

**Prevention:**

# Specialisation in prevention of violence against women

Preventing violence against women is a long-term goal that sits outside the cycles of government. The knowledge and skill of PVAW specialists must be valued and supported over the long term to maintain the integrity of the practice and give Victoria the best chance to create a safe and equitable world in which women and their children are thriving, respected and free from violence.

Almost two years after the Royal Commission into Family Violence, it's important to take stock and reflect on the value of specialisation in the prevention of violence against women (PVAW). In the context of the broader family violence reforms, more prevention work is being led by government departments and universal organisations than ever before. This genuine commitment to prevention enables previously unimaginable impact and reach, but without specialist expertise guiding the design, implementation, and evaluation we risk losing the systemic approach, the gendered lens, and the in-depth attention to the drivers of violence against women that are critical to the success of this work if we are to truly see a reduction in the prevalence of violence against women.

Everyone can contribute to the prevention of violence against women in their sector or organisation once they have the right skills and knowledge, but it's neither necessary or realistic to expect all workers to become prevention specialists. Specialists understand that an individual approach won't drive whole-of-population change; we need to take a staged approach at community, organisational, institutional and societal levels. Specialists can translate the evidence into practice in ways that are accessible for a range of audiences. Specialists lead prevention work by designing, implementing and evaluating programs in line with the evidence base. They provide recommendations and guidance to practitioners whose work may only partially focus on prevention.

In addition to a commitment to gender equality and social justice, the Our Watch practice handbook, *How to Change the Story*, describes PVAW specialists as requiring particular attributes including 'determination,



positivity, resilience, creativity, innovation, an inclusive approach and collaboration'.

There are specialisations or skills within prevention too; in communications, policy and advocacy, research, monitoring and evaluation, program design, practice leadership, and training as well as with particular population groups. Specialists put their prevention knowledge into practice with these skills, whether they're developing a survey around attitudes towards violence

against women, designing social marketing campaigns, or delivering training that builds the knowledge and skills of prevention practitioners.

**Specialisation in PVAW practice leadership**

PVAW practice specialists have unique knowledge and ways of working. First and foremost, PVAW specialists have an in-depth and nuanced understanding of the gendered drivers of violence against women, and

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are able to articulate what these drivers look like in a range of different settings and contexts. PVAW practice specialists understand that we are all steeped in harmful gender norms and practices, so their reflective practice involves a constant and deliberate examination and correction of their own practice for gendered assumptions, unconscious bias or power dynamics.

Practical efforts to prevent violence against women can range from highly impactful to ineffective or even harmful, which is another reason for involving specialists right from the program design stage. PVAW specialists have the necessary skills to identify 'gender blind' or 'gender exploitative' practices that perpetuate or reinforce gender inequalities and can offer suggestions that enable the program to address the causes of gender inequality and contribute to the prevention of violence against women.

#### **Specialisation in PVAW communications**

The rate of change in communications technology is as exponential as that of the prevention sector, so practice has developed in tandem. Ten years ago, social media, apps and smart phones weren't as readily available and their arrival brought changes to the flow of information. Everything sped up. Social media elevated the voices of victim survivors, but has also increased the reach of perpetrators' voices and attitudes. As a result, PVAW communications specialists need more content knowledge to respond in real time and to be aware of potential risks. When framing a message, PVAW communications specialists consider tone to educate in the face of resistance. These specialists critically appraise their own language to avoid minimising, denying, or colluding. They use the active voice to keep the perpetrator in the frame.

They can prepare strategies for dealing with inappropriate, offensive or violence-supportive responses, and manage backlash. When selecting imagery, they use a gendered lens that keeps women at the centre, is mindful of power and control, promotes intersectionality and non-traditional gender roles. These qualities can be outlined in a brief to a communications agency, but specialisation in prevention and communication ensures these complex intersections are navigated with nuance and efficiency.

#### **Specialisation in PVAW monitoring and evaluation**

PVAW specialists are familiar with the evidence that underpins the prevention of violence against women. Monitoring and evaluation are crucial to build on and identify gaps in the evidence base and work to chart progress toward our shared goal; this is the domain of the PVAW evaluation specialist. The process for collecting and analysing prevention data uses intersectional methodologies that keep diverse population groups in focus by, for example, establishing an intersectionality advisory group, highlighting gaps and asking who is missing from the data.

Our Watch has devised a guide, *Counting on Change*, that identifies indicators used to measure change against the recognised drivers and reinforcing factors of violence against women at a population level rather than a project level. PVAW evaluation specialists bring an understanding of gender and violence; intersectionality; the drivers and reinforcing factors; the structures, norms and practices that operate at different levels and the ways we can monitor the transformation required in each of those spaces to end violence against women. ■

