

Inquiry into family, domestic and sexual violence

**Submission to the House
Standing Committee on
Social Policy and Legal
Affairs**

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Introduction

About the Local Government Association of South Australia

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

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

The LGA of SA 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.

Local government and the prevention of family, domestic and sexual violence

Family and domestic 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

The economic costs of violence against women has 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.²

The breadth of services and community infrastructure delivered by councils allows an opportunity for activity to prevent violence against women and allow 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.

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. Our members understand that it takes many expert organisations and specialist skills to work in partnership in order to effect sustainable change.

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 of SA is aware that many South Australian councils have chosen to play an important advocacy role in addition to providing sources of information and referral for domestic and family violence victims.

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

² Ayre, J, Lum On, M, Webster, K, Gourley, M & Moon, L 2016, *Examination of the burden of disease of intimate partner violence against women in 2011: Final report*, ANROWS, Sydney

Other support has included training front line staff to deal with sensitive situations, leadership and skill development programs for women, youth programs and providing information about external support programs. Several councils have also chosen to participate in primary preventative programs, promote gender equality, and 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.

LGA of SA policy

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

The policy statement on public health, including a position on family and domestic violence is as follows:

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.

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 of SA welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the *Inquiry into family, domestic and sexual violence*.

This submission is made in response to the Terms of Reference published by the House Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs.

It is recognised that the outcomes of the inquiry will inform the development of the next *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children*. Whilst giving regards to the following Terms of Reference, this submission will primarily address sections 'a and c'.

The Terms of Reference sections:

- a) Immediate and long-term measures to prevent violence against women and their children, and improve gender equality.**
- b) The level and impact of coordination, accountability for, and access to services and policy responses across the Commonwealth, state and territory governments, local governments, non-government and community organisations, and business.**

This submission has been informed by consultation with our member councils, via a [Latest News](#) item, the LGA of SA's existing policy positions and evidence-based research. It principally focuses on the role of local government and its contribution to primary prevention strategies and actions. Good Practice Examples have also been noted, as provided by our members.

As a member of the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA), the LGA of SA is aware of and supports their submission.

The LGA of SA supports the commitment by the Federal Government to address this serious and concerning issue, the outcomes of which will drive significant change and support the reduction of violence against women and their children.

1. General comments

1.1. Primary prevention

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. Evidence shows that primary prevention strategies work best when they are delivered in the places where people live, work, play and learn.³

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. In many instances a combination of approaches (i.e. implementing a range of strategies or activities) for the same issue deliver the best outcomes. The work of councils varies but is predominantly placed at the population-focused end of the continuum.

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 to be further supported with to ensure that councils can be part of the solution.

Just this month [Our Watch](#) finalised and published the [Prevention Toolkit for Local Government](#).

³ State of Victoria 2016 *Royal Commission into Family Violence: Report and Recommendations*, Parl paper no.132(2014-16)

The toolkit includes information to help local governments get prepared, set up internal practices, take action and share and improve prevention processes and activities.

Local government are efficient partners in government and provide value for money by contributing significant in-kind funding which stretches Federal funding further. Councils add value through volunteer networks and significant infrastructure, such as sporting clubs, libraries and community centres.

Recommendations

1. That Commonwealth, state and territory governments continue to fund and contribute to organisations such as Our Watch and Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) to ensure that primary prevention research, initiatives and evidence continues.
2. That the Commonwealth Government encourages state and territory governments to 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 Prevention Toolkit for Local Government.

2. Immediate and long-term measures to prevent violence against women and their children, and improve gender equality.

Councils can influence changes in attitudes and can partner with other organisation to the benefit of local communities to develop measures to prevent violence against women and their children, and improve gender equality.

2.1. Local government sector leadership

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.

The Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) have a successful model (refer to the Good Practice Example below) whereby it has been funded to have a dedicated Project Officer to support gender equality and prevention of violence against women. Having a dedicated domestic and family violence officer in every state and territory Association would have the benefit of providing a single point of contact for local government in their respective states and territories and would improve coordination between levels of government, community organisations and business.

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. Resourcing is necessary to assist local government to drive and embed change across services and programs.

Councils are uniquely placed to take a more central role in community awareness raising about gender equity and family and domestic violence within their communities.

Good practice example

- *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.⁴

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 upon 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.⁵

Recommendations

3. That the Commonwealth Government provide fixed-term funding for a minimum of five years, for a domestic and family violence policy officer in every state and territory local government association. State and territory governments could supplement funding to meet specific jurisdictional objectives and priorities.
4. That the Commonwealth Government encourage state and territory governments to implement higher levels “heads of” style agreements between their relevant state government departments and local government associations to bring together and plan systemic place-based prevention responses to inform and guide this approach.
5. That the Senate Committee 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.*

2.2 Increasing participation of women in local government

The LGA of SA has a strong commitment to increasing the participation of women in local government and has supported a sector representative on Chiefs for Gender Equity, which gave the LGA of SA and councils the benefit of the Chiefs for Gender Equity network, resources and media platforms.

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. Women account for a higher proportion of staff positions (46%) but this falls as the management level rises.⁶

⁴ MAV *Submission into the Royal Commission into Family Violence 2015* pg. 9

⁵ MAV *Submission into the Royal Commission into Family Violence 2015* pg. 15

⁶ <https://alga.asn.au/policy-centre/other-policy-commitments/>

In 2017, the 2020 Foundation revealed that gender equality advances have stalled across Australia's local government sector. The rates of women in senior positions are far lower than any other tier of government. At the last round of local government elections, women accounted for just 32% of all candidates and were elected to 30% of positions. Even fewer (24%) mayoral candidates were women but almost all were elected. Women account for a higher proportion of staff positions (46%) but this falls as the management level rises. Only 11% of council chief executives are women.⁷

Good practice example

- *The LGA of SA*

The LGA of SA'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.

Recommendation

6. That the Commonwealth Government supports local government's role and capability to progress gender equity and influence attitudinal change through resourcing the local government sector or peak agencies to coordinate and inform sector efforts by way of grant funding.

2.3 Resource development

Our members have told us that they would like to see examples of good practices 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 who 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 example

- *LGA of SA*

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.

- *City of Salisbury*

Council has funded the publication of the Domestic Violence information and referral booklet, developed by the Northern Domestic Violence Service, through funds received from the Department for Social Services. This booklet '*Our Community, Our Business*' is widely used by a wide 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

⁷ <https://alga.asn.au/policy-centre/other-policy-commitments/>

- *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

Recommendation

7. That Commonwealth, state and territory governments support local government's role and capability to progress gender equity and influence attitudinal change through resourcing the local government sector or peak agencies to coordinate and inform sector efforts by way of grant funding.

2.4 Population focus areas of councils

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 strategies.

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.

Research undertaken by ANROWS and VicHealth in May 2019 revealed that controlling behaviour in relationships was an area of concern – particularly for young men – with one in five not understanding that using technology to track their partner's movements, such as logging into her social media accounts or installing spyware on her phone, is abusive behaviour. Furthermore, it found that over 2 in 5 young Australians (43%) support the statement 'I think it's natural for a man to want to appear in control of his partner in front of his male friends'.⁸

Good practice example

- *City of Playford*

The Northern Sound System, the City of Playford's youth music venue, has provided several training courses to their staff and youth staff, as well as too 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.

⁸ Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) and VicHealth 2019 The National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey (NCAS) Youth report

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.⁹

As a sector, many councils are funded by the Commonwealth to deliver home support packages through the Commonwealth Home Support Programme (CHSP). The Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety recently noted 'the preference of older people to age in their own home'¹⁰ and that the 'most 'in-demand' aged care service is the lowest level of support and is delivered to people in their homes'¹¹

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.

Good practice example

- *City of Playford*

Grenville Connections Hub over 50's - The Aged Right Advocacy Service provides two presentations to staff and participants per year and flyers are available for clients regarding Elder Abuse. Information is also provided by Older Person Advocacy Network and Alliance for Prevention of Elder Abuse.

Priority populations

Councils have an obligation to promote the wellbeing of all members of their community. Our members have noted that there needs 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 LGBTI+ community;
- women from culturally and linguistically diverse communities;
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women; and
- members of the CALD community.

These groups are often isolated from traditional support services and means of seeking help.¹²

⁹ https://www.communities.wa.gov.au/media/1853/draft_elder_abuse_strategy_2019.pdf

¹⁰ Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety – Interim Report – pg 95

¹¹ Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety – Interim Report – pg 90

¹² VicHealth 2017, *Violence against women in Australia: An overview of research and approaches to primary prevention*, Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, Melbourne, Australia

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.¹³

Under the Disability Inclusion Act 2018 (SA), State Government agencies and councils are required to develop their own Disability Access and Inclusion Plans (DAIPs). These plans are due to be completed by October 2020 and provide an ideal opportunity for strategies and initiatives addressing violence against girls and women with a disability.

Good practice example

- *Ballarat City Council*

Strengthening Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Communities by Preventing violence against women

Recommendations

8. That Commonwealth and state and territory governments support investment in councils' youth services and youth-based organisations to deliver prevention work and build leadership and respectful relationships programs in education and community settings.
9. That the Commonwealth Government provides long-term funding certainty to local government for councils to deliver the Commonwealth Community Home Support Programme (CHSP).
10. That Commonwealth and state and territory governments support local government to seek opportunities to continue to advocate for ongoing funding 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.
11. That Commonwealth and state and territory governments support investment in councils to deliver primary prevention work with priority populations which would enable opportunities and support partnerships development in this area.

2.5 Program focus areas of councils

Organisational and workforce development

Local government employs 187,600 people, which is nearly 10% of the total public sector (as at June 2018).¹⁴ In many rural and regional areas 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.

¹³ MAV *Submission into the Royal Commission into Family Violence 2015* pg. 57

¹⁴ ALGA website <https://alga.asn.au/facts-and-figures/#:~:text=Local%20government%20employs%20187%2C600%20people,tax%20levied%20by%20local%20government.>

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.

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 changes behaviours and support gender equality.

Good practice example

- *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).¹⁵

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).

¹⁵ Peter Nannes & 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

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.

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.¹⁶

There is currently no best practice toolkit that 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.¹⁷

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.

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.¹⁸ 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.¹⁹

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.²⁰

Good practice example

- *Macedon Ranges Shire Council*

Rural Challenge – Embedding gender equality in community groups

- *Gippsland Women's Health*

Make the link Campaign: Gender Equality in Sport = Everybody Wins!

Libraries

SA councils operate 100 plus libraries and co-fund another 40-school based, joint-use 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.

¹⁶ MAV *Submission into the Royal Commission into Family Violence 2015* pg. 62

¹⁷ 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>

¹⁸ <https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/programs-and-projects/action-in-sport-and-recreation-settings>

¹⁹ <https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/programs-and-projects/action-in-sport-and-recreation-settings>

²⁰ <https://www.ourwatch.org.au/our-work/preventing-violence-against-women-through-sport/>

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 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.

A report commissioned by the LGA of SA 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."²¹

Housing

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.

Good Practice examples

- *City of Playford*

Council participates in the Northern Homelessness and Violence against Women Collaboration led by the SA Housing Authority. This network ensures that Council has ongoing engagement with service providers in this space and as such ensures that community development staff have adequate information to make meaningful referrals to community members

- *City of Adelaide*

Support through council grants program for Catherine House, a supported accommodation service to women experiencing homelessness in South Australia. Also works closely with service providers and SA Police to ensure vulnerable people in the city, including those experiencing violence are able to connect to support services with the aim to keeping them safe.

Recommendations

12. Encourage state and territory government to support council's 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.

²¹ Hudson Howells 2020 *Local Government Association of South Australia - Value of Libraries' Study Final Report* March 2020.

13. Encourage state and territory governments to support a requirement for sector-wide workforce planning and reporting that addresses and monitors gender equality.
14. Encourage the funding of family and domestic violence awareness campaigns such as bystander awareness and community information at the local level, allowing each council to identify specific locations for high impact messages.
15. Encourage state and territory governments to support council's 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.
16. Encourage state and territory governments to 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.
17. Encourage state and territory governments to support libraries in developing resources about gender equality and prevention of violence against women.
18. Encourage state and territory governments to support council efforts to build community infrastructure and facilities that are inclusive of girls and women of all ages and abilities.

3 The level and impact of coordination, accountability for, and access to services and policy responses across the Commonwealth, state and territory governments, local governments, non-government and community organisations, and business.

3.1 The National Plan and Women's Safety Taskforce

The *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022* was developed to bring together efforts of governments across Australia to make a real and sustained reduction in the levels of violence against women.

It recognised that whilst all governments have highly effective services and programs to respond to violence against women and their children, there was opportunity to respond in a more coordinated way. Furthermore, it acknowledged that local government has a key leadership role to promote equal and respectful relationships between women and men.

Four Action Plans have been developed to date, with the most recent *Action Plan* demonstrating a substantial, increased investment in responding to violence against women, as well as a bilateral government commitment to prevention.²² The Fourth Action Plan makes prevention a strong priority, with prevention work receiving around 20% of the total federal funding.²³

The National Plan was designed to provide a coordinated framework and improve the scope, focus and effectiveness of governments' actions, ensuring that women and children would receive the support they need.²⁴

²² <https://theconversation.com/the-latest-action-plan-to-tackle-violence-against-women-isnt-perfect-but-it-takes-a-much-needed-holistic-approach-121870>

²³ <https://theconversation.com/the-latest-action-plan-to-tackle-violence-against-women-isnt-perfect-but-it-takes-a-much-needed-holistic-approach-121870>

²⁴ https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/08_2014/national_plan_accessible.pdf

The LGA of SA supports that the outcomes and lessons learnt from this Inquiry are used to formulate and develop the next *National Plan to reduce violence against women and their children*.

Preventing domestic violence is a priority at the highest level of government – the National Federation Reform Council (formerly COAG). The Women’s Safety Taskforce is one of two taskforces under the National Federation Reform Council.²⁵ The Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) has in the past provided updates to COAG on domestic violence initiatives at local government level but is not a member of the Women’s Safety Taskforce.

The LGA of SA support ALGA’s view that it should be represented on the Taskforce to ensure that the voice of local government is heard as it is important in ensuring that the voice of local government is reflected in policy development and initiatives.

Recommendation

19. Encourage the Federal government to include ALGA as a representative on the Women’s Safety Taskforce, to ensure that local government has a voice at the table.

3.2 Local government strategic planning role

At a state level, the South Australian government identifies key actions in ‘*Committed to Safety – South Australia’s framework to Prevent Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence*’ recognising local government’s role in the primary prevention sphere.²⁶

South Australian councils are further guided by other key legislation including the *Local Government Act 1999*, which defines the roles, functions and principles to be observed by councils. Several are relevant to local government responsibilities in domestic violence, including to:

- 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, well-being 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; and
- participate with other councils, and with State and national governments, in setting public policy and achieving regional, State and national objectives.

Furthermore, Section 51 and 52 of the *South Australian Public Health Act 2011*²⁷ 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 2016.²⁸

²⁵ <https://www.pmc.gov.au/domestic-policy/effective-commonwealth-state-relations>

²⁶ https://officeforwomen.sa.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0007/78604/Committed-to-Safety.pdf

²⁷ <https://www.legislation.sa.gov.au/LZ/C/A/South%20Australian%20Public%20Health%20Act%202011.aspx>

²⁸ <https://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/wps/wcm/connect/public+content/sa+health+internet/public+health/regional+public+health+planning+and+implementation>

Only six councils identified family and domestic violence in their plans, with no consistency across the board. 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,²⁹ which councils need to have regard for in their plans.

Good practice example

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

Likewise, to South Australia, Victorian councils are required to prepare a Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan (MPHWP), using a social model of health. In 2015, the Victorian Government established a Royal Commission into Family Violence in acknowledgement of the seriousness of family violence and its consequences for individuals, families and communities.

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 MPHWP. 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

20. Encourage state and territory governments to make the prevention of family and domestic violence a distinct priority when developing their next State Public Health Plans (or equivalent) to provide strategic leadership for councils.
21. Encourage the local government sector to include measures to address domestic and family violence when developing their regional public health plans, similar to what is required in Victoria.
22. 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 and public health planning processes.

3.3 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. However, resourcing is necessary to assist local government drive and embed change across services and programs.

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

²⁹ <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>

equality and respect in community settings, this could include faith networks, 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.

Good practice examples

- *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. Examples include:

- Street Smarts Australia – An organisation aiming to tackle homelessness
- Dress for Success – Providing women with professional attire to secure employment and gain financial independence.
- White Ribbon Australia
- Support for Men's Sheds programs

- *Cities of Playford and Salisbury*

Both councils have been active members of the Northern Homelessness and Violence Against Women regional collaboration. The collaboration brings together Government agencies and non-Government organisations to:

- Facilitate coordinated, action-based approaches across the community, government and other service providers, tailored to the particular characteristic of the Northern Adelaide Region.
- Support community based practical and strategic prevention and intervention initiatives.
- Ensure that issues and responses are interconnected with the relevant groups in the region to develop a cross sectoral response to homelessness and Domestic Violence.
- Understand, analyse and enhance agency and community responses to homelessness and systems enhancement opportunities arising from these meetings.
- Prioritise issues on homelessness and violence against women through the development of a regional Action Plan

The collaboration has undertaken several projects since its inception, including:

- Annual regional forums aimed at community awareness and sector skill development, this has included themed topics relating to working with men, working with children, working with women, working with diverse communities to respond to family and domestic violence in a broad range of practice settings;
- Connect2U community connections and awareness events;
- Youth matters community events;

- Healthy Relationships Program at the Adelaide Women’s Prison. The collaboration utilised the skills of the Northern Domestic Violence Service, Flinders University and Relationships Australia SA’s Specialised Family Violence Service to design a program to meet the needs of women in prison who have extensive victimisation histories. The program was funded via a grant from the Department for Correctional Services.
- Assisting in safe options for family pets for women and children escaping abusive relationships project. The collaboration supported Flinders University and the Northern Domestic Violence Service to explore the meanings attributed to pets by victims/survivors of domestic/family violence. It involves two main parts set to begin in the new year:
 - photographic and art exhibition by adult and child survivors of violence of their love of companion animals; and
 - a qualitative research project narratively analysing photos, artwork and data from individual interviews held with adult survivors. This project was supported with funding and venue hosting for an art/photographic exhibition and presentations by the City of Salisbury.
- Boarding House project – the collaboration members worked with local boarding house owners to adapt their boarding house tenancy models to better cater to women leaving abusive relationships. This project was identified as a means of filling a gap in the tenancy market for transitional rental accommodation for women escaping abusive relationships.
- PACT Project – A community engagement project undertaken in a highly disadvantaged residential region of Parafield Gardens identified due to significantly high socioeconomic disadvantage, high in police attendance requirements, transitional housing and high levels of Aboriginal and CALD communities. The residents were surveyed to identify the issues experienced in their community, the services and resources they may require, and what barriers may exist to accessing services. This project provided an evidentiary basis for subsequent programs and community engagement activities.
- The City of Whitehorse (Vic)

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Recommendations

23. Persuade federal, state and local governments to work together and put 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.
24. Recommend that federal, state and territory governments fund grassroots organisations 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.

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 area of family and domestic violence 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 also stretch Federal and state funding and resources though 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 equity and early intervention.

The LGA of SA is committed to working in partnership with the State and Federal Governments, 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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