlined policies and procedures for preventing and responding to men's violence against women, ensuring a consistent and coordinated approach to supporting women experiencing violence and abuse and promoting gender equality.

This commitment by the South Australian Government is unique and pioneering, with positive flow-on effects to populations outside of South Australia. Fifteen Queensland Government agencies are now participating in the Workplace Accreditation Program and the Tasmanian Government has formally and publicly committed to accrediting all agencies over the next few years.

Overall, this outcome demonstrates the ongoing importance of government as a leader in pioneering social justice initiatives. We commend the South Australian Government for their commitment to preventing men's violence against women through the Workplace Accreditation Program and other activities, including this consultation.

3. White Ribbon Whole of Community Development Model

White Ribbon operates a community development model and this is reflected in the influence of our workplace-based initiatives with the South Australian Government as well as community based initiatives to generate whole-of-community responses to preventing men's violence against women.

These whole of community responses utilise the various programs developed by White Ribbon Australia to enable and support community driven social change. For example, through the Workplace Accreditation Program and the *Breaking the Silence* Schools Program, metropolitan and regional areas are developing strong community focused primary prevention action.

Schools in Mount Gambier, the Limestone Coast and Adelaide are participating in *Breaking the Silence* Schools Program, which supports principals and teachers to embed models of respectful relationships in school culture and across classroom activities. The *Breaking the Silence* Schools Program is expanding to more communities in South Australia, with 26 White Ribbon Schools and another 24 schools currently participating in the Program. Alongside this work, these communities are actively involved in the Ambassador and Advocates Programs, run White Ribbon events and establish White Ribbon Committees to drive primary prevention in their local communities. The White Ribbon SA Committee and regional committees in Whyalla and Mount Gambier are among the most active in Australia.

¹ White Ribbon Australia has long advocated for Australian governments to adopt whole-of-government and cross-portfolio approaches to preventing men's violence against women to fully realise the social and economic benefits of ending this violence. See White Ribbon Australia submission to the [Finance and Public Administration References Committee inquiry into domestic violence in Australia](#) and the [2016 White Ribbon Australia Call to Parties](#).

4. The role of workplaces in promoting gender equality and ending men’s violence against women

The *Domestic Violence Discussion Paper* highlights the critical role employment plays in providing financial security to women experiencing violence and abuse.

White Ribbon recognises the challenges identified in the discussion paper regarding implementing discrimination by reason of domestic violence legislation. Some aspects of violence against women are covered by current legislation, regulations or legal agreements. For example, sexual harassment is covered by the *Australian Government Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012* in all workplaces with 100 or more employees and by the *Australian Government Sex Discrimination Act 1984*.

Supporting women to disclose their experience of domestic violence, by educating workplaces and employees on responding to disclosures, is essential. The White Ribbon Workplace Accreditation Program requires workplaces to do this.

Importantly, the program also supports workplaces to adapt organisational culture, practices and procedures so they promote safe workplaces for women and respectful relationships. To achieve accreditation, participating workplaces must commit to promoting gender equality in the workplace.

This approach addresses gender inequality as the underlying cause of men’s violence against women. The South Australian Government shares this understanding. In the workplace context, positioning violence against women as a gender inequality issue enhances the capacity of workplaces to support women and actively prevent men’s violence against women. White Ribbon recommends the consultation note workplace promotion of gender equality in its consideration of initiatives and practices that foster supportive environments.

5. Holding perpetrators to account

In addition to provision of domestic violence leave and other workplace policies and procedures, workplaces foster supportive environments by holding perpetrators to account. White Ribbon recommends the consultation consider holding perpetrators to account as key to fostering supportive environments. Holding perpetrators to account is an essential component of White Ribbon campaigns and programs, and is key to the social movement to end men’s violence against women.

In a workplace environment, perpetrators can be:

- Employees using violence against another employee
- Employees using violence in their personal life

- Customers or clients
- Associates of employees that visit the employee's workplace

To achieve accreditation as a White Ribbon Workplace, organisations must meet *Criterion 3.2: Response to Perpetrators*. This criterion requires evidence of procedures for referral to Police (for criminal matters) and actions to be taken in non-criminal matters when an employee is alleged to have perpetrated violence within the workplace.

White Ribbon workplaces have instituted a number of measures to hold perpetrators to account, including:

- Codes of conduct to ensure professional standards of behaviour on and off site.
- Social media policies that outline professional standards of behaviour on public and private social media channels.
- Anti-bullying policies.
- Grievance resolution procedures.
- Promotion of active bystander approach.
- Promotion of male support services e.g. behaviour change programmes.

These initiatives are underpinned by clear communication of consequences for the perpetration of violence to ensure accountability.

Intersection with other topics in this consultation

A domestic violence disclosure scheme could also contribute to fostering supportive environments, provided there are appropriate mechanisms put in place to minimise the risk of misuse and further victimisation. Anecdotally, White Ribbon has heard of a manager supporting an employee to access the NSW Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme.

6. The important role of data and the promise of existing data sets

As for all the initiatives that may arise out of this consultation and other activities, it is important to track the outcomes of workplace-based programs to determine their effectiveness. White Ribbon encourages the South Australian Government to explore existing data sets before designing and implementing new monitoring and evaluation tools and processes.

For example, through violence prevention program work, White Ribbon has collected three large data sets assessing attitudes, bystander behaviour and the role of the workplace in preventing men's violence against women and promoting gender equality. These data sets will continue to expand in the coming years as more data is gathered during the ongoing Workplace Accreditation Program.

The current data includes over 140,000 survey responses from employees and the general public and over 10,000 documents on workplace approaches to preventing and responding to men's violence against women.

This data is unique. It offers quantitative and qualitative insights into:

- Australians' awareness of and attitudes to men's violence against women and behaviour as bystanders
- Whole-of-community responses to the prevention of men's violence against women and strengthening of gender equality
- The role and effectiveness of the workplace in preventing men's violence against women, supporting women experiencing violence and holding perpetrators to account.

White Ribbon is looking for partnerships to help cover the cost of analysing this data. The data could help develop a baseline that organisations and governments working towards ending men's violence against women can use to assess the success of their own programs, policies and initiatives.

7. Conclusion

Workplaces have a key role to play in supporting women experiencing violence and abuse and in preventing men's violence against women.

The White Ribbon Workplace Accreditation Program supports workplaces to fulfil this role through a focus on establishing safe workplace practices, developing respectful relationships and promoting gender equality. In addition to supporting female employees experiencing violence and abuse, the program requires workplaces to develop policies and procedures for holding perpetrators to account. Effective perpetrator accountability is key to fostering supportive workplace environments for women.

Data collection will be key to determining whether or not our efforts are creating positive social change. White Ribbon encourages the South Australian Government to consider innovative and collaborative approaches to data analysis when measuring the outcomes of initiatives implemented as a result of this consultation.

The commitment of the South Australian Government to the White Ribbon Workplace Accreditation Program, and the flow-on effect this has had in South Australian communities and other States and Territories, demonstrates the ongoing leadership role that governments play in violence prevention, particularly in the promotion of the community development model that the White Ribbon campaigns and programs take.