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LGA Submission - Royal Commission into Domestic, Family, and Sexual Violence

October 2024

lga. South
Australia

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1. Introduction

1.1 About LGA South Australia

LGA South Australia (LGA) is the voice of local government in South Australia, representing all 68 councils across the state and the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara.

The *Local Government Act 1999 (SA)* recognises the LGA as a public authority for the purpose of promoting and advancing the interests of local government. The LGA is also recognised in and has prescribed functions in 29 other South Australian Acts of Parliament. The LGA provides leadership, support, representation, and advocacy relevant to the needs of our member councils.

The LGA is a strong advocate for policies that achieve better outcomes for councils and the communities they represent. Councils are a partner in government and part of the solution. Working together we can make positive contributions to the health and wellbeing of our communities.

Acknowledgement

The LGA acknowledges the Traditional Owners of country throughout South Australia, and pays its respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

We acknowledge the unique cultural and spiritual relationships to the land, waters and seas and the rich contribution that First Nations people continue to make to our society.

The LGA operates on Kurna land, and our work extends across many First Nations communities within South Australia.

We acknowledge that local government can learn from the deep feelings of attachment that First Nations people have to country and respect this relationship in the delivery of services to communities.

The LGA is committed to strengthening connections between First Nations people, councils and the broader community as the peak body for local government in South Australia.

LGA policy

The LGA has worked with our member councils to adopt policy positions, based on robust research and its evidence base, to recognise their roles and identify how local government is and can be an important partner in government.

Policy Statement 3.1 – Public Health

Local government acknowledges that protecting the health and wellbeing of its communities is a shared responsibility of all tiers of government and recognises the significant contributions that councils make in this area. Councils should contribute equitably to providing preventative and on-going health services, notwithstanding the significant responsibilities of federal and state government.

Policy Statement 3.4.8 - Family and Domestic Violence

Local government commits to being part of the solution in the prevention of violence against women in South Australia. As the level of government closest to our communities, we recognise the damaging impact domestic and family violence has on individuals and our communities.

Recognising local government's role to create and maintain healthy, vibrant, inclusive and safe communities, councils in South Australia will seek opportunities to work in partnership with each other and collaborate with specialist non-government organisations and agencies from other levels of government to raise awareness, facilitate, advocate and provide information to support victims of domestic violence.

Councils in South Australia will demonstrate leadership by supporting employees through training and HR arrangements where appropriate.

Our submission

The LGA welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Royal Commission into domestic, family and sexual violence.

This submission is made in response to the Terms of Reference, as follows:

- a) How South Australia can facilitate widespread change in the underlying social drivers of domestic, family and sexual violence by addressing the attitudes and systems that drive all forms of domestic, family and sexual violence, and particularly violence against women and children, to stop it before it starts (**prevention**).
- b) How South Australia can improve effective early intervention through identification and support of individuals who are at high risk of experiencing or perpetrating domestic, family and sexual violence and preventing the reoccurrence of such violence (**early intervention**).
- c) How South Australia can ensure best practice responses to family, domestic and sexual violence through the provision of services and supports, such as crisis support, health services, police intervention and a trauma-informed justice system that will hold people who use violence to account, to intervene in and address existing violence, and support victim-survivors experiencing violence (**response**).
- d) How South Australia can embed an approach that supports recovery and healing within South Australia through reducing the risk of re-traumatisation, and supporting victim-survivors of family, domestic and sexual violence (including children) to be safe and healthy to be able to recover from trauma and the physical, mental, emotional, and economic impacts of violence (**recovery and healing**).
- e) How government agencies, non-government organisations and communities can better integrate and coordinate efforts across the spectrum of prevention, early intervention, response and recovery, including through whole-of-system approaches and information and data sharing system.

It is acknowledged that the Terms of References aligns with the [National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022-2032](#).

Whilst giving regards to the Terms of Reference, this submission will primarily address prevention (a), early intervention (b) and coordination (e) which most strongly relate to the role of local government.

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This submission focuses on the role of local government and its contribution to primary prevention strategies and actions, as well as a range of early intervention strategies. It has been informed by consultation with our member councils, via several Latest News (LGA newsletter) items, the LGA's existing policy positions, anecdotal feedback and evidence-based research.

The LGA expresses thanks and gratitude to the councils which contributed to the Good Practice Examples provided in this submission and to colleagues at the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) for their insights into this work.

Many of the drivers of violence can be addressed through primary prevention strategies utilising a range of techniques. This submission incorporates measures and actions that our members have identified and seek further support on to ensure that councils are part of the solution to this challenging issue.

The LGA supports the commitment by the State Government to the Royal Commission, the outcomes of which will drive significant change and support the reduction of violence against women and their children in South Australia.

LGA Recommendations

LGA seeks the Royal Commission's consideration of the following recommendations to the South Australian Government.

- 1) Support local government's role and capability to progress gender equity and influence attitudinal change through resourcing LGA in an advisory capacity to coordinate and inform sector efforts and partner with the state government and other key stakeholders. It is suggested that:

The State Government provide the LGA with fixed-term funding for a minimum of five years, for a dedicated domestic, family and sexual violence policy/project officer based at the LGA to:

- a) assist councils to support the State Government's outcomes; and
 - b) utilise and implement Our Watch's local government toolkit/resources and implement preventative domestic and family violence measures and gender equality work.
- 2) Support local government's role and capacity to progress primary prevention work through appropriately resourcing all councils to build the organisational capability and capacity to facilitate community-based local responses, utilising Our Watch's

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local government toolkit/resources by way of a local government grant funding program, similar to the Victorian *Free from Violence grant program*, to be administered by the LGA.

- 3) Support local government's role and capability to progress gender equality and influence attitudinal change through resourcing the local government sector or the LGA to coordinate and inform sector efforts by way of grant funding.
- 4) That the Royal Commission considers the findings and recommendations from the 2017 report from the MAV and Nous Group in [Evaluation of the role of local government in preventing violence against women](#).
- 5) That the Royal Commission considers the information contained in the Municipal Association of Victoria's [Local government guide for preventing family violence and all forms of violence against women](#).
- 6) That the Royal Commission considers the findings from the [Breaking Barriers: A Study of Women's Participation and Representation in Local Government](#) report.
- 7) Support local government's role and capacity to progress primary prevention work through appropriately resourcing councils to build the organisational capability and capacity to facilitate community-based local responses.
- 8) Support local government's role and capability to progress gender equality and influence attitudinal change by establishing a local government grant funding program, similar to the Victorian *Free from Violence Grant Program*, to be administered by the LGA.
- 9) Develop methods for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of community based programs that councils and other organisations can use to build a robust evidence-base.
- 10) Advocate to the Federal Government to ensure continued, long-term investment in research organisations such as Our Watch and ANROWS to continually build on the evidence-base.
- 11) Support councils to make gender awareness training available to all local government staff (including situational awareness training tailored to particular work environments such as libraries, outdoor staff, youth workers, aged care etc.) to improve knowledge, attitudes and behaviours to influence attitudinal change and support their communities.

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- 12) Support councils with the implementation of a sector-wide workforce planning and reporting that addresses and monitors gender equality, as proposed in the *SA Women's Equality Blueprint*.
- 13) Encourage the State Government to make the prevention of family and domestic violence a distinct priority when developing their next State Public Health Plan to provide strategic leadership for councils.
- 14) Support councils to include measures to address domestic and family violence when developing their regional public health plans.
- 15) Advocate for the coordination and collection of relevant data and information to inform evidence-based strategies and interventions at a local government level to inform council's strategic, public health and disability planning processes.
- 16) That the Department for Education fund further rounds of the *Local Government Early Childhood Community Innovation Grants*, with a focus on gender equality.
- 17) That funding is provided to establish additional supported playgroups, particularly in vulnerable areas to provide pathways for victim-survivors and their children to access the services and supports they require.
- 18) Provide a mechanism to upskill family violence workers, child and family practitioners in understanding and evaluating risk and safety related to family violence. Further, child and family practitioners should feel confident in managing low to medium family violence cases that involve children. This upskilling and confidence in managing low to medium cases can be completed through training, but also through co-location of child and family practitioner and family violence workers. Co-location allows skills to transfer naturally where practitioners can be supported and guided in a way that is sustainable.
- 19) Roll out the '*Love Bites - Respectful Relationships*' program as a prescribed part of the South Australian Education System. These workshops could be provided by family violence workers, child and family workers or youth workers.
- 20) Develop information sharing legislation that allows both domestic violence organisations, child and family support and safety programs, corrections workers and Police to share information relevant to family violence risk and safety to services, health services, agencies and schools where information is deemed as necessary to share to ensure safety.

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- 21) Fund dedicated male family violence workers across all areas of South Australia that are provided after every family violence incident. This worker can then call each respondent to provide support and to keep the person accountable.
- 22) Co-locate services where possible, to enable better communication, familiarity between services, increased understanding of each other's roles and the opportunity for practitioners to learn from each other.
- 23) That councils' investment in youth services and other youth-based organisations are supported to deliver prevention work and build leadership and respectful relationships programs in education and community settings.
- 24) That the State Government advocate to the Commonwealth Government to provide long-term funding certainty to local government for councils to deliver the Commonwealth Community Home Support Programme (CHSP)/Support at Home program.
- 25) That councils are supported with resources to build public awareness and understanding of elder abuse as a form of family violence and improve the capacity of council staff to recognise, respond and refer cases of elder abuse, and other forms of family violence, with a particular focus on the bystander approach and training.
- 26) Support councils' role and capacity to deliver primary prevention work with priority populations which would enable opportunities and support partnership development in this area.
- 27) That the State Government work with the Federal Government in developing policies to support changing partner visas for women experiencing violence.
- 28) That the funding of evidence-based family and domestic violence awareness campaigns such as ['See the signs'](#) or Bystander Awareness and community information at the local level, continues, allowing each council to identify specific locations for high impact messages.
- 29) Support councils' role and capacity to progress gender equity and influence attitudinal change through developing a local government communications/key messaging guide for working with the community and the local media.
- 30) Support councils' role and capacity to deliver primary prevention work to implement community safety initiatives which would enable opportunities and support partnership development in this area.

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- 31) Ensure that there are adequate numbers of animal shelter services for women escaping violence. There are currently only limited programs available, such as the RSPCA's Safe Kennels Program and Safe Pets Safe Families Organisation.
- 32) Support councils' role and capacity to deliver primary prevention work to implement arts and cultural initiatives which would enable opportunities and support partnership development in this area.
- 33) That the State Government's new arts, culture and creative sector policy incorporates actions to address gender equity and the prevention of violence against women and children.
- 34) Support councils' role and capability to progress gender equity and influence attitudinal change by developing a gendered urban planning and infrastructure toolkit for local government to assist in assessing new developments and public spaces.
- 35) Provide funding and support to the local government sector to provide appropriate and safe meeting spaces for community organisations to meet with women and children fleeing domestic and family violence as part of infrastructure and community centre upgrades.
- 36) That councils are supported in their efforts to build community infrastructure and facilities that are inclusive of girls and women of all ages and abilities.
- 37) Support infrastructure funding applications from councils building community hubs to enable family-violence related services, such as community legal service and counselling support, to be accommodated in universal, accessible, safe and confidential environments.
- 38) Support councils' role and capability in the provision of sports and recreation services and facilities to enhance opportunities and support partnership development in this area.
- 39) Support councils' role and capability in the provision of library services to develop resources about gender equality and prevention of violence against women and to enhance opportunities and support partnership development in this area.
- 40) That the State Government restore indexation to library funding and allocate an additional \$1M each year over 4 years to meet priority digital inclusion programs and improve digital connectivity and access. This extra funding can also be used to support prevention efforts.

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- 41) In smaller rural communities the practicalities of locating and maintaining a secure safe place can be problematic, so safe shelters may have to be located in a larger nearby community. Local governments have knowledge of local circumstances and community needs which they can provide to service providers and other levels of governments.
- 42) Develop a housing strategy that addresses the link between family violence, housing and homelessness.
- 43) Support councils by putting systems in place to encourage formalised partnership models and initiatives. Sustained partnership models are required to provide continuous and evolving service delivery that can bring about change. [Public Health Partner Authorities](#) are one example of how this could be achieved.
- 44) That grassroots organisations are funded to work with their local councils to deliver primary prevention work within their community which would enable opportunities and support partnership development in this area.

2. Background

Family, domestic and sexual violence is a complex, serious and widespread problem in Australia, with enormous individual and community impacts and social costs. However, it is also ultimately preventable.¹

To address the endemic levels of violence against women worldwide, there have been multiple and intersecting policy responses at a global, federal, state and local level.²

Certain people, identities and communities within Australia are at greater risk than others and experience violence that intersects with other forms of discrimination and disadvantage.³

The economic costs of violence against women have been reported to be as high as \$21.7 billion each year, let alone the social costs relating social isolation, difficulties with education and employment opportunities and poverty.⁴

It can be challenging to make the economic case for preventive health interventions as the benefits of prevention can take many years to become evident.⁵

2.1 Causes and factors of violence against women

As the national voice for prevention of violence against women, Our Watch's *Change the Story* is an evidence-based framework to guide a co-ordinated and effective national approach to preventing violence against women. *Change the Story's* (second edition) identifies gendered drivers of violence against women, the underlying social context for the violence against women and the factors that reinforce the violence against women. This is explained in the figure below.

¹ <https://www.ourwatch.org.au/quick-facts/>

² City Of Adelaide Submission to LGA September 2024

³ City Of Adelaide Submission to LGA September 2024

⁴ [PricewaterhouseCoopers Australia \(PwC\). 2015. A high price to pay. The economic case for preventing violence against women. Melbourne, VIC: PwC.](#)

⁵ <https://preventioncentre.org.au/about-prevention/what-are-the-economic-benefits-of-prevention/>

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Gendered drivers of violence against women

<p>Driver 1.</p> <p>Condoning of violence against women</p>	<p>Driver 2.</p> <p>Men's control of decision-making and limits to women's independence in public and private life</p>	<p>Driver 3.</p> <p>Rigid gender stereotyping and dominant forms of masculinity</p>	<p>Driver 4.</p> <p>Male peer relations and cultures of masculinity that emphasise aggression, dominance and control</p>
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Underlying **social context** for violence against women

SOCIAL CONTEXT

Gender inequality and other forms of **oppression**
such as racism, ableism, ageism, classism, cissexism and heteronormativity

Factors that reinforce violence against women

<p>REINFORCING Factor 1.</p> <p>Condoning of violence in general</p>	<p>REINFORCING Factor 2.</p> <p>Experience of, and exposure to, violence</p>	<p>REINFORCING Factor 3.</p> <p>Factors that weaken prosocial behaviour</p>	<p>REINFORCING Factor 4.</p> <p>Resistance and backlash to prevention and gender equality efforts</p>
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These drivers and reinforcing factors play out at every level of society: from individual attitudes and behaviours, to social norms, organisational cultures and practices, policies, laws, and institutions.

Figure 1- Change the Story – Summary⁶

⁶ Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women in Australia – Summary (2nd ed.) <https://assets.ourwatch.org.au/assets/Key-frameworks/Change-the-story-summary-AA.pdf>

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Councils can help prevent violence against women before it occurs by addressing these known contributors and factors to such violence. Alongside primary prevention activities, some councils may choose to support early intervention and advocate for response and recovery services for victim-survivors.

2.2 Addressing the causes and factors through prevention

A 'primary prevention' approach addresses the underlying, gendered drivers of violence against women. The aim of primary prevention is to stop violence before it happens.⁷

The compelling argument for prevention activities is appropriately summarised in the summary and recommendations of the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence (Victorian Royal Commission) in 2016⁸, (emphasis added).

*If we are to prevent family violence we must change the attitudes and social conditions that give rise to it. There is **a need to implement primary prevention strategies that are designed to dismantle harmful attitudes towards women, promote gender equality and encourage respectful relationships**. Because family violence takes many forms, a variety of approaches is required. Some programs should be addressed to the Victorian community, others to particular population groups and places. Educating young people about respectful relationships must be a core part of the Victorian Government's long-term prevention strategy.*

*Only a small amount of government funding goes to prevention. **Prevention activities are often funded for short periods**. But changing behaviours and attitudes is a complex and lengthy process, **which requires long-term investment**. Failure to give greater priority to prevention efforts risks condemning future generations to the plight of today's victims of family violence. Unless we pay serious and sustained attention to prevention initiatives, the service system will remain overwhelmed and under-resourced.*

The Commissioners further note:

Primary prevention strategies work best when they are delivered in the places where people live, work, play and learn.

⁷ Our Watch <https://www.ourwatch.org.au/what-is-primary-prevention>

⁸ State of Victoria, Royal Commission into Family Violence: Summary and recommendations, Parl Paper No 132 (2014-16). Page 19

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Councils connect with people throughout their day and across their lives, managing the spaces where people live, work and play, from birth to old age. *Change the Story* also identifies local governments as having a ‘critical role to play’ and being an important stakeholder.

Councils can influence changes in community attitudes and can partner with other organisations to develop measures to prevent violence against women and their children and improve gender equality and gender equity.

As major employers, councils can influence attitudes to gender equality and equity in a work environment and through elected members as community leaders.

The breadth of services and community infrastructure delivered by councils allows an opportunity for prevention activities and for a gender lens to be applied across a wide range of council services and settings, such as health and community services, arts, sports and recreation, education and care settings and public spaces, with councils adding value through volunteer networks.

Using a shared framework, such as *Change the Story* for the primary prevention of violence against women, will assist to address the drivers and causes in a holistic way. It is important that this occurs all levels, from the individual to the societal.⁹ In many instances a combination of approaches (i.e. implementing a range of strategies or activities) for the same issue deliver the best outcomes.

2.3 Policy context

There are several guiding documents in place that are relevant to the Commission’s inquiry.

2.3.1 Global Context

The United Nations [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women](#) is an international legal instrument that requires countries to eliminate discrimination against women and girls in all areas and promotes women’s and girl’s equal rights.

⁹ Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women in Australia (2nd ed.) <https://assets.ourwatch.org.au/assets/Key-frameworks/Change-the-story-Our-Watch-AA.pdf>

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The United Nation's *Sustainable Development Goals* include [Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls](#). This goal recognises the need to close the gender wage gap, address discrimination and promote women's leadership.

2.3.2 Federal Government

The [National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032](#) is the overarching national policy framework that will guide actions towards ending violence against women and children over the next 10 years.

The Plan highlights how all parts of society, including governments, businesses and workplaces, media, schools and educational institutions, the family, domestic and sexual violence sector, communities and all individuals, must work together to achieve the shared vision of ending gender-based violence in one generation. There are four domains:

- (1) Prevention
- (2) Early intervention
- (3) Response
- (4) Recovery and healing.

The Federal Government released the [Working for Women: A Strategy for Gender Equality](#) in early 2024. The Strategy outlines five priority areas:

- (1) Gender-based violence
- (2) Unpaid and paid care
- (3) Economic equality and security
- (4) Health
- (5) Leadership, representation and decision-making.

Additionally, gender responsive budget measures have been introduced at a Federal level, with the Office for Women developing a guideline for Federal agencies on gender responsive budgeting.

The [Women's Budget Statement 2023-24](#) saw gender responsive budgeting reintroduced by the Albanese Government. The Statement endeavours to include data and analysis to demonstrate the outcomes experienced by different groups of women, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, women with disability, women of different ages, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual or other sexually or gender diverse (LGBTQIA+) populations.

2.3.3 State Government

The [SA Women's Equality Blueprint 2023-26](#) was launched by the State Government in September 2023. The Blueprint includes key actions the state government will implement across four priority areas fundamental to women's equality - Safety and security, Leadership and participation, Economic wellbeing and Health.

The Blueprint is underpinned by the principles that:

- Equality is a human right.
- Gender equality benefits everyone.
- Achieving equality for women and girls is a collective effort which requires action from the government, private sector, non-government organisations and communities.
- Achieving equality for women and girls requires addressing the intersectional disadvantage and discrimination they may experience.
- Diversity in leadership and in the workforce is beneficial for South Australia's economic growth and productivity.
- Recognising and celebrating the achievements and contributions of women and girls in all their diversity helps inspire future generations.

One of the commitments outlined in the Blueprint is the introduction of an Equality Bill which will require organisations to take positive actions across a range of areas to advance gender equality. It is The proposed legislation will draw lessons from the [Gender Equality Act 2020 \(Vic\)](#), which requires certain organisations with more than 50 employees (defined entities which included local government) to complete five key tasks to meet their obligations under the Act:

1. Promote gender equality
2. Conduct gender impact assessments
3. Undertake a workplace gender audit
4. Create a Gender Equality Action Plan
5. Report on progress.

Lastly, a new version of the '[Committed to Safety – South Australia's framework to Prevent Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence](#)' is currently being developed, according to the Office for Women's website.

3. Role of local government

As the level of government closest to the community, local government is in a unique position to effect change. Local councils:



The Municipal Association of Victoria’s (MAV’s) [Local government guide for preventing family violence and all forms of violence against women](#), describes councils as having four domains of influence to prevent violence against women. These are:



The LGA encourages the Commissioner to review MAV’s *Local Government Guide*.

Doing more with less – a comment on resourcing

Harnessing the potential of local government as a universal platform for integrated primary prevention would require resourcing in each council to drive and embed change across the settings and services that connect with local communities on a day-to-day basis.¹⁰

However, local government are efficient partners in government, providing value for money by contributing significant in-kind funding which stretches Federal and State funding further. Prevention efforts tailored to the local context, will ultimately take pressure off response and crisis services and will be a more effective approach to the problem.

To increase the skills and capacity of the local government workforce as well as the community groups it partners with, additional resources are needed. Alongside the introduction of legislation, additional funding to support local government's role needs to be part of the solution.

There is also an increasing expectation in the community that local government should respond to a range of important social issues. Individual councils have made commitments of varying scope and scale through local investment. However, there have been no State or Federal Government commitments to resource local responses by local government.¹¹ This is reflected in the Good Practice Examples (see below) provided to the LGA for this submission. The majority have come from larger metropolitan councils.

The Federal '[Inquiry into local government sustainability](#)' highlights the strain local government is under to meet legislated roles, including the range of additional activities being passed on by other levels of government. This limits its role to take on discretionary, but equally impactful, issues.

Many councils would like to play a role in preventing violence against women but lack funding and support to resource the work both internally and externally. This is particularly an issue for regional and remote councils with severely limited resources, but which are often geographically very large.

Evidence suggests that short-term, project-by-project approaches are not effective and do not work when it comes to primary prevention. This is long-term work, that requires a whole-of-government, whole-of-community and across all political parties' approach.¹²

¹⁰ MAV Submission into the Royal Commission into Family Violence 2015 pg.24

¹¹ City of Adelaide Submission to LGA September 2024

¹² Parliament of the Commonwealth Of Australia, *Inquiry into family, domestic and sexual violence*, House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs.
https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/committees/reportrep/024577/toc_pdf/Inquiryintofamily,domesticandsexualviolence.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf

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Local government offers a unique and valuable capacity to partner in this shared effort, working in a consistent evidence-based and evidence-building framework.

3.1. Local government sector leadership

Local governments can provide significant political and cultural leadership to drive change, model best practice and respond to local concerns.

Local governments can both lead and enable the delivery of primary prevention activities through their operations and partnerships, as well as internally, with their employees.

The work of local councils – and the important reach into communities and settings that they have – can be amplified when their work is shared, coordinated and supported by state-wide agencies which have a specific remit to enable effective prevention activity within local government.

The Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) and Local Government Queensland (LGAQ) have successful models (refer to the Good Practice Examples below) whereby funding has been provided to have a dedicated Project Officer to support gender equality and prevention of violence against women.

Having a dedicated domestic and family violence officer would have the benefit of providing a single point of contact for local government and would improve coordination between levels of government, community organisations and businesses.

Good practice examples of sector leadership

- *LGA*

At the LGA Ordinary General Meeting held on 22 May 2024, the City of Campbelltown submitted an Item of Business calling for action on domestic violence. This was a significant occasion, with numerous council mayors speaking on this issue describing the need for and importance of action.

This motion was passed 66-2 and provides an authorising environment for the LGA secretariat to advocate to the State Government on this issue.

“Communities are our core business. ... We need to provide leadership. Councils are not just about roads..”

Mayor Moira Weir,
City of Onkaparinga

“we need to do more... it is local government business, and it is our moment to make a stand”

Mayor Michael Coxon,
City of West Torrens

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- *Gender equality approaches within the Victorian local government sector*

The MAV has benefited from various levels of funding support, initially from VicHealth, and from successive state governments since 2010 to deliver a state-wide local government prevention of violence against women initiative.¹³

This initiative is exemplary and provides a good level of external and internal support to Victorian councils that ensures higher level of accountability and responsibility in supporting local government respond to challenging and significant social issues that impact their communities.

The MAV initiative has seen the development of toolkits, training, funding opportunities, networks and leadership. A key enabler of this was the support of a state-local partnership platform which saw partnership agreements and protocols developed with key state departments and signed by the Premier and the MAV President.¹⁴

Since 2017, Victorian councils can apply for small 12-month grants, supported by the MAV Policy Officer. This has expanded with local councils now having access to a three-year grant program. The *Free from Violence Local Government Grant Program* continues to support councils to embed gender equality and family violence prevention practices into the programs and services they deliver. Available grants range between \$270,000 to \$300,000. The change to the funding arrangements was based on the finding of the Victorian Royal Commission which found that 12 months is insufficient delivery time for prevention work.

The program supports the Victorian Government's vision to create a Victoria where everyone experiences equality, respect and lives free from violence.

One example of a project funded under the grants involved Wangaratta Rural City Council, which delivered workshops to more than 200 council employees. They had a focus on male-dominated work groups such as depot workers and field services teams to consider how to prevent violence against women. Delivered in partnership with Jesuit Social Services, these workshops aimed to break down harmful gender stereotypes and actively promote healthy masculinity.

The grant program is a partnership between MAV, Local Government Victoria in the Department of Government Services and the Office of Family Violence Prevention and Reform, Family Safety Victoria in the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing.

¹³ MAV Submission into the Royal Commission into Family Violence 2015 pg. 9

¹⁴ Ibid pg. 15

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- *Local Government Association Queensland (LGAQ)*

The Local Government Association of Queensland (LGAQ), in partnership with the Queensland State Government, recruited a Domestic Family Violence (DFV) Project Officer to work with councils which wanted to be more engaged on this issue. The range of activities included:

- assistance in developing and promoting awareness-raising activities and campaigns; and
- guidance on how to support their own staff as councils are often the major employer of the community.

The LGAQ project officer facilitates 'community of interest' networks. The focus of these networks is to increase awareness of DFV both internally with council staff and with the wider community, sending a message that abuse in all its forms should not be tolerated. These groups meet regularly every two months and are supported with a monthly newsletter and exclusive access to an online collection of resources. This work was made possible due to State Government funding.

3.1.1. Resource development

Our member councils have told us that they would like to see examples of good practice highlighted in relation to gender equity and awareness of family and domestic violence and the promotion of shared learnings to build the capacity of councils which are newer to this work.

Many of our members stated that they provide contact details of various relevant organisations on their websites and have information available at community centres and libraries.

Good practice examples of resource development

- *LGA*

Information documents were developed for council staff and a fact sheet for victims of domestic and family violence, to be made available in public areas of the council. These resources provide information and resources for councils. The LGA has also supported various webinars including:

[Webinar: The Role of Local Government in the Prevention of Violence against Women](#)

[Webinar: Advancing Gender Equity through Physical Activity](#)

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- *City of Burnside, City of Campbelltown, City of Norwood Payneham & St Peters*
Jointly funded the development of booklet titled: [Domestic Violence Information Booklet for the East](#)

3.1.2. Increasing participation of women in local government

The LGA has a strong commitment to increasing the participation of women in local government, both within the staff and Elected Member body.

It is important that councils reflect the communities they serve. The more representative councils are at the elected and senior management levels, the better and more relevant will be the quality of their decision-making.

In 2023 the Local Government Research and Development Scheme (LGRDS) funded a [Workforce and Gender Equality in SA Local Government Project](#), to help councils take steps to address gender equality to make our communities more inclusive and create fairer local government workplaces. The project will collect data from local government workplaces to inform new initiatives designed to address systemic drivers of inequality and improve gender diversity and equity. It is due to be completed in early 2025.

This is important as the research suggests that gender inequality, sexual harassment and domestic and family violence are about power. Unequal power dynamics in workplaces and society allow gender inequality, sexual harassment, and domestic and family violence to persist.¹⁵

Research undertaken by Carson & Ruppner this year shows that:

- Women councillors, across regional and metropolitan municipalities in Victoria, are burning out as they try to juggle the demands of work, family and politics.
- This strain is making it hard to close the gender gap within local councils as women are choosing not to recontest nor stand for an elected position, as the needs of their family outweigh those of the time needed to engage in local politics.
- Women councillors carry similar problems managing work, family and councillor roles as the general population of working women and even though councils (in Victoria) provide subsidies for childcare expenses, the research showed that this measure is

¹⁵ Workplace Equality and Respect – A how-to guide Our watch 2022.
<https://www.ourwatch.org.au/workplace/resources/workplace-equality-and-respect-how-to-guide>

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underutilised for several reasons, including because of online bullying and harassment and can be stigmatised.¹⁶

It is highly likely that this research is reflective of female elected members in South Australia and reinforces political inequities.

Their report recommended:

- That equal utilisation of childcare provisions by male councillors is promoted to ensure parity and normalise its use, enabling all councillors with young children to fulfil their responsibilities without feeling role strain.
- That additional resources are provided to the e-Safety Commissioner, and other relevant bodies to address online bullying, harassment and trolling of candidates and councillors on social media platforms.

Shedding light on the challenges faced by female councillors is important, as elected members are community leaders who play an essential role in making decisions about services and infrastructure in our diverse local communities. Gender equity is essential for good governance and is crucial for enhanced democracy in local government.¹⁷

Good practice example of increasing women's participation in local government

- *LGA*

The LGA's 2018 South Australian council elections campaign was designed to increase the number of women nominating for election to councils. The successful campaign resulted in a 19% increase in the number of women standing for council elections – translating to a 4.5 percentage point increase in the proportion of female candidates.

The percentage of women elected also increased, from 29% female representation in 2014 to 35% in 2018. The number of female mayors almost trebled, with 39% of mayoral positions now held by women. It also saw the election of South Australia's youngest ever female councillor, at 18 years of age. This campaign later won an AMI Awards for Marketing Excellence (2019) for Social Change Marketing.

¹⁶ Carson A., & Ruppner, L. (2024) Breaking Barriers: A Study of Women's Participation and Representation in Local Government. La Trobe University: Melbourne. <https://www.vlga.org.au/news/australian-first-research-highlights-unique-experience-women-councillors>

¹⁷ Ibid.

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This is important work and demonstrates how local government can help address gender inequality and domestic violence.

Recommendations to increase local government leadership and participation

- 1) Support local government's role and capability to progress gender equity and influence attitudinal change through resourcing LGA in an advisory capacity to coordinate and inform sector efforts and partner with the state government and other key stakeholders. It is suggested that:

The State Government provide the LGA with fixed-term funding for a minimum of five years, for a dedicated domestic, family and sexual violence policy/project officer based at the LGA to:

- a) assist councils to support the State Government's outcomes; and
 - b) utilise and implement Our Watch's local government toolkit/resources and implement preventative domestic and family violence measures and gender equality work.
- 2) Support local government's role and capacity to progress primary prevention work through appropriately resourcing all councils to build the organisational capability and capacity to facilitate community-based local responses, utilising Our Watch's local government toolkit/resources by way of a local government grant funding program, similar to the Victorian Free from Violence grant program, to be administered by the LGA.
 - 3) Support local government's role and capability to progress gender equality and influence attitudinal change through resourcing the local government sector or the LGA to coordinate and inform sector efforts by way of grant funding.

That the Royal Commission:

- 4) Considers the findings and recommendations from the 2017 report from the MAV and Nous Group in ***Evaluation of the role of local government in preventing violence against women.***
- 5) Considers the information contained in the Municipal Association of Victoria's ***Local government guide for preventing family violence and all forms of violence against women.***
- 6) Considers the findings from the ***Breaking Barriers: A Study of Women's Participation and Representation in Local Government*** report.

3.2. Leadership within councils

Our members recognise that collaboration is vital to successful and meaningful work in the prevention of violence against women and their children. There are numerous examples how councils can lead, advocate, facilitate, partner or be an agent of change in this area.

The LGA is aware that many South Australian councils, in addition to advocacy, have provided:

- Sources of information and referral for domestic and family violence victims.
- Training for front line staff, such as customer service and library staff, to deal with sensitive situations.
- Leadership and skill development programs for women.
- Youth programs relevant to this issue.
- Information about external support programs.

Several councils have also chosen to review their organisation's internal working culture to ensure it supports those experiencing domestic and family violence. The actions undertaken by individual councils are heavily influenced by financial and resource constraints. Good practice examples are provided below.

Council actions and responses to the prevention of violence against women often occur along a continuum, from those that focus on individuals through to interventions that focus on outcomes targeted at whole-of-populations.

Many councils, particularly the smaller rural and regional councils, would benefit from more sector-wide and sector-led approaches and resources to support them in undertaking a range of community focused initiatives promoting gender equality and the prevention of violence against women.

This approach would need to emphasise close collaboration with the domestic violence sector and support a closer level of connection between councils and the relevant specialist support organisations in their areas.

Some councils have expanded their focus on primary prevention of violence against women to encompass gender equality, as noted below. This is due to an increased understanding and evidence base of the underlying drivers of violence against women from organisations such as Our Watch and [Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety](#) (ANROWS).

Our Watch's [Local Government Toolkit](#), initially released in 2020 but updated July 2024 to reflect current thinking can help local governments get prepared, set up internal practices,

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take action and share and improve prevention processes and activities. Some councils are using these resources. However, councils would welcome additional support in implementing the Toolkit.

Lastly, our members are also mindful that methods for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of community-based programs could be strengthened. With such limited resources available, implementing programs or initiatives that have a strong evidence-base is crucial.

Good practice example of leadership within councils

- *Adelaide Hills Council*

In July 2023, Adelaide Hills Council adopted a [Statement of Commitment](#) to help prevent violence against women and their children. The statement is an important step towards stopping violence before it happens in our community.

Primary prevention means addressing and raising workforce and community awareness of the key underlying drivers of domestic and family violence.

This Statement recognises that violence against women and children affects the entire community, and that local government have a responsibility to help reduce these behaviours.

As part of this Commitment, Council will work with community partners to help prevent domestic and family violence and is implementing the Our Watch's [Local Government Toolkit](#).

- *City of Adelaide*

The City of Adelaide has led gender equality progress in local government in SA. As well as establishing and chairing a Gender Equality Steering Group for a two-year term from 2022-2024, the Council is a member of Our Watch's Local Government Community of Practice.

The gender equality work undertaken during the term of the Gender Equality Steering Group was aligned to their *Strategic Plan 2020-2024* goal of *Thriving Communities* with the deliverable: Council will create a city that is welcoming, inclusive and accessible.

The work also linked to the Safer City Policy Actions:

- Build opportunities to celebrate diversity and be well connected
- Promote a creative and vibrant night life to reduce anti-social behaviour.

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In February 2024, the Council adopted their [Homelessness Strategy: Everyone's Business](#). The Strategy includes the principle "A primary prevention approach that addresses the drivers of violence against women by promoting gender equality". Additionally, there is an action to, "Partner with the sector, State and Federal Government to determine strategies for addressing the drivers of violence against women".

The [Disability Access and Inclusion Plan 2024-2028](#) makes reference to the Establishment of the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability. We acknowledge women with disability are at greater risk of experiencing violence.

The draft [Reconciliation Action Plan 2024-2027](#) acknowledges the disproportionality high levels of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women by including Action 16 - Address social determinants of health, and, Deliverable 16.2 - Develop strategies for addressing the drivers of violence against women.

The Council has also undertaken numerous projects aligned to this issue and examples are provided throughout this submission.

- *City of Melbourne (Vic)*

The City of Melbourne has developed strategies to support its work including:

- [Gender Equality Action Plan 2022-25 - City of Melbourne](#)
- [Creating Communities of Equality and Respect: Women's Safety and Empowerment Action Plan](#)
- [Gender equality statement of commitment - City of Melbourne](#)

Key projects under these plans include:

- [Project Night Justice](#)
- [Period Poverty](#)

3.2.1. Organisational and workforce development

Local government employs 190,800 people, across more than 400 occupations, which is nearly 10% of the total public sector (as at June 2021).¹⁸ In many rural and regional areas

¹⁸ ALGA website <https://alga.asn.au/facts-and-figures/#:~:text=Local%20government%20employs%20187%2C600%20people,tax%20levied%20by%20local%20government.>

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councils are often one of the largest employers. This enables great reach and access to local communities and the opportunity to embed primary prevention in their communities through civic leadership, service provision, policies, work practices and community engagement.

Organisational culture can have a powerful role in influencing behaviour of individuals and groups and so can play a role by modelling equitable and respectful relationships between men and women.

The [South Australian Office of Women](#) identifies workplaces as a key environment in which to undertake preventative action to reduce violence against women and support women who are experiencing violence.

Good practice examples

- *Various SA councils*

Several of our members reported examples including:

- Increasing situational awareness through education and training for front-line staff to recognise and handle incidents and victims.
- Introducing HR arrangements to support employees impacted by domestic and family violence – this includes Employee Assistance Programs and the formal adoption of special leave circumstances in Enterprise Agreements.
- Supporting high profile campaigns and events, including White Ribbon Day and accreditation recognising workplaces that are taking active steps to prevent and respond to violence against women.
- Developing respectful workplace policy and guidelines.
- Introducing internal diversity and inclusion strategies to raise the profile of domestic and family violence and understanding of its impact on the individual and the organisation.

Opportunities could include:

- Additional training to focus on Leadership programs and support activities such as specific mentoring programs for women; as well as supporting pathways for women into traditional male (and often higher paid) roles and careers.
- Requirement for sector-wide workforce planning and reporting that addresses and monitors gender equality.

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Recommendations to increase leadership and organisation and workforce development within councils

- 7) Support local government's role and capacity to progress primary prevention work through appropriately resourcing councils to build the organisational capability and capacity to facilitate community-based local responses.
- 8) Support local government's role and capability to progress gender equality and influence attitudinal change by establishing a local government grant funding program, similar to the Victorian *Free from Violence Grant Program*, to be administered by the LGA.
- 9) Develop methods for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of community based programs that councils and other organisations can use to build a robust evidence-base.
- 10) Advocate to the Federal Government to ensure continued, long-term investment in research organisations such as Our Watch and ANROWS to continually build on the evidence base.
- 11) Support councils to make gender awareness training available to all local government staff (including situational awareness training tailored to particular work environments such as libraries, outdoor staff, youth workers, aged care etc.) to improve knowledge, attitudes and behaviours to influence attitudinal change and support their communities.
- 12) Support councils with the implementation of a sector-wide workforce planning and reporting that addresses and monitors gender equality, as proposed in the *SA Women's Equality Blueprint*.

3.3. Strategic planning role

All councils have existing strategic planning processes in place. South Australian councils are guided by several legislative instruments to govern on behalf of their communities and ensure that their operations are financially sustainable and create healthy, safe, and inclusive communities.

This is expressed in various Acts including the:

- [Local Government Act 1999](#) (SA), which defines the roles, functions and principles to be observed by councils. Several are relevant to local government responsibilities in domestic violence, including to:

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- Encourage and develop initiatives within its community for improving the quality of life of the community.
- Provide services and facilities that benefit its area, its ratepayers and residents, and visitors (including health, welfare or community services).
- To provide for the welfare, wellbeing and interests of individuals and groups within its community.
- Establish or support organisations or programs that benefit people in its area or local government generally.
- Participate with other councils, and with State and national governments, in setting public policy and achieving regional, State and national objectives.

Councils are also required to prepare a Strategic Plan and a Long-term Financial Plan to support these activities.

- [South Australian Public Health Act 2011](#) - Section 51 and 52 of the Act requires councils to prepare, maintain and report on a Regional Public Health Plan (RPHP) that is consistent with the State Public Health Plan and responds to public health challenges within their local area or region.

In the first phase of public health planning in South Australia, 20 councils chose to plan alone, and 48 councils chose to plan regionally (ranging from groups of 2 to 8 councils). Thirty-one RPHPs were developed for the first five-year cycle of planning under the Act (12 metropolitan and 19 regional plans), and these commenced over a two-year period from 2014 to 2016.¹⁹

Only six councils identified family and domestic violence in their plans, with no consistency across councils. Whilst this may not reflect the actual work being undertaken by councils, it implies that the capacity and leadership needed in this area may be missing.

It may also reflect the lack of direction at a state level considering that family and domestic violence or gender equality is not explicitly mentioned in the State Public Health Plan,²⁰ which councils need to have regard for in their plans.

¹⁹<https://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/wps/wcm/connect/public+content/sa+health+internet/public+health/regional+public+health+planning+and+implementation>

²⁰ <https://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/wps/wcm/connect/d18380e5-6792-4cdd-a193-08d80fd47df4/FINAL+State+public+Health+Plan+2019-2024.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CACHEID=ROOTWORKSPACE-d18380e5-6792-4cdd-a193-08d80fd47df4-n5iLkpR>

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The data from 2018-2020 indicated fewer than five councils had noted it as a concern in the emerging issue section. The data for the 2020-2022 reporting period has not yet been released, but anecdotal evidence suggests that there are still not many councils recognising prevention of violence against women or gender equality as a priority area.

- [Disability Inclusion Act 2018 \(SA\)](#) - Under this Act, State Government agencies and councils are required to develop their own Disability Access and Inclusion Plans (DAIPs) and provide an ideal opportunity for strategies and initiatives addressing violence against women and girls with a disability.

Good practice example in strategic planning processes

- *Domestic and Family Violence and Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plans*

Similarly to South Australia, Victorian councils are required to prepare a Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan (MPHWP), using a determinants/social model of health.

In response to the Victorian Government's Royal Commission into Family Violence, the Victorian Government accepted all 227 recommendations, including Recommendation 94 that stated that councils "report on the measures they propose to take to reduce family violence and respond to the needs of victims" in preparing their MPHWPs. The measures referred to may include strategies and/or actions councils propose to take. This requirement was aimed at increasing the focus on family violence prevention and response at a local level.

Recommendations on addressing domestic violence in strategic planning processes

- 13) Encourage the State Government to make the prevention of family and domestic violence a distinct priority when developing their next State Public Health Plan to provide strategic leadership for councils.**
- 14) That councils are supported to include measures to address domestic and family violence when developing their regional public health plans.**
- 15) Advocate for the coordination and collection of relevant data and information to inform evidence-based strategies and interventions at a local government level to inform council's strategic, public health and disability planning processes.**

4. Council services – population and program focussed

As previously highlighted, the breadth of services a council delivers and the populations they engage with are significant. This section of the submission identifies some key areas where councils can make a difference through the delivery of primary prevention or early intervention strategies.

It also addresses the way councils can assist to better integrate and co-ordinate efforts across the spectrum of prevention and early intervention, through whole-of-system approaches and partnerships and the sharing of information.

4.1. Early years

Local government is increasingly playing more of a role in the early years. Similar to other age cohorts, councils provide leadership, coordination and building capacity across their early years communities. They are working with various partners and services in their local area to plan for and deliver services to children and families. This includes playgroups, story time activities, playgrounds, sporting facilities and in some cases delivering childcare (long day care) services.

The [*Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care \(RCECEC\)*](#) noted the importance of community connection and the role of local government in supporting connection.

It further acknowledged the important role of partnering with local government to deliver connected, accessible services and in defining roles of government, it noted that “this important tier must not be missed.”²¹

In 2021, the Department for Education partnered with the LGA to provide SA councils with the opportunity to apply for the *Local Government Early Childhood Community Innovation Grants* (refer to the Good Practice Example below). These grants focussed on addressing the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) data, which has five domains:

- Physical health and wellbeing
- Social competence
- Emotional maturity
- Language and cognitive skills (school-based)

²¹ https://www.royalcommissionecec.sa.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0009/937332/RCECEC-Final-Report.pdf pg 71

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- Communication skills and general knowledge

This data is relevant as it aligns with research indicating that domestic and family violence can affect children's behaviour, schooling, cognitive development, mental and physical wellbeing, and is the leading cause of homelessness for children.²²

Research further suggests that primary prevention should be universally delivered, and work to help children be critical of gender norms and violence-supportive attitudes and equip them with the skills to form healthy and respectful relationships in adulthood.²³

Important messages about the impact of violence upon the mental health of children and very young children can be safely imparted in the context of universal services such as supported playgroups, and resources available through local libraries and community centres. Universal access to services allows women to feel connected to a support system that is safe as well as providing a physical space to make phone calls or meet with support workers.

Good practice examples in the early years

- [Local Government Early Childhood Community Innovation Grants](#)

The grant injected a total of \$180,000 into twelve council-led projects specifically tailored to the unique needs of the children and families residing in their communities.

The grants demonstrate how seed funding and strong stakeholder partnerships are supporting councils in their crucial role in leading local and responsive early childhood innovation projects in communities. The program supported councils to respond to their local [Australian Early Development Census \(AEDC\)](#) data and support early childhood developmental outcomes within communities. Both the LGA and the Department for Education acknowledged the value of the program which was seen as a particularly effective use of relatively limited funding and the wide range of projects that could be supported.

The grant programs delivered a variety of projects, including:

- Storytime and rhythm and play in local libraries
- An outdoor activity garden

²² Campo, M, 2015 Children's Exposure to domestic and family violence. <https://aifs.gov.au/resources/policy-and-practice-papers/childrens-exposure-domestic-and-family-violence>

²³ Campo, M, 2015 Children's Exposure to domestic and family violence. <https://aifs.gov.au/resources/policy-and-practice-papers/childrens-exposure-domestic-and-family-violence>

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- The delivery of book packs in the Kurna language
 - Connected people with the community through several play street events
 - The creation co-designed children policy
 - STEM workshop sessions
 - The development of playgroups
 - Workshops for parents and carers
- *Fleurieu Families- An (early intervention) initiative of the City of Victor Harbor*

Fleurieu Families is a program operated by the City of Victor Harbor, with funding from the Commonwealth Government (CaPS funding), South Australian Government through DHS (Strong Families, Strong Communities) and a contribution from Yankalilla Council.

This program provides support to parents and families across the Fleurieu and has been operational for over 25 years. This support consists of Outreach Case Management supports, Circle of Security (8 week parenting education program), 'Love Bites - Respectful Relationships' workshops in high schools, and partners with MIPAAC (local Aboriginal Co-op) to facilitate a Youth Nunga space providing cultural activities and community connection.

The program managers have identified areas of further development that can support early intervention to assist in the prevention of violence against women. These include:

- Early prevention education in schools
- Increased Training for Child and Family Practitioners to Have Greater Family Violence Lens - due to family violence being present in the majority of the cases that child and family workers work in.
- Information Sharing Legislation - that allows for real time collaboration from services and organisations to keep women and children safe and keep perpetrators accountable.
- Male Perpetrator Focus - Currently, there is very limited perpetrator focus during and after a family violence incident. On the Fleurieu, there are no dedicated male family violence workers.
- Collaboration and Co-location of Services - collaboration is the key factor in changing a system and one that does not come with a substantial funding increase. Currently on the Fleurieu, child and family support services (Noarlunga and Victor Harbor), domestic violence supports (Goolwa) and child protection (Mt Barker) work in silos.

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- *City of Darebin (Vic)*

Funded from the Victorian Government's *Free from Violence grants*, the Creating Gender Equity in the Early Years project, saw the creation of a range of Early Years resources to increase knowledge and understanding about the powerful role the sector has in providing services and programs that are gender equitable, by challenging stereotypical notions of gender and creating foundations for learning that are respectful and promote positive gender norms.

Recommendations for addressing domestic violence in the early years

- 16) That the Department for Education fund further rounds of the Local Government Early Childhood Community Innovation Grants, with a focus on gender equality.
- 17) That funding is provided to establish additional supported playgroups, particularly in vulnerable areas to provide pathways for victim-survivors and their children to access the services and supports they require.
- 18) Provide a mechanism to upskill family violence workers, child and family practitioners in understanding and evaluating risk and safety related to family violence. Further, child and family practitioners should feel confident in managing low to medium family violence cases that involve children. This upskilling and confidence in managing low to medium cases can be completed through training, but also through co-location of child and family practitioner and family violence workers. Co-location allows skills to transfer naturally where practitioners can be supported and guided in a way that is sustainable.
- 19) Roll out the 'Love Bites - Respectful Relationships' program as a prescribed part of the South Australian Education System. These workshops could be provided by family violence workers, child and family workers or youth workers.
- 20) Develop information sharing legislation that allows both domestic violence organisations, child and family support and safety programs, corrections workers and Police to share information relevant to family violence risk and safety to services, health services, agencies and schools where information is deemed as necessary to share to ensure safety.
- 21) Fund dedicated male family violence workers across all areas of South Australia that are provided after every family violence incident. This worker can then call each respondent to provide support and to keep the person accountable.

- 22) **Co-locate services where possible, to enable better communication, familiarity between services, increased understanding of each other's roles and the opportunity for practitioners to learn from each other.**

4.2. Young people

Local government delivers a broad range of services and programs to support the wellbeing of young people and build their leadership skills and capacity through recreation, arts and music and sport.

Our members have noted that these settings provide an ideal opportunity to mobilise and support young people and their families to address violence against women and challenge the social norms that make it acceptable. It is an important age group to educate and raise awareness about gender equality and equity.

Many councils employ youth development officers, providing a significant opportunity to invest in council youth services to further harness the linkages between schools and civic leadership and engagement, and to promote respectful relationships in a sustained, co-ordinated statewide effort.

Findings from the 2021 *National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey (NCAS) Youth Report* showed an overall improvement in young people's attitudes towards gender-based violence and inequality. It further noted that young people can be catalysts of social change and help shape a culture that rejects violence against women and fosters gender equality.²⁴

Projects that support young men and boys to develop positive masculinity and counteract misogynistic influencers, as well as fostering positive attitudes and behaviours amongst young people are important. The National *[Inquiry into Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence](#)* supported an emphasis on school and community education, particularly for children and young people.²⁵

²⁴ Attitudes matter: The 2021 National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey (NCAS), Findings for young Australians [https://irp.cdn-website.com/f0688f0c/files/uploaded/ANROWS%20-%20NCAS%20Young%20People%20Sub-Report%202023%20\(DIGITAL\)%20-%20FINAL.pdf](https://irp.cdn-website.com/f0688f0c/files/uploaded/ANROWS%20-%20NCAS%20Young%20People%20Sub-Report%202023%20(DIGITAL)%20-%20FINAL.pdf)

²⁵ Parliament of the Commonwealth Of Australia, *Inquiry into family, domestic and sexual violence*, House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs, pg. 244. https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/committees/reportrep/024577/toc_pdf/Inquiryintofamily,domesticandsexualviolence.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf

Good practice example in youth services

- *City of Playford*

The [Northern Sound System](#), the City of Playford's youth music venue, has previously provided several training courses to their staff and youth staff, as well as to the Playford Youth Network (PYN) in the following areas:

- LGBTIQ+ Awareness Training through Uniting Communities organisation.
- Referral of our young people into pre-existing services that are connected to PYN and making other services aware of what is available through networking opportunities at PYN.
- Advocating to both Headspace Edinburgh North and Shine SA to initiate a Rainbow Mates group at NSS.

Recommendation for addressing domestic violence in young people

- 23) That councils' investment in youth services and other youth-based organisations are supported to deliver prevention work and build leadership and respectful relationships programs in education and community settings.**

4.3. Older adults and elder abuse

Many councils use a community development strengths-based approach to empower older people to make choices that suit them best. Local government has a unique understanding of the needs and aspirations of older people in their communities and many councils have strategies that link aged care to community wellbeing and social inclusion, such as public health plans, community development plans and active ageing strategies.

The issue of elder abuse can easily be overlooked as a type of family violence. Elder abuse is commonly defined to refer to abuse by people 'in a position of trust' and although this includes paid carers, elder abuse is often committed by a family member.²⁶ Often it is a gender power imbalance within families that culminates in abusive relationships in later years. This is supported by the National [Inquiry into Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence](#),

²⁶ https://www.communities.wa.gov.au/media/1853/draft_elder_abuse_strategy_2019.pdf

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which reported that the elder abuse should not be viewed as a separate problem distinct from FDSV.²⁷

The National Elder Abuse Prevalence Study found that 11 per cent of women aged 65 and over have been victims of intimate partner violence. Further, findings from the 2021-22 Personal Safety Survey estimated that 17,300 women aged 55 years and over, had experienced sexual violence in the last two years and 4284 of women aged 55 and over had experienced partner violence over the same period.²⁸

The Federal Minister for Social Services, Amanda Rishworth, highlighted in a press release in June 2024, the importance of preparing in-home support workers to identify and respond to varying types of abuse, further connecting older Australians affected by violence with the services they need.²⁹

As a sector, in 2022, there were 26 South Australian councils receiving more than \$100,000 - with a total value of \$96,934,268 - in funding from the Commonwealth, to deliver in-home support packages through the Commonwealth Home Support Programme (CHSP).³⁰

The Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety noted 'the preference of older people to age in their own home'³¹ and that the 'most 'in-demand' aged care service is the lowest level of support and is delivered to people in their homes'.³²

The CHSP provides council staff with a ready audience and direct opportunity to engage, inform and educate older people and their carers about elder abuse and work with professional organisations to recognise the signs of elder abuse and respond accordingly.

The LGA regularly shares information and resources about [Elder Abuse](#) to its members due to strong relationships with the Office for Ageing Well. Many councils have been active in promoting World Elder Abuse Awareness Day within their communities contributing to wider community knowledge.

²⁷ Parliament of the Commonwealth Of Australia, *Inquiry into family, domestic and sexual violence*, House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs, pg. 213.
https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/committees/reportrep/024577/toc_pdf/Inquiryintofamily,domesticandsexualviolence.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf

²⁸ <https://ministers.dss.gov.au/media-releases/14886>

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ [LGA Submission – A new program for in-home aged care November 2022](#)

³¹ Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety – Interim Report – pg 95

³² Ibid. pg 90

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Good practice example in aged services

- *City of Playford*

The City of Playford has a strong connection with the Aged Rights Advocacy Service who have a regular and on-going presence at the Grenville Hub to provide presentations, information and 1:1 support/advice to community members and staff regarding Elder Abuse. More broadly, City of Playford also supports other Advocacy services to have an outreach presence in other community spaces including libraries and community centres to provide a space for community to access confidential advice.

Information is also provided by [Older Person Advocacy Network](#) and [Alliance for Prevention of Elder Abuse](#).

Recommendations for addressing domestic violence in older adults

- 24) **That the State Government advocate to the Commonwealth Government to provide long-term funding certainty to local government for councils to deliver the Commonwealth Community Home Support Programme (CHSP)/Support at Home program.**
- 25) **That councils are supported with resources to build public awareness and understanding of elder abuse as a form of family violence and improve the capacity of council staff to recognise, respond and refer cases of elder abuse, and other forms of family violence, with a particular focus on the bystander approach and training.**

4.4. Priority populations

Councils have an obligation to promote the wellbeing of all members of their community. Our members have noted that there need to be strategies that focus on traditionally marginalised groups as these groups can often be disproportionately impacted by violence, including (but not limited to):

- women from rural and remote areas;
- women with disabilities;
- members of the LGBTQI+ community;
- women from culturally and linguistically diverse communities; and
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

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These groups are often isolated from traditional support services and means of seeking help.³³

Rural and regional areas can often have mixed responses when dealing with the prevention of family and domestic violence. On the one hand they can have great potential for whole-of-community responses due to their high levels of inter connectivity, conversely this factor may also create a barrier due to perceived concerns with 'interference' or privacy.³⁴

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) disability and violence report, **women with disability** are almost twice as likely as women without disability to have experienced physical or sexual violence by a cohabiting partner over a 12-month period (2.5 per cent compared with 1.3 per cent). The likelihood of emotional abuse by a cohabiting partner is also significantly increased - 6.3 per cent compared with 4.1 per cent.³⁵

Council's Disability Access and Inclusion Plans (DAIPS) provide an opportunity for councils to work with partners to provide a disability inclusive lens on primary prevention work.

Many councils have strong relationships and support **culturally diverse communities** through cultural programs. These activities help people from diverse cultures to maintain their independence and continue to be active in the community.

Some members have noted that in a diversifying multicultural South Australia, there is growing need in outer suburbs and regional areas for culturally responsive services and workers. Women are not accessing services due to lack of understanding about cultural perspectives towards forms of violence, shame, child custody and marriage.

Further they suggest that there is a need for policy, funding, and support service access for women on specific Visas that are staying in violent relationships, due to the complexities around expectations of family in their home country or threats to the women from the home country. These women find it difficult or are unable to receive help as our systems are difficult to navigate without good English.

There is an opportunity to utilise existing council relationships, as many are well-connected, skilled brokers who can facilitate appropriate connections and offer local place-based advice on addressing violence against culturally diverse women.

³³ VicHealth 2017, *Violence against women in Australia: An overview of research and approaches to primary prevention*, Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, Melbourne, Australia

³⁴ MAV *Submission into the Royal Commission into Family Violence 2015* pg. 57

³⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2021). 'Disability and Violence – in Focus: Crime and Justice Statistics, Australian Bureau of Statistics'. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/crim-e-and-justice/focus-crime-and-justicestatistics/april-2021>

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According to Our Watch, **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women** experience disproportionate rates of violence, and violence that is often more severe and more complex in its impacts.³⁶ They further report that the violence that **LGBTIQA+ people** experience also happens because of rigid and hierarchical ideas about sex, gender and sexuality.³⁷

Good practice examples working with priority populations

- *City of Salisbury*

The Council supports several social groups that support older people with maintaining social connections and receive information in their own language. These activities help older people from diverse cultures to maintain their independence and continue to be active in the community.

- *City of Onkaparinga*

- The Council's Cultural Diversity Officer is currently building connections and awareness for the specific services required to ensure that domestic and family violence support services are accessible and culturally appropriate for all community members. This consists of connecting to inner suburban services that are not currently reaching the Southern region.
- The Council also has signatory membership with the *Onkaparinga Collaborative Approach (OCA)* for the prevention of Domestic Violence and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Violence. The OCA membership consists of service organisations that share knowledge and resources, provide training, and deliver programs for prevention and recovery. The Council facilitate and provide administration at monthly meetings and assist to plan and implement group actions.

Through their OCA membership, the Council is connected and informed with the struggles and achievements of our local services and hears firsthand of current case-study issues. The Council support the OCA needs through advocacy and broad promotion of their programs.

³⁶ Our Watch *Changing the picture* <https://assets.ourwatch.org.au/assets/Key-frameworks/Changing-the-picture-AA.pdf>

³⁷ Ibid.

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- *City of Adelaide*

- The Council's [Disability Access and Inclusion Plan 2024-2028](#) makes reference to the Establishment of the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability. They acknowledge women with disability are at greater risk of experiencing violence.
- The *Period Poverty in the City* initiative was developed as period poverty was identified as a priority through the Gender Equality Steering Group. TABOO Period Products, a city based social enterprise whose mission is to eradicate period poverty, has been working with a range of city stakeholders including the Commissioner for Children and Young People (CCYP), schools, and specialist homelessness service providers such as Catherine House.

Research from the CCYP in SA revealed that one in four young people experience barriers to period products.

Barriers facing menstruators vary significantly across population groups, with social, cultural, environmental, and economic factors contributing to access.

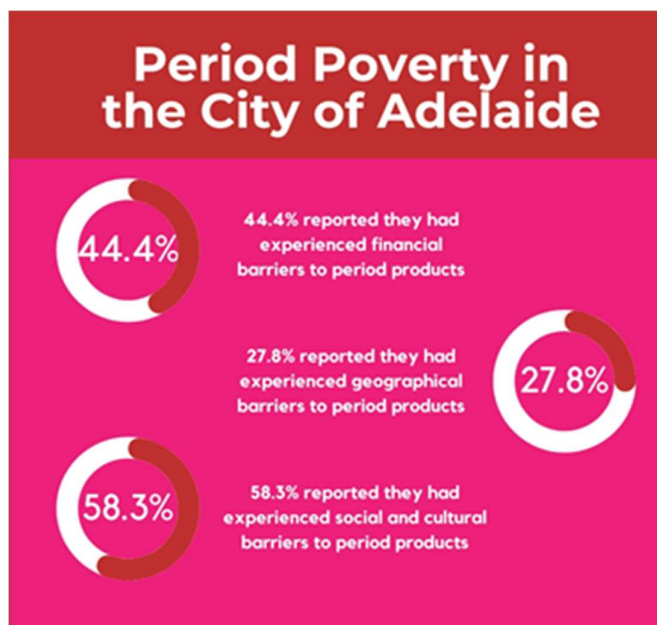
When people experience barriers to period products and menstrual health education, their capacity to manage their period is limited and their participation in school, work and social activities is restricted. They are often forced to use alternative absorption materials, increasing risk of health complications, and further fuelling cycles of shame and embarrassment.

To trial provision of free period products in the city, TABOO and Youth Inc. applied for a City of Adelaide Community Impact Grant and were awarded \$20,000. The grant funded the provision of period products and educational resources across five sites from 28 May 2023 to 28 November 2023 – at North Adelaide Community Centre and Library, Southwest Community Centre, Box Factory Community Centre, City Library and Hutt Street Library. The grant also supported the delivery of community-based workshops, plus a social media campaign.

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A best practice approach to addressing period poverty and gender equality is to approach the provision of period products as a basic right comparable with toilet paper, hand soap and sanitary product disposal. Therefore, to support the continuation of this project beyond the six-month trial, it is proposed that period products form part of the ongoing operations budget for Council's community facilities.

An evaluation of the Period Poverty in the City project was prepared by TABOO with Council staff and community input. Based on the success of the trial, the City of Adelaide committed to continuing the provision of free period products in their community centres and libraries.



- *Ballarat City Council (Vic)*

[Strengthening Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Communities by Preventing violence against women](#)

Recommendations for addressing domestic violence in priority populations

- 26) **Support councils' role and capacity to deliver primary prevention work with priority populations which would enable opportunities and support partnership development in this area.**
- 27) **That the State Government work with the Federal Government in developing policies to support changing partner visas for women experiencing violence.**

4.5. Communications

Local governments are well placed to assist in amplifying messages and ensure that there is consistent communication and a role in community awareness raising about gender equality and the prevention of violence against women at the local level.

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The Local Government Communicators Network is one of LGA South Australia's practitioner networks. It comprises almost 300 local government professionals working across communications, marketing, media and community engagement. The network actively participates in professional development forums and an annual conference hosted by the LGA, ensuring its members remain highly engaged and informed.

The network provides a direct channel for LGA to engage with key council staff in communication-related roles and allows for an efficient and coordinated approach to support communication across all councils in SA.

In addition to the network, the LGA keeps the sector informed of any issues or topics that may be of interest and provide regular communication advice regarding matters that impact the whole local government sector. This is done via a weekly Latest News, CEO's Update and President's Update.

Providing such advice has the potential to ensure clear and consistent messaging around domestic violence and gender equality are provided to council staff, local communities and local media, promoting better understanding.

Councils would welcome resources and collateral to assist in promoting positive messaging on these issues, as well as promoting the use of shared language and concepts.

Good practice example in communications

- *City of Adelaide*

In 2021 the [I'm Not OK With That: Step Up for Gender Equality](#) campaign was launched including a Poster Campaign profiling 22 prominent South Australians as Champions for change (including political leaders including the former Lord Mayor, Councillor Abrahamzadeh, former Premier Steven Marshall and then leader of the Opposition Peter Malinauskas, male and female sporting professionals, women experiencing discrimination) speaking out about how they can prevent gender-based violence, promote gender equality and encourage people to be active bystanders.

The posters featured in an online social media #ImNotOkWithThat campaign, and physical posters were put up in participating Adelaide venues such as bars and cafes.

- *City of Onkaparinga*

The council is developing a FDV webpage to strengthen local support networks and referral systems that the community, staff, and volunteers can use to guide community members to the local Yellow Gate Hub and other local services.

Recommendations for addressing domestic violence in communications

- 28) **That the funding of evidence-based family and domestic violence awareness campaigns such as [‘See the signs’](#) or Bystander Awareness and community information at the local level, continues, allowing each council to identify specific locations for high impact messages.**
- 29) **Support councils’ role and capacity to progress gender equity and influence attitudinal change through developing a local government communications/key messaging guide for working with the community and the local media.**

4.6. Community safety

A safe environment where people can live, work or play has a direct impact on the community’s physical, social and emotional wellbeing. Many councils are committed to providing a safe community and work towards creating a safer environment.

4.6.1. Public spaces

Perceptions of safety are often used as indicators for wellbeing in council planning processes.³⁸ Unfortunately, many women feel unsafe when commuting, working or going out, particularly at night. This presents a challenge for councils, particularly when trying to implement strategies to active public spaces and support the [‘night time economy’](#).

There is an opportunity to assist councils with initiatives that support women’s safety, particularly at night.

4.6.2. Animal management

Council’s Animal Management Officers play an important role in educating the community about responsible pet ownership and where required, ensuring compliance with relevant legislation. They also undertake other initiatives relating to pet management such as pet care support programs to promote the benefits of pet ownership in mitigating loneliness and provide support or promote opportunities to work with developers in creating pet friendly developments.³⁹

³⁸ Indicators of Community Wellbeing for the Southern and Hills Local Government Area
https://www.lga.sa.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0025/1057093/2019.68-Indicators-of-Community-Wellbeing-Framework-and-Report.-August-2021.pdf

³⁹ *People, Pets And Places Animal Management Plan 2018-2023* City of Port Adelaide Enfield,
https://www.cityofpae.sa.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0032/1584149/PAE-animal-management-plan-2018-23.pdf

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According to the RSPCA, there is substantial evidence documenting the connection between animal abuse and domestic and family violence.⁴⁰ Council staff have regular interactions with pet owners and can play an important connector role, referring and linking women experiencing domestic violence to supports such as the [RSPCA's Safe kennel's project](#) or the [Safe Pets Safe Families](#) organisation.

Good practice examples in community safety

- *City of Adelaide*
 - To better understand the experience of women who come to the city at night, the Council coordinated two gender and safety focus groups in June 2023. The sessions aimed to understand how women and gender diverse people plan their night out, how they navigate the city at night and what they feel would improve their experience. Of the people selected to participate:
 - 50% identified as LGBTQIA+
 - 15% identified as people of colour
 - 20% identified as living with disability.

Five key themes emerged about their experience including:



The findings of this report will inform future policy directions; as well as existing Council projects such as Mainstreet Master Planning, Code Amendments, Lighting Masterplan, and the Adelaide Design Manual. It will also be used for any specific briefs for lighting and other elements of public space that contribute to amenity and

⁴⁰ <https://www.rspcasa.org.au/safe-kennels-project/>

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perceptions of safety. Key actions have been identified for discussion within council and with key stakeholders including the Gender Equality Steering Group.

- The City of Adelaide partnered with key stakeholders and city venues to launch [Project Night Life](#). This was a one year pilot program that prioritises women's safety at night and aimed to enhance Adelaide's status as a safer city for all to enjoy. The project focused on staff training and providing support for venues to create and promote a culture that is safe and respectful of women.

Twelve city venues participated with each location undertaking a safety assessment audit, which included expert advice on how venue design and layout can help discourage violence. Staff from each establishment also undertook bystander intervention training and learnt how to appropriately respond when people disclose experiences of family and domestic violence or sexual assault. A video summarising the benefits of the project from a venue perspective is available [online](#).

- In 2021 the ['I'm Not OK With That': Step Up for Gender Equality](#) campaign was launched and included:
 - Forum at the LAB with key stakeholders and the Adelaide community to learn more about bystander intervention and hear from experts and Champions on the prevention of violence against women and gender equality, held during the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence.
 - Bystander Intervention Workshops across the year, delivered free to the community and local businesses to learn the skills and tools to become positive bystanders and prevent gender-based violence. These workshops were popular with licensed venues with a wide range of hospitality staff attending.

- *City of Salisbury*

The City of Salisbury's [Community Safety Strategy](#), provides a platform for how the City works with the community and all stakeholders to address the complex crime and safety issues affecting their community. The strategy helps Council make informed decisions about their priorities and provides evidence for their approaches to the State and Australian governments for grants and other funding.

The Strategy demonstrates the important role councils play in being a partner, connector and facilitator, noting one of the actions under 'Partnerships' includes

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'support local organisations and agencies that work to reduce domestic and family violence and anti-social behaviour'.

- [Local Councils in Victoria](#)

The City of Casey became aware of the need to act in 2012, following the removal of two dogs from a local resident. The owner, a pregnant woman, pleaded with the officers not to take the animals, saying her partner would be angry to see the dogs gone when he returned home. She told the council staff that her partner would blame her and may become violent. This incident prompted the City to review their animal management practices. They have since shared their experiences encouraging local laws teams to build capacity, resulting in more than 200 officers participating in identifying family violence training. Additionally, many councils have updated their Animal Management Plans to include a reference to family violence.

Recommendations for addressing domestic violence in community settings

- 30) Support councils' role and capacity to deliver primary prevention work to implement community safety initiatives which would enable opportunities and support partnership development in this area.**
- 31) Ensure that there are adequate numbers of animal shelter services for women escaping violence. There are currently only limited programs available, such as the RSPCA's Safe Kennels Program and Safe Pets Safe Families Organisation.**

4.7. Arts

Councils are increasingly finding innovative ways work with their communities to address social issues. Using the arts to undertake primary prevention activities is another way that councils can act to change behaviours and support gender equality. Public art can be used to connect people, share messages and encourage conversation and action.

Several councils undertake activities during the [16 Days of Activism against Gender-based violence](#), an annual global campaign that calls for the prevention and elimination of violence against women and girls.

Good practice examples in arts

- *City of Charles Sturt*

The City of Charles Sturt ran a creative arts project called the “Act of Love”, in which artists produced portraits of people affected by domestic and family violence (DFV).⁴¹

This project was one of five action research projects described in *Preventing domestic and family violence: Action research reports from five Australian local government councils* undertaken by [Australia’s National Research Organisation for Women’s Safety](#) (ANROWS).

The aim was to raise awareness of the prevalence and impact of DFV. A short film was made about the process. Following a public launch, the portraits and film were displayed at the council offices from 25 November to 21 December 2018, which included the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence campaign.

A key lesson learned from this project was at the arts provide a non-confrontational and engaging medium in which to discuss and raise awareness of domestic and family violence.

- *Adelaide Hills Council*

The [Adelaide Hills Council turned orange in support of UN’s 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence](#). It further adopted a statement of commitment to help prevent violence against women and their children. The campaign ran from 25 November – 10 December.

The 2023 theme was '[UNITE! Invest to prevent violence against women and girls](#)' and used the colour orange to symbolise a brighter future, free of violence. The Council partnered with the Zonta Club of Adelaide Hills to display silhouettes of orange ladies in the Coventry Library, Stirling to raise awareness of the 16-day campaign, along with educational materials about domestic and family violence and support services.

- *City of Adelaide*

In 2022 and 2023 the City of Adelaide used public art during the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence to raise awareness.

⁴¹ Peter Ninnies & Celeste Koens (2019-06-27). *Preventing domestic and family violence: action research reports from five Australian local government councils*. Australia’s National Research Organisation for Women’s Safety

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In 2022 the [Benches of Hope](#) were used to raise awareness about gender-based violence and create spaces of public safety through art. Adelaide street artist Leah Grant led and mentored members of the community, including women impacted by this issue, students and supporters to paint 5 street-side benches across the city as a message of hope, resilience and healing.

In 2023, the City of Adelaide, installed a [temporary installation of 51 pairs of shoes](#), representing the number of women killed through gendered violence up to that point in 2023. The shoes were donated by women with lived experience of domestic and family violence. The shoes were displayed over the weekend, in Adelaide's CBD.

This temporary installation was designed to invite City visitors to consider the shocking statistics, to reflect on the causes, to find out more, and to prompt conversations and take action that could change behaviours and save lives.

The project was a partnership with Catherine House, an organisation supporting women experiencing Domestic and Family Violence and Homelessness in South Australia.

- *City of Onkaparinga*

The RESPECT Community Action Group (CAG) Onkaparinga is supported by the Council in its annual calendar of events for the International 16 Days of Activism. This includes displaying banners on prominent roadsides during the 16 Days of Activism.

The Council's libraries and community centres raise public awareness and education by participating in the [16 Days of Activism in Onkaparinga](#) campaigns. These events become part of the *RESPECT CAG Onkaparinga* calendar of events. This has included the 1000 butterflies campaign aimed at child and youth awareness of healthy relationships, adult's movie screenings and speaker sessions about domestic violence issues and morning tea events to raise funds for services in both crisis and recovery and healing services.

The Council has also worked with [Spirit of Woman](#) and the late Helen Oxenham OAM to create and unveil the first 'Ripple, Place of Courage' at Rotary Park, Christies Beach. It was the first milestone on the long journey Spirit of Woman have single-mindedly undertaken to raise awareness via public memorials for women who experience domestic violence.

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Recommendations for addressing domestic violence through the arts

- 32) Support councils' role and capacity to deliver primary prevention work to implement arts and cultural initiatives which would enable opportunities and support partnership development in this area.
- 33) That the State Government's new arts, culture and creative sector policy incorporates actions to address gender equity and the prevention of violence against women and children.

4.8. Urban planning, transport and infrastructure design

Planning and design processes can unintentionally exclude or discriminate against groups in our community. Often planning policy overlooks the fact that men and women use public space and infrastructure differently.⁴²

There is currently no best practice toolkit that SA local government can use to consider the issue of gender in the planning and design of communities. It is recognised that the [Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design \(CPTED\)](#) principles could be modified to include a gender lens and consideration of how gender may intersect as well as improve a women's perception of safety within the community.⁴³

Local government is well placed to design and maintain community infrastructure and public spaces that are safe, inclusive and responsive to the needs of women.

Councils can also play a role in making accommodation available to family violence related services, such as community legal services or counselling support, in universal and safe, non-identifying environments such as customer service centres, libraries and community hubs.

Good practice example in urban planning, transport and infrastructure

- *ACT Government City Services*

The Gender Sensitive Urban Design Framework and Toolkit was developed as part of the initiative to improve gender equality of Canberra's public spaces.

⁴² MAV Submission into the Royal Commission into Family Violence 2015 pg. 62

⁴³ Lennon, J 2004 *Does crime prevention through environmental design in Port Adelaide Enfield Council effect women's fear of crime and perception of safety?* Theses Planning Research project, University of South Australia <https://trove.nla.gov.au/work/11067432>

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They serve as a comprehensive guide to achieving best-practice urban design outcomes for the public realm, establishing standards for public spaces that are equitable, inclusive, and safe with particular attention to the needs of women, girls, and gender-diverse individuals.

Recommendations for addressing domestic violence in urban planning, transport and infrastructure

- 34) Support councils' role and capability to progress gender equity and influence attitudinal change by developing a gendered urban planning and infrastructure toolkit for local government to assist in assessing new developments and public spaces.**
- 35) Provide funding and support to the local government sector to provide appropriate and safe meeting spaces for community organisations to meet with women and children fleeing domestic and family violence as part of infrastructure and community centre upgrades.**
- 36) That councils are supported in their efforts to build community infrastructure and facilities that are inclusive of girls and women of all ages and abilities.**
- 37) Support infrastructure funding applications from councils building community hubs to enable family-violence related services, such as community legal service and counselling support, to be accommodated in universal, accessible, safe and confidential environments.**

4.9. Sports and recreation

Councils intersect with many settings in which prevention work could occur and council's role in sports and recreational areas is no different. Much work has been done around gender equality in sports, particularly by [VicHealth](#). Sporting clubs provide a unique opportunity to shape attitudes and many of the entrenched beliefs and behaviours that shape our culture are played out in sports settings.

Sport can use its influence to extend the principles of equality and fairness beyond the field – into the boardroom, the coach's box, the stands, the change rooms, and the media – to prevent violence against women.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ <https://www.ourwatch.org.au/news/our-watch-partners-with-afl>

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Good practice examples in sports and recreation

- *Macedon Ranges Shire Council (Vic)*

Rural Challenge – Embedding gender equality in community groups

- *Sport and Recreation Victoria*

The Victorian Government's [Safe and Inclusive Sport: Preventing gender-based violence guide](#) acknowledges the enormous capacity of sport to influence positive attitudes and behaviours around gender equity and the prevention of gender-based violence.

The guide provides 10 guiding principles, case studies and practical tools to support state sporting associations, regional sports assemblies, women's health and community health services, **local councils**, and other organisations work together to develop and implement prevention of gender-based violence projects in community sport settings.

Recommendation for addressing domestic violence in sports and recreation services

- 38) Support councils' role and capability in the provision of sports and recreation services and facilities to enhance opportunities and support partnership development in this area.**

4.10. Libraries

SA councils operate 100 plus libraries and co-fund another 40 school community libraries in rural and remote areas. Libraries are no longer just about books, many also host Justice of the Peace services, lend out toys, computer tablets, and sometimes even garden equipment.

Libraries run universal programs like story time, summer reading clubs, provide resources in languages other than English, digital literacy courses and book discussion groups. Libraries have enormous opportunities to reflect and reinforce messages of prevention of violence against women, gender equality and respect.

Libraries keep communities socially connected, offer equitable access to technology and are inclusive and welcoming. They are a trusted and safe space in the community and can provide an important safe haven for women and children living in violent situations.

Our members report that many women use libraries to safely access the internet or other digital based resources in addition to council's telephone system.

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A report commissioned by the LGA on the value of libraries, identified that libraries can be an important place and space to support women and families. The report noted that “libraries could keep stocks of information brochures and set up dedicated ‘women’s corners’ which would be areas where women could meet and discuss aspects such as family life and relationships, domestic/family violence, sexual assault and safety, health and wellbeing, accommodation and housing issues, financial security and independence and education, training and career paths”.⁴⁵

Good practice examples in libraries

- *Alexandrina Council and Mount Barker District Council, and the City of Mount Gambier*

Funding from DHS enables these councils to co-locate the Women’s Information Service Haven and Children’s Centre in the Goolwa Library, Mount Barker Community Centre and Mt Gambier Library. The WIS Haven centres are a safe local place where women can speak privately to trained volunteers and get information, support and referrals.

- *City of Adelaide and City of Salisbury – Social Worker in a library pilot*

Recognising that libraries across the world are increasingly being called on to support users with complex needs through the provision of tailored resources, spaces and services, the councils are partnering with Sonder to deliver a Library Social Work program based at the Salisbury Community Hub in 24/25. The program will deliver support to people with complex needs and enhance the capacity of library staff to address multiple and complex needs in a safe and trauma-informed holistic and compassionate manner.

Recommendations for addressing domestic violence in library services

- 39) Support councils’ role and capability in the provision of library services to develop resources about gender equality and prevention of violence against women and to enhance opportunities and support partnership development in this area.**
- 40) That the State Government restore indexation to library funding and allocate an additional \$1M each year over 4 years to meet priority digital inclusion programs**

⁴⁵ Hudson Howells 2020 *Local Government Association of South Australia - Value of Libraries’ Study Final Report* March 2020.

and improve digital connectivity and access. This extra funding can also be used to support prevention efforts.

4.11. Housing

The LGA welcomed recent changes to the *Residential Tenancies Act 1995 (SA)* to enable more protections for tenants who experience abuse or domestic violence. The LGA are cognisant that older women are the fastest growing group of people experiencing homelessness in Australia.

However, often a lack of accessible and affordable housing deters victim-survivors from leaving violent relationships and can push victim-survivors into homelessness. In 2020, the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) reported that domestic and family violence (DFV) was a main reason women and children left their home. With 116,200 people (42% of all Specialist Homelessness Service (SHS) clients) who presented as clients to a SHS reported that they were escaping DFV.⁴⁶

Additionally, the SA Women's Legal Service reported that rising costs of living, soaring rental prices and plummeting vacancy rates have resulted in a three-fold increase in the number of domestic violence victims forced to remain living with their abusive partner.⁴⁷

The LGA commends the initiative, noted in the State Government's Housing Roadmap, whereby the State Government will provide no-interest loans for developments that deliver special housing outcomes, for example, they have provided a \$5 million loan to the YWCA for 24 long-term apartments to be leased at rents below market rates to women and families who have experienced domestic and family violence.⁴⁸ It is suggested that incentives for the building of more of these developments is needed.

Good Practice examples in housing

- *Local Government Homelessness Network*

The Local Government Homelessness Network (LGHN) was established in March 2023 to support councils dealing with increasing numbers of people experiencing homelessness in their communities. Many council teams have interactions with people

⁴⁶ <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/analysis/brief/housing-homelessness-and-domestic-and-family-violence>

⁴⁷ <https://www.indaily.com.au/news/2022/06/28/housing-crisis-raises-risk-for-domestic-violence-victims>

⁴⁸ https://www.treasury.sa.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/1052745/South-Australias-Housing-Roadmap-10-July-2024.pdf

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experiencing homelessness from Customer Service and Libraries, through to Community Safety and Parks and Gardens.

Although limited on how they can operate in this space from a funding perspective, local governments, being closest to the community, can remain informed on the homelessness issue and advocate to higher levels of government on behalf of their community.

Further, Local Governments can enable the provision of service providers and homelessness action groups by acting as a centralised connection point for communications and allowing use of facilities for meetings and cross-organisational collaboration.

- *Various SA councils*

Many councils participate, in varying capacity, in their local Homelessness Alliances, which were established following the Homelessness Sector reforms and subsequent development of the new Homelessness Alliances in 2021.

Participating in these Alliances enables councils to have ongoing engagement with service providers and ensures that community development staff have adequate information to make meaningful referrals to community members.

Members have suggested that the State-wide Domestic and Family Violence Alliance is not as well connected and that there is an opportunity for councils to be more involved with this Alliance.

- *City of Victor Harbor*

The City of Victor Harbor's Community Services staff are playing a connector role with local homelessness services. In a two-year trial, local service clubs are funding the rental of a property with support from a grant from Bendigo Bank. This project is a community driven initiative with the City of Victor Harbor assisting. The community have been pivotal in making this initiative happen.

Elders Real Estate are managing the property and the house, which has now been sourced, will support women over 55 who are homeless. Criteria for a 'house sharing model' is currently underway. The service clubs are now also looking to use this model to rent a second property for short-term DV victims and is intended for a family with children.

Recommendations for addressing domestic violence in housing

- 41) In smaller rural communities the practicalities of locating and maintaining a secure safe place can be problematic, so safe shelters may have to be located in a larger nearby community. Local governments have knowledge of local circumstances and community needs which they can provide to service providers and other levels of governments.**
- 42) Develop a housing strategy that addresses the link between family violence, housing and homelessness.**

5. Coordination

5.1. Community partnerships

Many councils actively seek out opportunities for funding and collaboration to enable the development of community awareness programs, referral pathways and build supports for their communities.

Our members have told us that collaboration is vital to successful and meaningful work in domestic and family violence.

Local government is uniquely placed to support local organisations, whether that be through managing funding and reporting to providing facilities or promoting programs or brokering relationships. We understand that it takes many expert organisations and specialist skills to combine in order to effect sustainable change.

Many councils aim to maximise value by leveraging multiple networks, investments and activities to deliver outcomes for communities.

All councils respond to emerging needs within their communities within available resources and this includes the strong coordination and partnership development role played by local government.

Council partnerships with community organisations can lead to a greater contextual understanding of the community and the services needed. This could include partnership with men's support groups, women's support groups, community advocacy and small business. Collaborative projects promote equality and respect in community settings, this

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could include faith networks, multicultural communities, First Nations communities, disability services, local police and sporting clubs.

Our members have noted that council support of grassroots projects and programs can have a measurable positive impact on the community. Furthermore, they suggest that advisory groups that link to lived experience are an important mechanism for developing local responses and tapping into local expertise.

Good practice examples of partnerships

- *City of Onkaparinga*

From 2019 to 2023, the Council worked alongside the Southern Domestic Violence Action Group, and their Southern Women Matters Campaign, the organisations from the *Onkaparinga Collaborative Approach (OCA)* membership, and Zonta in advocating for the establishment of a Southern women's hub for domestic violence prevention and recovery.

This advocacy resulted in the 2023 opening of the Yellow Gate at Noarlunga Centre. The Yellow Gate is a first point of contact for women to receive sustained support with navigating systems. The Yellow Gate received state government funding for 3 years. Council continues to work alongside the Southern Domestic Violence Action Group in advocating for sustainable funding beyond the three years.

- *City of Salisbury*

Council has provided support for local shelters, advocacy and support groups, programs supported by local businesses or small campaigns which directly benefit the community. Council has also funded community grants that align with Salisbury's strategic directions and health and wellbeing priorities. One example included the Mawson Lakes Rotary Club - program for Domestic and Family Violence Awareness training.

- *Cities of Playford and Salisbury*

In 2014, the Cities of Playford and Salisbury led work on a resource booklet titled 'Our Community Our Business' with a local domestic violence group (which is no longer operating). This document had information on:

- definitions of domestic violence
- what to take with you when you leave

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- legal assistance info
- specific info for CALD, Aboriginal, Same-sex relationships, older people
- resource guide with contact numbers

Playford council noted it had been widely used by a range of local support organisations and SA Police to assist women and families in family and domestic violence situations in the Northern Adelaide Metro, Gawler and Barossa regions and that they continue to get queries requesting more copies of these booklets. However, they are now out of print. Members suggest that these types of resources are limited or not well shared.

Playford have now collaborated with the Women's Safety Services, which has led to the sharing of small credit card Z-card style fold out's that contain similar information as the booklet. These are now being shared with SA Police, other organisations and placed in council's community centres.

This collaboration has also resulted in Council's community teams developing information sessions for staff and community to raise awareness of some of the Escaping Violence payment options, referral pathways etc.

- *The City of Whitehorse (Vic)*

Strengthening local action for family violence prevention – [Free from Violence Project 2019](#)

Recommendations for addressing domestic violence through partnerships

- 43) **Support councils by putting systems in place to encourage formalised partnership models and initiatives. Sustained partnership models are required to provide continuous and evolving service delivery that can bring about change. [Public Health Partner Authorities](#) are one example of how this could be achieved.**
- 44) **That grassroots organisations are funded to work with their local councils to deliver primary prevention work within their community which would enable opportunities and support partnership development in this area.**

6. Conclusion

Ending violence against women and their children is everyone's responsibility and everyone's business.

The activities of local governments in South Australia to date have mostly been focused upon the fields of advocacy, public education, community development and organisational change.

Unsurprisingly many of the examples of work undertaken in the sphere of family and domestic violence and /or gender equality have come from larger metropolitan based councils who are usually better resourced and have better capacity and ability to be involved.

As the level of government closest to communities, councils play a significant role in creating safe public environments, developing community facilities, and providing health and community services.

Local government can stretch State and Federal Government funding and resources through significant in-kind contributions.

This suggests that local government is an important part of the solution in addressing and responding to family, domestic and sexual violence and is well placed to work in partnership with key stakeholders to contribute to primary prevention activities and influence community attitudes in regard to gender equality and early intervention.

The LGA is committed to working in partnership with all levels of Government, as well as non-government organisations to assist in developing preventative place-based responses to family, domestic and sexual violence by challenging and changing the cultural attitudes, norms and behaviours that have long since supported violence against women and their children.

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