

Prevention spotlight:

More than the sum of its parts: the prevention action plan

Free from Violence: Victoria's first strategy to prevent family violence and all forms of violence against women: First action plan 2018 – 2021 marks a significant moment for the prevention of violence against women sector.

The statewide primary prevention strategy, launched last year was a recommendation of the Royal Commission into Family Violence and puts strategy into practice by providing a clear map of the Victorian government's implementation priorities, investment and approach to primary prevention over the next three years. It articulates the importance of a long-term, staged approach to prevention with a dedicated \$50.8 million for prevention activities, including:

- Respect Victoria, a statewide prevention agency to provide the leadership, collaboration, monitoring and drive for change that our growing sector needs
- Victorian Family Violence Prevention Research Alliance to build the evidence base on what works to prevent family violence and violence against women
- An innovation fund to support innovative prevention practice
- A commitment to build the workforce by developing new accredited primary prevention training

The prevention of violence against women sector – a small, but growing band of community agencies who have been working tirelessly for many years – needs these statewide mechanisms to ensure the work is sustainable, coordinated and strategic.

Despite the commitments outlined above, a large portion of the first action plan is weighted towards community-led initiatives that directly engage people and organisations, which are both politically appealing and generate a groundswell of support for the prevention of violence against women. The importance of community driven activity that creates real and lasting change in people's lives can't be underestimated, but *Change the Story* clearly states the need to balance this activity with building the critical infrastructure required to sustain our efforts.

Until recently, evidence for the effectiveness of prevention efforts came largely from discrete project evaluations. But international reviews have noted that to achieve the broad, deep and

sustainable change needed to prevent violence against women and their children, discrete projects and programs are not enough.¹

Primary prevention work cuts across the whole Victorian population; small disparate programs (the only type of funding that's been available until now) can't have the same impact as work that's designed in line with the evidence base and coordinated at a statewide level. The immense efforts made at a community level must be supported by something that connects their work in a sustainable, cohesive way at a statewide level. That 'something' is Respect Victoria.

Prevention agency and the evidence

Respect Victoria will be a statutory authority to coordinate and drive prevention efforts and harness the growing momentum to prevent family violence and violence against women by enabling community action, supporting Aboriginal self-determination and ensuring initiatives have a broad reach to support all Victorians.

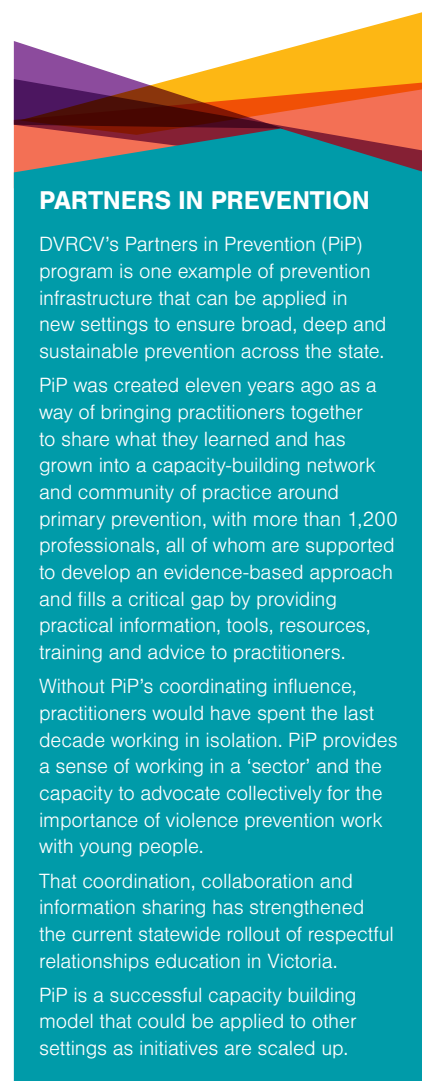
The independence of Respect Victoria is crucial – it must have the funding and the freedom to build the evidence around what is effective in supporting statewide workforces, so that any prevention activity conducted is effective and relevant to their local community.

Coordination and building new knowledge are important, but it's essential that Respect Victoria also drives policy change and builds the capacity of the workforce across the state. One of the important roles that Respect Victoria could play is in challenging the status quo and supporting government, businesses and community agencies to innovate and build the evidence in a range of settings.

Innovation and investment

Innovation is necessary to expand the sector at the exponential rate required. The word suggests a completely new, transformative approach. The recently announced Innovation Fund is specifically designed to support community groups and organisations to trial and evaluate new approaches to violence

prevention. Investment through this \$1.75 million fund should be informed by a healthy appetite for risk because true innovation means learning from our failures as well as our successes. Importantly, each activity supported by the Innovation Fund needs to break new ground in prevention, but activities also need to be evaluated as a whole for their collective impact in supporting creativity and innovation in preventing violence.



PARTNERS IN PREVENTION

DVRVCV's Partners in Prevention (PIP) program is one example of prevention infrastructure that can be applied in new settings to ensure broad, deep and sustainable prevention across the state. PIP was created eleven years ago as a way of bringing practitioners together to share what they learned and has grown into a capacity-building network and community of practice around primary prevention, with more than 1,200 professionals, all of whom are supported to develop an evidence-based approach and fills a critical gap by providing practical information, tools, resources, training and advice to practitioners.

Without PIP's coordinating influence, practitioners would have spent the last decade working in isolation. PIP provides a sense of working in a 'sector' and the capacity to advocate collectively for the importance of violence prevention work with young people.

That coordination, collaboration and information sharing has strengthened the current statewide rollout of respectful relationships education in Victoria. PIP is a successful capacity building model that could be applied to other settings as initiatives are scaled up.

1. Our Watch, ANROWS and VicHealth (2015) *Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia*, Our Watch, Melbourne. p48

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Links to response

The plan clearly links to the government's gender equality strategy *Safe and Strong* but lacks a strong practice connection to the broader family violence reforms or the work of the specialist family violence response sector.

It can be easy for prevention efforts to get lost in the face of overwhelming respond demand. While it's important to have a dedicated focus on primary prevention – addressing the underlying drivers of violence against women and family violence, rather than responding to violence or reducing the risk of further violence – it's just as important to recognise that any prevention activity will increase demand for response; the two are intrinsically linked.

Evidence shows that safe and effective primary prevention work needs to be informed by the current response context², which simply means that prevention activities need to be delivered in areas where response to both perpetrators and victims (adults and children alike) is embedded in the local community and adequately resourced to manage the inevitable increase in demand.

Building the workforce

The Centre for Workforce Excellence is a key partner in the comprehensive and commendable workforce development portion of the rolling action plan. The commitment to developing new specialist primary prevention training and communities of practice is of critical importance. LGBTIQI seniors, disability and Aboriginal sectors represent high risk but often invisible groups, so we commend the attention to embedding prevention in those sectors. To embed this work, these actions would be ideally complemented with resources, connection, and coordinated ways to share practice across and within communities.

Along with Our Watch and Women's Health Victoria, DVRCV was funded by the Centre for Workforce Excellence to develop the first ever Preventing Family Violence and Violence against Women Capability Framework. As such, we can clearly see the potential of that framework to inform future training and shape

workforce development needs of the primary prevention workforce. The framework itself is an incredibly important start in gaining clarity on the different roles of those who are leading and continuing to primary prevention in Victoria, but it should be a living document.

Opportunity for systemic reform

Work to prevent violence from occurring in the first place has been happening in Victorian communities for many years, but it's often on a small scale.

If we are going to create a future in which violence against women and family violence doesn't exist, we need to make sure we reach every member of the Victorian community.

The primary prevention sector has never had an action plan with such a significant level of funding attached; the sector has developed

organically and we need to grasp this opportunity to articulate what is required to achieve that reach.

Quality prevention infrastructure is not just about establishing agencies, workforces, alliances and funds. It also requires mechanisms for quality assurance, political leadership and legislation.

This action plan outlines critical aspects of what is needed but we need to see work with government – and Respect Victoria, when it's established – to support the creation of a vision for how this might look at a statewide, regional and local level, and how all these pieces of work and infrastructure will 'speak to' each other to make sure that every Victorian is engaged in prevention activity where they live, work, learn, socialise or play. ■



2. *Ibid* p37

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