

Position paper

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COVID-19 and primary prevention of violence against women



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Introduction: Impacts of the COVID-19 crisis on the drivers of violence against women and unique opportunities for a transformative recovery

The primary prevention of violence against women is a long-term goal. The COVID-19 pandemic has shone a light on and amplified existing inequalities which drive gender-based violence, further reinforcing the need for continued commitment to this goal. Actions and reform aimed at preventing violence against women will be crucial to the crisis recovery period in Australia, to ensure that we both sustain the gains made in the past decade and continue to make progress towards the aim of ending violence against women and their children.

As outlined in *Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia* violence against women has specific gendered drivers, and that it is gender inequality across society that creates the underlying conditions for high rates of violence against women. Due to its disproportionate impacts on women, the health, social and economic crises caused by the COVID-19 pandemic threaten to reverse the gains that we have made in addressing this critical issue, both by increasing violence against women in the short term, and by amplifying or further entrenching the underlying gender inequalities that drive this violence in the first place.

Our Watch is a national leader on the primary prevention of violence against women. The development and publication of this position paper responds to the significant implications of the COVID-19 crisis for the primary prevention of violence against women, its impacts on the underlying gendered drivers of this violence, and the need for action across the country to ensure that gains in addressing these drivers and promoting gender equality are not lost. As set out in Our Watch's 2019-24 Strategic Plan, we are committed to translating evidence into accessible policy solutions and leading a national conversation about ending violence against women and their children.

As Australia looks towards the recovery period, we not only have challenges to overcome, we also have a unique opportunity to do things differently, and better. We have a chance to reimagine and transform aspects of our society and economy in ways that will not only increase resilience and help the country recover more rapidly from this crisis, but that will also boost and fast-track our efforts to prevent violence against women and advance gender equality. The good news is that there are proven solutions: gender-responsive approaches that, if applied consistently to our planning, decision-making and policy processes, will enable Australia to meet these challenges effectively.

This is also opportune timing for such an approach because we can ensure that actions to address the gendered drivers of violence against women in crisis recovery planning are strongly linked to the development of the *Second National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and Their Children*.ⁱ

By seizing this window of opportunity, by making bold decisions about the kind of future we want to achieve, we can put Australia on track towards a future in which everyone is safe and living free from violence, and in which women can participate and contribute equally.

ⁱ Announced by COAG on 13 March 2020: <https://www.coag.gov.au/meeting-outcomes/coag-meeting-communicue-13-march-2020>

Why primary prevention is central to crisis recovery

Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia demonstrates how gender inequality sets the necessary social context in which violence against women occurs.

There are four particular expressions of gender inequality which consistently predict higher rates of violence against women (summarised as the 'gendered drivers' of violence against women):

- Condoning of violence against women
- Men's control of decision-making and limits to women's independence in public life and relationships
- Rigid gender roles and stereotyped constructions of masculinity and femininity
- Male peer relations that emphasise aggression and disrespect towards women

The drivers of violence against women arise from unequal and discriminatory institutional, social and economic structures, social and cultural norms, and organisational, community, family and relationship practices. Together, these structures, norms and practices create environments in which women and men are not considered equal, and violence against women is both more likely to happen, and more likely to be tolerated and even condoned.

Primary prevention is an approach that uses whole-of-population initiatives to address the drivers of violence against women. Change cannot be achieved at the individual level prior to, or in isolation from, a broader change in the underlying drivers of violence across communities, organisations and society as a whole.

Primary prevention includes initiatives that reach people where they live, work, learn and play, supported by political and institutional strategies including policy, legislation and regulation, that together can shift the social structures that enable, drive or effectively condone violence against women.

Primary prevention focuses on stopping violence before it starts. This is distinct from, but complements, early intervention and responses to violence against women.²

Primary prevention can help build long term community resilience and cohesion, through the promotion of gender equality and by addressing other intersecting forms of discrimination and disadvantage. This is why it is so critical to the COVID-19 crisis response and recovery and there are many opportunities to build prevention approaches into the work that governments across Australia are undertaking across social policy, public health planning, and economic measures.

The importance of taking an intersectional approach to primary prevention

Intersectionality refers to the interconnections between systems and structures of inequality such as gender inequality, class inequality and racial inequality.

Change the story shows that, while gender inequality is always influential as a driver of violence against women, it cannot be considered in isolation, nor is it experienced in the same way by every woman. Other forms of systemic social, political and economic inequality, discrimination and disadvantage influence and intersect with gender inequality at all levels of society and must also be considered and addressed in order to prevent violence against women.³

The Fourth Action Plan of the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and Their Children* also points to the importance of taking an intersectional approach to the prevention of violence against women. It emphasises the need to consider gender inequality together with other forms of social discrimination and disadvantage, such as racism, classism, ageism, dispossession, homophobia, biphobia and transphobia. It points to the need to respect, listen and respond to women's diverse lived experiences; and to understand and address the way in which multiple forms of discrimination or inequality intersect to create disproportionate impacts across society.¹

Because an intersectional approach focuses on the social systems and structures, norms and practices that contribute to discrimination and privilege, and influence perpetration and experiences of violence, it is an approach that can strengthen and improve the effectiveness of our overall primary prevention efforts.

Gendered impacts of COVID-19

Like many other crises, COVID-19 is having specific and disproportionate health, social and economic impacts on women. These include:

- exacerbating women's experiences of violence
- placing predominantly female workforces onto the frontline of the crisis
- amplifying rigid gender roles
- increasing the burden of unpaid work borne by women
- reducing women's economic security
- impacting on women's health

These impacts are being felt severely in the short term and will continue to have medium- and long-term consequences for women. The Australian Government has acknowledged the need to address these disproportionate impacts signing on to a joint statement with ministers representing governments of 58 countries which states:

COVID-19 affects women and men differently. The pandemic makes existing inequalities for women and girls, as well as discrimination of other marginalised groups such as persons with disabilities and those in extreme poverty worse and risk impeding the realisation of human rights for women and girls. Participation, protection and potential of all women and girls must be at the centre of response efforts. These efforts must be gender-responsive and consider different impacts surrounding detection, diagnosis and access to treatment for all women and men.²

Violence against women

International and national evidence from previous disasters and crises identifies that violence against women often increases during and in the wake of these events.³

Situations of heightened stress, family disruption, social isolation, financial pressures, and disruption to people's usual personal and social roles can all compound or exacerbate the underlying gender inequalities that lead to violence against women. While such stress-related factors do not in themselves cause violence against women, they can increase the severity and frequency of this violence.

Key areas of concern relating to violence against women in Australia during the pandemic, both while social distancing restrictions were at their strictest and as they loosen, include:

- Social distancing restrictions meant that women experiencing violence were isolating at home with their abusers with limited contact with social support networks. As restrictions lift and people can move around more freely, there is a risk that perpetration may increase as perpetrators use more controlling behaviours to reassert power and control
- Reduced access to services for women experiencing violence while isolating at home with their abuser, or in regional and remote areas due to restrictions on movement.

As restrictions are progressively lifted, there will likely be increased rates of reporting as women who have been experiencing violence are able to access support. This may cause strain on response services if appropriate resourcing is not put in place

- It may be harder for women to leave an abusive partner because of economic impacts of the crisis (including job losses) which disproportionately effect women and may restrict their financial independence
- An increase in online abuse including image-based abuse⁴
- Intensified risks of work-related discrimination and sexual harassment perpetrated by colleagues through online means⁵, with many more people working from home, and reports of workplace abuse of workers in female-dominated customer service/public-facing roles such as healthcare and retail⁶
- Reduced oversight (formal and informal) in closed residential settings, increasing concerns about the risk of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation for people with disability⁷ and older people
- Increased reports of racism, particularly for women from Asian backgrounds⁸

Women on the frontline of the crisis

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted and exacerbated inequalities in the workforce, with many women working on the frontline and providing essential services to the community during the crisis – overwhelmingly in occupations that have been traditionally undervalued and poorly paid.

Healthcare and community services, predominantly female industries,⁹ have been crucial to ensuring community wellbeing and preventing the spread of the virus. The majority of service staff at healthcare facilities (cleaners, caterers, laundry workers) are also female.¹⁰

Early childhood education and care have been identified as key services and remained open, meaning that workers (who are mostly women in low-paid roles)¹¹ are at an increased risk of contracting the virus due to close contact with children and families, and with associated precarity and uncertainty for the future of services. Schools were significantly disrupted, with education being delivered remotely for almost three months, highlighting the importance of the work that teachers (who are predominantly female)¹² do.

The gendered structural dynamics that characterise the Australian workforce, with 6 out of 10 Australians working in industries dominated by one gender,¹³ reflect gendered social norms. In particular, the kinds of care work that are overwhelmingly performed by women (and have been at the forefront of the response to COVID-19) are generally devalued and less well paid, while occupations in which men are concentrated are better paid and have a higher social status.

Gender roles and unpaid work

We know from the evidence that rigid gender roles are one of the underlying drivers of violence against women. Given this, it is significant that evidence suggests that unequal gender norms and roles are often reinforced during disasters, because as these norms and power structures are reasserted, women and other groups can lose footing in the pursuit of equality.¹⁴ Emerging evidence shows that the COVID-19 pandemic is having ramifications for gender roles in Australia, amplifying existing rigid attachments to these roles across society.

For example, during the first phase of the crisis, with many people confined to their homes, women undertook significantly more unpaid caring and domestic work, despite the fact that they were already undertaking a disproportionate amount of this labour prior to the crisis.¹⁵ As the UN has pointed out, the crisis has “made starkly visible the fact that the world’s formal economies and the maintenance of our daily lives are built on the invisible and unpaid labour of women and girls”.¹⁶

Research on masculinities and disasters suggests that while the interruption of existing societal structures provides an opportunity to challenge existing roles and stereotypes of masculinity, there is more often a reassertion of and reversion to traditional and binary-driven gender roles during and immediately following disasters and times of crisis.¹⁷ Additionally, the ways in which a crisis is managed and spoken about in public discourse often reflects and reinforces rigid gender roles and stereotypes of masculinity.¹⁸ In turn this can reinforce the links between masculinity, violence, and aggression, contributing to narratives that condone or excuse men’s violence.

Women’s economic security and paid work

Increasing women’s independence and economic security is a key component of work to prevent violence against women because it directly addresses one of the gendered drivers of this violence. In this context, it is of concern that the economic crisis associated with COVID-19 has created new threats to women’s economic security.

The economic impacts of the crisis on the Australian workforce and businesses are significant and likely to be ongoing, both because of the long-term consequences of the economic shock and because some social distancing restrictions will need to continue in order to contain the virus. Evidence suggests that these impacts are gendered. Data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics shows that several industries that predominantly employ women have been most severely affected by business closures and social distancing restrictions, and women have experienced higher job losses than men.¹⁹ Data also shows that women have borne the brunt of the increase in under-employment caused by the crisis.²⁰

As identified by the Reserve Bank Governor, the Australian economy is experiencing the biggest economic contraction since the 1930s and the pandemic will have long-lasting effects on the economy.²¹ The immediate impacts of the crisis on women’s loss of employment and income, combined with the predicted global recession, could result in women’s workforce participation declining overall over a longer period and ongoing negative impacts on women’s economic security throughout their lives.

Based on past experience and emerging international data, the UN has warned: “it is possible to project that the impacts of the COVID-19 global recession will result in a prolonged dip in women’s incomes and labour force participation, with compounded impacts for women already living in poverty”.²² In Australia, as identified by the Australian Council of Social Services, “the people affected are disproportionately those who will struggle to re-establish their careers and incomes as the economy recovers: people in low-paid and insecure jobs (mainly young people and women), of whom around a third are expected to lose their jobs”.²³

Women’s health

While Australia has to date been relatively successful in containing the health impacts of COVID-19, there are concerns about the potential for some related or ongoing health impacts on women.

Many women already experience a range of barriers to accessing healthcare, including women with disability, women in regional areas, and women on temporary visas who do not have access to Medicare. The crisis has raised concerns about further potential limitations to women’s access to healthcare during the pandemic, or women being reluctant to access healthcare due to COVID-19, including regular health check-ups, as well as impacts of restrictions on elective surgery and access to sexual and reproductive healthcare.²⁴

The availability of mental health services, given the increase in the number of people needing supports during the pandemic, and the ongoing impacts of the pandemic on mental health is also of concern. Women and girls in Australia have poorer mental health than men and boys, including higher rates of anxiety, depression and affective disorders, twice the rate of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and higher rates of self-harm and suicidal behaviour.²⁵

Opportunities for a gender transformative recovery: Addressing the drivers of violence against women and promoting gender equality in crisis response and recovery planning

Beyond addressing the immediate impacts of the crisis on women, governments across Australia have an opportunity to address the drivers of violence against women and support primary prevention by promoting gender equality in crisis response and recovery planning and actions.

In the context of COVID-19, the UN Working Group on Discrimination Against Women and Girls has said:

The key benchmark of any new policy must be that it does not deepen existing structural inequalities, or create new vulnerability, but rather ameliorates and creates new opportunities that are just and equitable...

The crisis is an opportunity to address structural inequalities and deficits that have consistently held women back, and to re-imagine and transform systems and societies. In order to fully comprehend the gendered impacts of the crisis, it is crucial to understand the structural discrimination underlying the emergency which is not only causing but exacerbating serious violations of women and girls' human rights.²⁶

In Australia our shared national framework *Change the story* identifies the following actions that are essential for addressing the gendered drivers of violence against women:

- Promote and normalise gender equality in public and private life
- Challenge condoning of violence against women
- Promote women's independence and decision-making in public life and relationships
- Foster positive personal identities and challenge gender stereotypes and roles
- Promote broader social equality and address structural discrimination and disadvantage

Embedding these essential actions in crisis recovery planning can contribute to the prevention of violence at this critical time and promote gender equality and women's safety in the long-term. Linking this crisis recovery planning process to the development of the Second *National Plan to Reduce Against Women and Their Children*, will ensure a consistent approach to preventing violence against women in both the immediate context and over the longer term.

Promote and normalise gender equality in public and private life

An effective way to promote and normalise gender equality in public and private life, in this crisis recovery period is to establish processes for gender-responsive policy making. This approach assesses all public policy for its impact on women and includes an analysis of any differential impact on different groups of women in order to achieve a truly inclusive gender equality.²⁷

Decisions made and taken by governments during the crisis and in the post-crisis period will have significant implications for all Australians. By **applying gender responsive policy-making and budgetingⁱⁱ processes to COVID-19 crisis planning and decision-making**, governments can effectively address gender inequalities across Australian society and change the broad and underlying conditions that produce and support violence against women. Further, by integrating intersectional analysis, gender responsive policy-making and budgeting processes can support efforts to address the intersecting drivers of violence against women. For example, understanding the ways in which racism and sexism intersect, and the ways in which laws, policies, economic measures, and organisational and institutional practices can have discriminatory impacts on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, can inform more effective strategies to address the specific drivers of violence against Indigenous women.

Using these tools, fiscal and other policy levers can address gender inequalities and support important primary prevention actions including, for example, by promoting women's independence and decision-making and challenging gender stereotypes.

Specific actions to apply gender responsive policy-making and budgeting in the crisis and post-crisis period could include:

- Ensure the design of economic stimulus packages and social assistance programs is informed by the use of a gender lens, and intersectional gender analysis,ⁱⁱⁱ to ensure the benefits of these measures are fairly distributed and address inequalities
- Continue to draw on the gender expertise within the bureaucracy, for example through Offices for Women, and where necessary complement this with additional capacity including from civil society to support gender analysis of crisis response and recovery planning, and gender responsive policy-making

Connected to this is the importance of **collecting sex and gender disaggregated data to inform policy making and monitor gender equality outcomes during the crisis and post-crisis period**. Our Watch's work on monitoring Australia's progress towards primary prevention highlights the importance of conducting national, ongoing, periodic monitoring of progress, using relevant, consistent measures and indicators. Future reports or results of such monitoring may provide valuable insight into the medium and long-term impacts of the COVID-19 crisis,²⁸ however the availability of disaggregated data is critical to enable this assessment.

Governments **can ensure women's equal representation in all COVID-19 response planning and decision making**, in line with a key recommendation from the UN Secretary General.²⁹

ⁱⁱ **Gender responsive budgeting** "identifies potential opportunities to advance gender equality through a government's budgetary expenditures, allocations and taxation. It aims to assess where policies proposed in a budget will benefit or disadvantage individuals based on their gender, and identify where changes can be made to promote greater gender equality" (Equality Rights Alliance (2020) *Analysing the Gap Policy Paper: Opportunities to improve gender equality in Australia's public policy processes*)
Gender responsive budgeting is supported by **gender responsive policy-making**, which applies a gender analysis to policy processes beyond those associated with revenue, expenditure and budget development.

ⁱⁱⁱ An **intersectional analysis** examines the impacts intersecting systems and structures of inequality have on people who are affected by multiple types of disadvantage, discrimination and oppression, and those who have different types and levels of privilege and power.

This is a critical action to support women's social, economic, cultural and political participation, particularly in decision-making.³⁰ The joint statement on promoting gender responsiveness in the COVID-19 crisis, signed by Australia, sets out a commitment to this action:

We support the active participation and leadership of women and girls at all levels of decision-making, including at community level, through their networks and organisations, to ensure efforts and response are gender-responsive and will not further discriminate and exclude those most at risk.³¹

Finally, increasing the involvement of **women's and specialist violence against women organisations, including organisations working with women affected by multiple kinds of discrimination and disadvantage, in decision-making**, is critical, in line with recommendations internationally from the United Nations and locally from the National Women's Alliances.³² A commitment to this approach will help enable the development of gender responsive approaches that consider the specific needs of all women and draw on the expertise of those who face multiple barriers in times of disaster.³³ In order to take an effective intersectional approach it is crucial that organisations specialising in working with women affected by multiple kinds of discrimination and disadvantage are involved in decision-making across a broad range of social policy measures.³⁴

Supporting this work may include resourcing women's and specialist violence against women organisations to undertake consultation, research, policy and program development to inform and support government planning and decision-making in the crisis and post-crisis period. Governments can also enable this by involving these organisations in formal mechanisms, such as advisory groups, to involve women's and specialist organisations in planning and decision-making.

In order to meaningfully engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations in decision-making, it is critical that governments **prioritise principles of Indigenous self-determination and commit resources to communities**.³⁵ Self-determination is recognised as a key principle for prevention in practice in *Changing the picture: A national resource to support the prevention of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their children* and will be critical to prevent violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in the medium and long term. The Fourth Action Plan also makes clear that, solutions to address violence must effectively engage and equip Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in decision-making processes that affect their lives",³⁶ and that "Indigenous peoples must be acknowledged as equal and indispensable partners in designing policy and legislative frameworks that enable diverse solutions, and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to determine their own futures, on their own terms".³⁷

To support self-determination for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in the context of COVID-19, governments can increase resourcing to peak bodies, and support and expand specialist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and initiatives to respond to the crisis and prevent violence.³⁸ Another key action would be to increase the representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in relevant decision-making forums and bodies during the crisis and post-crisis period.³⁹

Challenge condoning of violence against women

There is a renewed opportunity, with increased awareness and public discourse about violence against women during the crisis, to challenge the condoning of violence against women. This includes challenging narratives that, for example, suggest that men being under stress or pressure is what leads to their violence. By challenging such messages, which tend to be even more common during crises, we can avoid framing the issue in a way that reinforces, amplifies and entrenches the existing tendency to condone violence against women within our society.

Key measures may include:

- Continue to use strong messaging that violence against women is always unacceptable, that stress does not cause or justify violence, and that the crisis is not an excuse for violence, as exemplified in Our Watch's [No Excuse for Abuse](#) campaign
- Ensure that measures to address violence against women are informed by an evidence-based understanding of the dynamics of violence and continue to have a focus on the gendered nature of violence and its impacts

Violence against women can be condoned both through widely-held beliefs and attitudes (social norms) and through legal, institutional and organisation structures and practices that reflect and reinforce them.⁴⁰ *Change the story* shows it is critically important to **challenge the condoning of violence against women, including by reforming systems** that, in their operation, may justify, trivialise, excuse or downplay violence against women, or blame the victim of violence.

Further, **addressing expected increases in violence against women during the pandemic** is critical to longer term prevention efforts. Early intervention and response efforts can and do have important preventative effects: stopping signs of violence from escalating, preventing a recurrence of violence, or reducing longer-term harm. They also provide the foundation for primary prevention efforts, by sending a society-wide message that violence is not acceptable, establishing perpetrator accountability, and protecting women and their children from further violence.⁴¹

Key actions could include:

- Continue to consult with organisations that respond to and intervene in violence against women to ensure that appropriate resourcing, supports and reforms are in place during the crisis and in the post-crisis period to support women experiencing violence and leaving violent relationships
- Urgently implement reforms to the family law system which prioritise the safety of women and their children, informed by the Women's Legal Services Australia *Safety First Plan*
- Implement all recommendations from the Australian Human Rights Commission's *Respect@Work: Sexual Harassment National Inquiry Report*
- Implement the recommendations set out in the position paper on *The Status of Women and Girls with Disability in Australia*, published by Disabled People's Organisations Australia and the National Women's Alliances⁴²

- Commit sustained funding to specialist organisations that are responding to and intervening in violence against women, including Aboriginal community controlled organisations and organisations led by women with disability and migrant women
- Ensure that the Second National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children takes a holistic approach across the entire spectrum of primary prevention, early intervention and response

Promote women’s independence and decision-making in public life and relationships

The post-crisis recovery planning processes currently underway nationally can strengthen women’s economic security, independence, economic participation, and decision-making in public life, all of which are measures that help address the gendered drivers of violence against women.

Economic stimulus measures provide an opportunity to promote gender equality. Key actions could include:

- Ensure a gender analysis is undertaken on proposed economic stimulus measures and that such measures do not disproportionately preference men’s employment and economic security over women’s
- Identify opportunities to advance gender equality through economic stimulus measures, such as procurement policies that require gender equality in employment for major infrastructure and other projects initiated as part of economic stimulus strategies

Supporting women’s employment in crisis recovery planning is crucial to support women’s economic security. Key actions could include:

- Apply a gender lens to industrial relations reforms to ensure any proposed reforms improve and promote women’s rights at work, increase security in employment, and address women’s circumstances and working patterns
- Consider options for reform to ensure the provision of affordable early childhood education and care in the long-term
- As large employers, governments can play a leading role in taking action and modelling good practice on supporting women’s employment
- Identify opportunities to embed gender equality measures in government procurement and grant and funding agreements

Additionally, **strategies can be developed to value and fairly remunerate those working in feminised industries**, which have been traditionally under-valued and poorly remunerated but during the crisis newly understood as critical to our communities. There is an opportunity to harness this overdue recognition and develop strategies to permanently increase the perceived value of feminised industries, both in community attitudes and the structures that govern pay and conditions for workers.

A gender lens can be applied to social security and other areas of policy to ensure that new measures introduced in response to the crisis are effective in helping to reduce the numbers of women living in poverty and supporting financial security and independence for women throughout their life course.

Foster positive personal identities and challenge gender stereotypes and roles

In public messaging, governments and civil society can challenge gender stereotypical constructions of men and women in and include examples of a broad range of positive personal identities and roles.

Promoting and supporting gender-equitable domestic and parenting practices is key to challenging rigid gender stereotypes and roles. Key actions can be taken to increase the value placed on women's unpaid domestic labour and care, which are under-valued on the basis of rigid gender roles. Public policy measures may include:

- Account for unpaid domestic and caring work in national accounts alongside GSP and other measures of formal economic activity
- Assess the impact of public policy and spending measures on women's unpaid work
- Identify and implement measures to reduce the economic burden on women engaged in unpaid work, such as relief for utility bills
- Review access for all workers to paid leave for family and community caring responsibilities

A further action to challenge stereotyped roles would be to review and reform Commonwealth paid parental leave entitlements to extend the period that parents can access entitlements for and improve the sharing of childcare between women and men. This work could draw on international models to inform enhancements to the Australian system.

Promote broader social equality and address structural discrimination and disadvantage

Both *Change the story*, and the Fourth Action Plan identify the need to address intersecting forms of inequality, recognising that gender inequality cannot be separated from other forms of inequality.

Key actions in the COVID-19 crisis recovery include:

- Challenge racism and all discrimination against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and women of colour, including through public messages, campaigns and social marketing

- Challenge ableism^{iv} and exclusion of women with disability including by increasing access to support, the social security safety net, health, education and human services, accessible information, assistive technology and participation in the community⁴³
- Address systemic barriers to equal access to services and supports including for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, women on temporary visas, and women with disability. This includes increasing resourcing to the Aboriginal community controlled sector to support its work in responding to the crisis and supporting Aboriginal people's health and wellbeing; ensuring that people on temporary visas, particularly women experiencing violence, have access to services;^{44 45} and embedding cultural safety in service delivery, including by involving women experiencing multiple forms of discrimination and disadvantage in service planning and decision-making

^{iv} The belief and practice that people with disability are less worthy or valued than people without disability. Ableism contributes to the inequality, disadvantage and marginalisation of people with disability, and is a driver of violence against people with disability (C. Frohmader and T. Sands. (2015). 'Australian Cross Disability Alliance (ACDA) Submission to the Senate Inquiry into violence, abuse and neglect against people with disability in institutional and residential settings'). For women with disability, ableism intersects with gender inequality to increase the risk, severity and impact of gendered violence, as well as create additional unique forms of violence. Interventions that challenge the ableist norms, practices and structures which drive violence against women with disability must be prioritised. (Our Watch and Women with Disabilities Victoria (2020) *Prevention of violence against women and girls with disabilities: a review of the literature*, unpublished)

Conclusion

This position paper has emphasised the unique opportunities presented by the current crisis, to advance work on primary prevention of violence against women and the benefits of developing a bold, transformative recovery strategy that maximises community resilience and helps deliver a safer and more gender equal future for all.

Through advancing the essential actions outlined in *Change the story* as part of our response to the COVID-19 crisis we can contribute to the prevention of violence at this critical time and promote gender equality and women's safety in the long-term.

Endnotes

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⁷ Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability. (26 March 2020). 'Statement of Concern – The response to the COVID-19 pandemic for people with disability'. Retrieved from: <https://disability.royalcommission.gov.au/publications/statement-concern-response-covid-19-pandemic-people-disability>

⁸ Australian Human Rights Commission. (8 April 2020). 'Racism undermines COVID-19 Response'. Retrieved from: <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/about/news/racism-undermines-covid-19-response>

⁹ Workplace Gender Equality Agency. (May 2020). *Gendered impact of COVID-19*. Retrieved from: <https://www.wgea.gov.au/topics/gendered-impact-of-covid-19>

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