

Working with News and Social Media to Prevent

Violence Against Women and their Children

Quick Reference Guide

Violence against women (VAW) is a fundamental violation of human rights. It is widely recognised as being at epidemic proportions globally, and includes many forms of abuse that are directed by men against women because they are women. As such, violence against women can also be referred to as *men's violence against women* or *gender-based violence*.

Men's violence against women also includes violence against their children. Children are often exposed to and impacted by violence against their mothers/female caregiver, particularly within a family context. Violence can also be directed towards children by men as a way to hurt and control their mother/ female caregiver. This does not encompass all violence directed towards children, or other forms of child abuse or neglect.

Evidence tells us that the most significant cause of violence against women is the unequal distribution of power and status between women and men. This includes gender inequalities and embedded social attitudes and norms about women and children's value and place in society.

Primary prevention of violence against women refers to activities and interventions that seek to prevent violence before it occurs.

The VicHealth paper *Preventing violence before it occurs* (2007)) argues that in order to prevent violence against women from occurring in the first place, our culture needs to understand what gender equality looks like and implement evidence-based solutions to become more gender equal.

The paper further argues that to reach a 'tipping point' of attitudinal and behavioural change, prevention messages and initiatives should reach community members where they live, work and play. It identifies multiple sites for action to prevent violence against women, including local government and community services, sport and recreation, workplaces, schools and young people, and media.

Why engage with the media?

Working with the media is an important element of Victoria and Australia's commitment to preventing violence against women and their children (PVAW).

High quality, informed and accurate news media coverage, and engaged social media interaction on PVAW, can make an important contribution to prevention efforts when it:

- Conveys the full impact of VAW on our communities;

- Provides accurate and meaningful context for stories on men's violence
- Challenges community attitudes and behaviours that underlie or reinforce men's violence
- Identifies available specialists and support services for people seeking assistance
- Ensures women's experiences of violence are accurately and sensitively communicated.

Engaging with media as an organisation or individual in the PVAW field is lively, demanding and complex work that really can make a difference.

The experience in Victoria over the last decade has shown that:

- The media is a powerful setting and influencer for social change
- There is strong enthusiasm for doing media-related PVAW work
- The intersections between media and PVAW are complex, and there are risks associated with doing media-related PVAW work in a poorly conceived, piecemeal or inconsistent way
- Achieving improvements in media and community understanding of violence against women will require stakeholders in this work to have a shared understanding of the evidence base, and of the key messages and approaches needed for positive social change.

What does the Framework do?

By promoting a coordinated, strategic and consistent approach, the Framework aims to maximise the effectiveness and potential of media-focused prevention work.

The Framework builds upon VicHealth's *Preventing violence before it occurs: A Framework and background paper to guide the primary prevention of violence against women in Victoria* (2007), and it supports the objectives of *The National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children 2010-2022*.

The Framework sets the stage for future work with media in the PVAW field, taking into account the complexity of the task, and the great diversity amongst stakeholders. It identifies strategic priority actions, including the critical first steps: to generate agreement about what is needed, and to align the diverse groups who are undertaking media-related PVAW work.

The Framework acknowledges that the media landscape is rapidly changing and will continue to do so. For example: social media has become a powerful mechanism for engaging and influencing the public and is integrated into much of the community; and traditional media outlets are no longer the sole contributors of news – social media can in fact drive news media content. The Framework provides guidance on what is needed to manage the challenges associated with working in such a dynamic environment.

How can I use the Framework?

While the Framework is not a step-by-step guide to implementing all future work, it does provide a road map of the approaches required. It is a tool to support informed and critical engagement with news and social media on PVAW.

The Framework provides guidance about what is needed to implement successful prevention work with media, setting out key elements that require thorough consideration. For example:

- The priority actions specified in the Framework should be implemented first, as they underpin the success of the other actions and the Framework as a whole
- An effective strategic approach requires specific expertise, capacity, planning and coordination
- An understanding of the contexts of the current media environment and of the historical relationship between media and community organisations is important
- The successes and learnings from current and previous initiatives in Victoria are important building blocks for future work
- Consistent messaging must be balanced against flexibility to address multiple audiences in different contexts and to maintain fresh commentary
- Many contextual factors are important, meaning that there isn't a 'one size fits all' approach
- There are significant risks in media-related prevention work associated with credibility, safety and legal issues
- The fields of media and PVAW, and how they interact, are constantly evolving – an understanding of these changes is crucial to ensure the work remains current and relevant.

It is important to note that state-wide consultations held in 2013 found that the Framework is not necessarily well-suited to meeting the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Consultations found that the development of an adapted version is needed to meet the specific needs of these communities in preventing family violence with news and social media. At the time of publishing, plans are underway for its development. Further information can be obtained through Domestic Violence Victoria.

This Quick Reference Guide is intended to provide readers with a conceptual understanding of the Framework. The full document *Working with News and Social Media to Prevent Violence Against Women and their Children: A Strategic Framework for Victoria* explores the potential for media-related PVAW work in detail. It can be found at www.dvvic.org.au

Vision and Aims of the Framework

The Vision

That news media will:

- Report men's violence against women and their children, its causes and prevention, in a way that is accurate, sensitive and contextualised
- Challenge myths about men's violence against women and their children, its causes and prevention
- Be an active proponent for the prevention of men's violence against women and their children.

That social media will be an active medium for:

- Distributing messages on the causes and prevention of men's violence against women and their children
- Challenging myths about men's violence against women and their children, its causes and prevention
- Promoting understanding and support for the prevention of men's violence against women and their children.

The Aims

To achieve the vision by:

- Strategically aligning those who can supply information or comment to the media on prevention of men's violence against women and their children
- Structuring, informing, and guiding consistent, coordinated, collaborative, and evidence-based approaches to this work
- Contributing to organisational actions which further an increase in quality media reporting, and reduce media reporting on attitudes and behaviours that support violence against women and their children
- Continuing to build and respond to the evidence on primary prevention, work with media, reporting and community attitudes.

Outline of the Framework

Action 1.1

Establish a coordinating body and/or worker to align Victorian media-related PVAW efforts

Action 1.2

Increase local and other networks for media-related PVAW

Action 1.3

Promote the Framework across the various sectors

Action 2.1

Develop agreed Victorian key messaging about PVAW

Action 2.2

Deliver training and resources for PVAW workers on news, social media and prevention

Action 2.3

Develop guidelines and strategies for coordinated use of social media for PVAW

Action 2.4

Invest in research and evaluation on PVAW and media



Action Area 1

Align the diverse groups working on, or planning to work on, media-related PVAW

Action Area 2

Upskill and develop resources for the specialist PVAW field and related organisations to engage effectively with media on prevention

Action Area 4

Strengthen dialogue with the news media on PVAW

Action Area 3

Provide content the way media needs to receive it

Action 4.1

Provide resources and information sessions for media which aid quality reporting

Action 4.2

Engage journalism students

Action 4.3

Support investigation into the impact of gender inequality within the media industry

Action 3.1

Support the ethical provision of women's stories to the media

Action 3.2

Support the provision of diverse and effective community voices on PVAW

Action 3.3

Use events to promote PVAW messages and story content

Who is the Framework for?

The Framework has been designed to be accessible and useful for a diverse range of practitioners and organisations that have a stake in engaging with media to prevent violence against women and their children in their respective areas of work.

The Framework has been developed with the following stakeholders in mind:

- Practitioners directly working on development of PVAW projects with a media component
- Project and organisational managers who are developing or revising policies around media and PVAW
- Organisations applying for funding to support PVAW through media projects, or other PVAW projects that may have a media component or media profile
- Family violence and sexual assault response service workers who communicate with or plan to communicate with media
- Organisations that are actively using or considering using social media and online media for PVAW related activities
- Government, philanthropic, corporate, and other bodies seeking to invest in media-related PVAW initiatives.

The Framework may also be of use to others, such as:

- Anyone working in the area of PVAW
- Anyone working in the area of early intervention or response to VAW who may be called upon by media to make comment
- Anyone responsible for communications, messaging or education in organisations whose work is related to or intersects with PVAW, including community groups, and the health sector
- Local and state government including local councils, Victoria Police, Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and other departments
- Tertiary institutions, academics and research bodies whose work is related to or intersects with PVAW.

Situating the Framework



Need More Info?

The full framework can be found at www.dvvic.org.au