

Discussion topic 4:

Safe and respectful relationships

Building partnerships to prevent family violence, violence against women and elder abuse

Everyone has the right to feel safe and respected in their relationships, and be free from the fear of violence within their homes and in the community. For many women, this will not be experienced until the cycle of family violence, and violence against women, is broken.

In the year ending March 2021, there were 2,091 family violence incidents with female victims in Frankston City, compared to 709 incidents with male victims.

Crime Statistics Agency

Frankston City has the highest rate of family violence incidents in Metro Melbourne.

Crime Statistics Agency

Breaching a family violence order is one of the top five criminal offences in Frankston City.

Crime Statistics Agency

Females are four times more likely to be a victim of intimate partner violence than men.

Crime Statistics Agency

Family violence is a fundamental, serious and preventable violation of human rights that occurs when a perpetrator exercises power and control over another person¹¹. It involves coercive and abusive behaviours designed to intimidate, humiliate, undermine and isolate, resulting in fear and insecurity¹². It also involves an escalating spiral of violence that can include physical and sexual abuse, as well as psychological, emotional, cultural, spiritual and financial abuse¹³.

Family violence is against the law and Victoria's justice system plays the leading role in responding to incidents of family violence to keep women and children safe and hold perpetrators to account.

Family violence affects all family members, however data shows that it is a gendered issue with the majority of victims being women and their children, and the majority of perpetrators being men. Family violence carried out against a current or former partner is known as intimate partner violence, and is the leading preventable contributor to death, disability and illness in Victorian women aged 15–44¹⁴. Stopping these forms of violence before they start requires a primary prevention approach.

The causes of family violence involve harmful cultural norms and structural inequalities. *Change the story: a shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women in Australia*¹⁵ identifies four gendered drivers of violence against women that are most consistently associated with higher levels of men's violence against women. These are: condoning of violence against women; men's control of decision-making and limits to women's independence in public and private life; rigid gender stereotyping and dominant forms of masculinity; and male peer relations and cultures of masculinity that emphasise aggression, dominance and control.

¹¹Our Watch 2021 *Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women in Australia* (2nd ed.) Our Watch, Melbourne.

¹²VicHealth 2017 *Violence against women in Australia An overview of research and approaches to primary prevention* VicHealth, Carlton South.

¹³Department of Premier and Cabinet 2016 *Ending Family Violence: Victoria's Plan for Change*, Department of Premier and Cabinet, Victoria.

¹⁴VicHealth 2004 *The health costs of violence: Measuring the burden of disease caused by intimate partner violence* VicHealth, Carlton South.

¹⁵Our Watch 2021 *Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women in Australia* (2nd ed.) Our Watch, Melbourne.

Violence against women occurs across the whole community, however certain groups of women experience much higher rates of intimate partner violence than others. Women that are pregnant, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and those with disabilities or leaving or trying to leave a violent partner, are at increased risk¹⁶. LGBTQIA+ people are less likely to receive appropriate support when needed¹⁷. For many women, the COVID-19 pandemic coincided with the onset or escalation of violence and abuse.

The estimate for the prevalence of elder abuse among people living in the community aged 65 and older in Australia is 14.8%, with the most common form of abuse being psychological abuse (11.7%) followed by neglect (2.9%). Overall prevalence rates were similar for men and women, and with low socio-economic status being associated with a greater risk of abuse overall. Elder abuse is mostly committed by family members, with adult children being the most common perpetrators, followed by intimate partners, then partners of adult children.¹⁸

Council's role

Local government plays an important primary prevention role in responding to family violence, as well as performing some statutory responsibilities. For Frankston City Council, this role includes:

- Providing frontline staff with education and training in family violence risk identification, assessment and management, consistent with the Victorian Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework (MARAM).
- Demonstrating commitment to addressing family violence, violence against women and elder abuse through policies and strategies, including the Frankston City Health and Wellbeing Plan 2021-2025, Positive Ageing Action Plan 2021-2025 and Family Violence Prevention Plan 2022-2026 (in development).
- Advocating and building collaborative partnerships to promote gender equality and prevention of violence against women, including Women's Health in the South East (WHISE), the Victorian Government, Peninsula Community Legal Centre, specialist family violence services, Victoria Police, health and community services and the community itself.
- Delivering primary prevention programs through our universal services that strengthen safe and respectful relationships, such as the Men as Role Models project to support boys to be free from violence and other harmful behaviours.
- Engaging the community in campaigns that raise awareness of gender equality and attitudes and behaviours that enable violence against women and elder abuse, including the 16 Days of Activism, International Women's Day, Elder Abuse Awareness Day and EveryAGE Counts Ageism Awareness Day.
- Co-designing and delivering a culture change program for sporting clubs to achieve greater gender equality, both on and off the field.
- As an employer, Council is developing a Gender Equality Action Plan and has policies in place to support employees impacted by family violence.

The Victorian Government is implementing a number of reforms to strengthen the family violence system in response to the recommendations from the Royal Commission into Family Violence. These include delivering Respectful Relationship education in schools, managing the risk of family violence through the MARAM and rolling out the Orange Door network. The Victorian Government has also established Respect Victoria, a statutory authority dedicated to the primary prevention of all forms of family violence. At a national level, the Australian Government is currently drafting a National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032.

¹⁶VicHealth 2017 Violence against women in Australia An overview of research and approaches to primary prevention, VicHealth, Carlton South.

¹⁷O'Halloran K 2015 Family violence in an LGBTIQ context: a summary of issues arising out of submissions to the Royal Commission into Family Violence, DVRCV Victoria.

¹⁸Qu, L., Kaspiew, R., Carson, R., Roopani, D., De Maio, J., Harvey, J., Horsfall, B. (2021). National Elder Abuse Prevalence Study: Final Report, Australian Institute of Family Studies, Melbourne.