



News Release

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Violence against women costing Australia \$21.6 billion a year

Violence against women and their children is costing Australia \$21.6 billion each year, with Governments carrying more than a third of the cost burden; as shown in the report *A high price to pay: the economic case for preventing violence against women* released today by PwC partner James van Smeerdijk, VicHealth CEO Jerril Rechter and Our Watch Director of Policy and Evaluation, Dr Lara Fergus.

- The cost of pain, suffering and premature mortality constitutes the largest proportion of the total cost of all violence at 48 per cent, equating to \$10.4 billion.
- Governments, both State and Commonwealth then bear 36 per cent or \$7.8 billion in order to deliver health services, criminal justice and social welfare for victims.
- Economically, \$3.4 billion is lost either due to victims or other members of society funding for their own services or due to lost opportunity costs.
- Prevention strategies have a proven effect on levels of violence. If we engage the whole community in prevention and give them skills for respectful relationships, we will reduce the costs associated with violence.

“Putting a financial number on a problem that is about the wellbeing and safety of human beings may seem like an impersonal thing to do, but it’s important we continue to shine the spotlight on the size of the domestic violence problem in Australia and the myriad of impacts it has, both human and financial,” said PwC partner van Smeerdijk.

The report, which was reviewed by an advisory panel of representatives from government, academia, community groups and research organisations and is a public submission to the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence, estimates that if no further action is taken to prevent violence against women, the costs will accumulate to \$323.4 billion over the thirty years to 2045.

“Prevention of violence against women is an issue whose time has well and truly come” said van Smeerdijk.

“Like many in the community, we are deeply saddened by the statistics and personal stories of violence against women. This is not just an issue for the community. It is a workplace issue and employers also have a role to play. Our report shows the magnitude of the problem, and it also shows the major benefits from investing in primary prevention. This investment will not only quickly pay for itself, but more importantly, it will transform women’s lives.”

The report reviewed what works in prevention and found two areas where there has been sufficient time and investment in evaluation to quantify the reduction in prevalence of violence against women, community mobilisation and individual and direct participation.

If a similar reduction in violence against women were achieved as has been the case for other community mobilisation programs, the benefits would range from \$35.6 million to \$71.1 million over a lifetime. For individual and direct participation programs, the benefits would range from \$2.2 billion to \$3.6 billion over a lifetime. These are only two examples which demonstrate the potential gains from investing in prevention.

“Although there is no single cause of violence against women, substantial evidence indicates that higher levels of violence against women are consistently associated with lower levels of gender equality in both public life and personal relationships. For example, one recent major study found higher gender inequality predicted higher levels of intimate partner violence across 44 countries,” said Our Watch Director of Policy and Evaluation, Dr Lara Fergus.

“The new cost estimate of over \$20 billion is staggering. In addition to economic costs, we must also remember the significant emotional and social costs of violence against women and their children. In estimating the benefits of investing in prevention, we note that this investment should not come at the cost of investing in response services. Increased and sustained investment to end violence against women and their children in Australia is required right across the spectrum from primary prevention to emergency response.”

“The intrinsic link between gender inequality and violence against women is now well understood and primary prevention offers a way to address them together. Prevention activities in a range of places including schools, workplaces and sporting organisations are essential in addressing the stereotypes and gender imbalances deeply embedded in our culture. This report shows that the benefits of improving equality between women and men will be felt by everyone in our community, not just victims, into the future.” said Jerril Rechter, CEO of VicHealth.

“Significant and ongoing investment in prevention is required if we want to see a reduction in the shocking statistics.”

ENDS

*If you cover this story, or any story regarding violence against women and children, please include the following tagline:

“If you or someone you know is impacted by sexual assault, family or domestic violence, call 1800RESPECT on 1800 737 732 or visit www.1800RESPECT.org.au. In an emergency, call 000”

To access guides for reporting about violence against women and their children, visit: www.ourwatch.org.au

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