

# Preventing violence against women

## Local government action guide no. 6

Promoting health and preventing illness in the community



Local governments play a major role in supporting the objectives of the *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008* by protecting, improving and promoting public health within their municipality. By integrating action across the social, cultural, built, economic and natural environments, council policies and practices can make major contributions to economic prosperity, community cohesion and population health outcomes.<sup>1,2</sup>

Councils can provide leadership across their communities to prevent violence against women by promoting gender equity and equal and respectful relationships between men and women. As large employers, they can influence and change workplace cultures to promote gender equity and the safety of women.

This guide is one of ten outlining a range of evidence-informed actions that councils may consider when preparing their Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plans and other strategies. The proposed strategies are consistent with national and state health promotion priorities and prevention frameworks, including *The Victorian public health and wellbeing plan 2011–2015* and VicHealth's *Preventing violence against women: A framework for action*.

### Why is preventing violence against women a public health and wellbeing priority?

- Intimate partner violence is the leading preventable contributor to death, disability and illness in Victorian women aged 15–44 years.<sup>3</sup>
- Violence has wide-ranging and persistent effects on women's health and increases their risk of anxiety and depression.<sup>3</sup>
- One in three women in Australia who have had a boyfriend or husband reported experiencing at least one form of violence from an intimate male partner.<sup>4</sup>
- One-quarter of women aged 15 or over have experienced inappropriate and unwanted sexual touching, and one-fifth have been stalked.<sup>5</sup>
- Women with disabilities, live in rural and remote areas, or are from Aboriginal, migrant or refugee backgrounds are at much greater risk of male violence.<sup>6</sup>

Violence against women can include psychological, economic, emotional, physical and sexual abuse. To prevent violence from occurring the first place, we all must work to challenge and change attitudes, beliefs and cultures that support violence. It is best prevented by ensuring that respectful attitudes, behaviours and beliefs are shaped in the places where we live, work and play.<sup>7</sup>

## A sample council strategy to prevent violence against women

### Strategic goal

Council is committed to preventing violence against women (PVAW) before it occurs by:

- addressing the known contributors to such violence
- creating safe, respectful and equitable communities, workplaces and public environments.

### Objectives and actions

#### Implement evidence-based violence prevention activities

- Advocate for the use of the VicHealth PVAW framework to guide evidence-based development of PVAW initiatives.
- Collaborate with other state and national projects to implement initiatives across multiple sectors and settings.

#### Provide leadership across communities to prevent violence against women by promoting gender equity and equal and respectful relationships

- Develop a whole-of-council PVAW plan with strong executive-level support.
- Consider ways to promote gender equity across a range of council areas, such as the sport and recreation, economic development and human resources departments.
- Undertake a gender audit and assess gender-inclusive requirements for the use of all council facilities.
- Establish a council-community White Ribbon Action Team with involvement of staff, including men, across all management levels, branches and sites.
- Build a page on the council's website promoting respectful communities and PVAW initiatives.
- Support and partner with community groups and clubs that are undertaking PVAW work.
- Promote the PVAW message through local print, radio and television media.

### Influence and change council workplace cultures to promote gender equity and the safety of women

- Support organisational changes in local government workplaces by providing leadership and accessing training on preventing violence against women.<sup>8</sup>
- Hold events with council staff to raise awareness of the causes of violence against women.
- Build council's own capacity to lead by example through promoting women's leadership.

### References

- 1 Blane, D, Brunner, E & Wilkinson, R, 1996, Health and social organisation: *Towards a health policy for the 21st century*, Routledge, London, p. 12.
- 2 Wilkinson, R & Marmot, M, 2003, *Social determinants of health: The solid facts* (2nd edn), [www.euro.who.int/en/what-we-publish/abstracts/social-determinants-of-health.-the-solid-facts](http://www.euro.who.int/en/what-we-publish/abstracts/social-determinants-of-health.-the-solid-facts)
- 3 VicHealth, 2004, *The health costs of violence: Measuring the burden of disease caused by intimate partner violence. A summary of findings*, Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, Melbourne.
- 4 Mouzos, J & Mikkai, T, 2004, 'Women's experience of male violence: Findings from the Australian component of the International Violence Against Women Survey', *Research and Public Policy Series*, no. 56, Australian Institute of Criminology, Canberra.
- 5 Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006, *2006 census of population and housing*, cat. no. 2914.0, ABS, Canberra.
- 6 VicHealth, 2011, *Violence against women in Australia: Research summary*, Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, Melbourne.
- 7 VicHealth, 2007, *Preventing violence before it occurs: A framework and background paper to guide the primary prevention of violence against women in Victoria*, Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, Melbourne.
- 8 Information on VicHealth's Short Course for Preventing Violence Against Women is available at [www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/shortcourse](http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/shortcourse)