Jesuit Social Services
Building a Just Society

the men's project
A Jesuit Social Services initiative

Perspectives on prevention of gender-based violence: Identifying and disrupting pathways to violence

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Contents

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Summary

Jesuit Social Services welcomes the opportunity to share this paper in light of the Rapid Review of Prevention Approaches (the Review). We affirm the need to build on Australia's current approaches to prevention and consider whether they need to be further adapted or refined. Inevitably, this process of evidence–based iteration and learning is needed in order to strengthen and accelerate current efforts to end men's violence against women and children.

This paper does not seek to provide an exhaustive contribution to what is needed. Instead, we have provided recommendations and reflections informed by our practice experience and research, as well as the lived experience of our participants.

We do not seek to holistically diagnose the underpinnings of violence and associated structural inequities, including patriarchal institutions that subjugate those already facing oppression, including victim-survivors. Given the broad scope of the Review, neither do we seek to do justice to the significant complexities and important nuances of violence prevention work such as considerations when engaging with people from specific cultural backgrounds.

Further, we do not seek to holistically address the intersectional nature of violence including the disproportionate rates of violence perpetrated against women with a disability, LGBTQIA+ people and others at greater risk of experiencing violence.

About Jesuit Social Services

Jesuit Social Services is a social change organisation. Our perspectives on prevention of violence are informed by a unique combination of practice expertise, research and lived experience. We have been working with boys and men for 47 years, delivering support services and advocating for improved policies, legislation and resources to achieve strong, cohesive and vibrant communities where every individual can play their role and flourish.

Jesuit Social Services works with the most disadvantaged members of the community, providing services and advocacy in the areas of justice and crime prevention; mental health and wellbeing; settlement and community building; education, training and employment; ecological justice; and preventing and addressing gender-based violence. Our work has involved engaging with boys and men involved in the criminal justice system, including those leaving prison; and establishing Victoria's first dedicated counselling service working with young people struggling with concurrent mental health and substance abuse problems.

Through our work with people who use violence, we are aware of the critical need for early intervention in the lives of young people to prevent exposure to and support recovery from violence and its effects. Our organisational data points to links between the experience of childhood violence and later contact with the justice system. For example, analysis of our

2023-24 case notes show that 74 per cent of participants in our adult justice programs and 53 per cent of participants in our youth justice programs reported being a victim-survivor of family violence at some stage in their lives (likely under-reported for a range of reasons). The vast majority of the reported experience was exposure to violence in childhood. Importantly, while females and gender diverse people in our programs were two and a half times more likely than males to have survived violence as adults, family violence exposure in childhood was evenly reflected across gender groups.

Our violence prevention work is motivated by our desire to keep people of all genders safe. We know the importance of engaging with boys and men, of recognising their specific needs, and looking beyond the criminal behaviour to the person who perpetrated it – while nevertheless holding them to account for their behaviour. We know the importance of creating respectful spaces where boys and men can take responsibility for their actions, explore alternatives to dominant understandings of masculinities, and find ways to address the use of violence in their own lives and the broader community.

Drawing from our experience, Jesuit Social Services established The Men's Project in 2017 to provide leadership and develop new approaches to reducing violence and other harmful behaviours prevalent among boys and men to keep families and communities safe and to improve their wellbeing. The Men's Project conducts research and promotes cultural change related to stereotypical ideas about what it means to be a man; develops, delivers and evaluates interventions that address violence and other harmful behaviour; shares knowledge across sectors about what works to engage men and boys and change their behaviour; and helps build capacity across services to recognise and respond to violence and other harmful behaviours in boys and men.

The Men's Project

The vision of The Men's Project is for good men, respectful relationships and safe communities. We seek to achieve this by:

- undertaking research to understand the behaviours and underlying attitudes of men and boys including related to violence, child sexual abuse and the wellbeing of men and boys themselves
- promoting positive change around gender norms related to what it means to be a man in the 21st century as well as building skills to intervene to prevent violence
- developing innovative ways to stop cycles of violence and harmful behaviour among boys and men.

Current priorities for The Men's Project include:

- drawing on our Man Box research and child sexual abuse prevalence study, building a greater understanding of perpetration including opportunities for prevention and early intervention
- supporting people who work with men and boys every day (e.g. teachers, sports coaches, social workers) to prevent violence and improve the wellbeing of men and boys
- developing new early intervention approaches with adolescents at-risk of using violence
- strengthening early intervention responses for adults and young people to prevent child sexual abuse
- drawing on our grounded practice experience, advocating for systemic changes that seek to prevent violence and child sexual abuse.

Jesuit Social Services' understanding of the drivers of violence

The causes of violence are complex and multi-faceted, and there are many legitimate perspectives on its underpinnings. However, studies in Australia and around the world agree that gender is a key issue: all genders can be victims of violence, but men are overwhelmingly the people who use violence. This is underpinned in part by the way gender itself is constructed; creating a set of stereotypical expectations that men are expected to live up to. While the connection between violence and this set of masculine ideals is clear, we retain a curiosity about a range of other factors that contribute beyond the construction of gender, and continue to examine and welcome evidence about them.

Jesuit Social Services' contribution to this Review highlights men's behaviour, beliefs and perpetration pathways as requiring more attention if we are to address the unacceptably high rates of violence against women perpetrated by men. We argue that a better understanding of perpetration is required in order to inform effective interventions that are appropriately designed, targeted and tailored to cohorts and communities where they can have the greatest impact. We also emphasise the preventative value of working with men and boys who are already displaying violent attitudes and behaviours. While by no means deterministic, they have often been victims of violence themselves (which of course does not excuse the use of violence) – and this cycle breaking work is critical.

As outlined in Change the Story, Australia's shared framework for the prevention of violence against women and their children, specific expressions of gender inequality consistently predict higher rates of violence against women. This includes the 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. Reinforcing factors such as personal experience of violence, exposure to violence, alcohol abuse, and socio-economic inequality and discrimination can increase the frequency and severity of violence.[1]

The best available evidence, including our own Man Box research, highlights the link between attitudes relating to aggression and control and the perpetration of violence. Yet as Jess Hill highlights, while "men are powerful as a group (and are often told they are entitled to power), they do not necessarily feel powerful as individuals."[2] Research demonstrates that when Man Box norms are threatened, the response can be dire.[3] Consider one part of the Man Box – that "men should be the breadwinner". An

[1] Our Watch (2024). Change the story and key frameworks. (Weblink)

Australian National University study found that when this norm is violated – i.e. women earn more than their male partner – the likelihood of men's violence and emotional abuse against their partner increases.[4] Importantly, there is also other evidence which suggests that greater economic equality can lead to more gender equal relationships.[5] However, in the face of threats to the male breadwinner norm, rather than work through why this feels personally challenging, some men will choose to denigrate and degrade their female partner to assert superiority.

The influence and reach of high-profile "alpha male" online personalities suggests a searching among young men for a sense of identity, connection and belonging, however destructive the dynamics. Men's conformity to the Man Box can be reinforced through perceived benefits of a spot in the alpha male "in-group" in return for endorsing a mix of misogyny, homophobia and classism. In some contexts, stepping outside the Man Box can result in immediate sanction – "don't be a girl"; "what are you, a pussy?". This system of rewards and punishments underpins how these stereotypical ideas about what it means to be a man are sustained.

A central line of inquiry in violence prevention work, therefore, should be why some men hold the attitudes they do, why they don't feel empowered and secure, and how these relate to the perpetration of violence. Why is the sense of self for so many men embedded in entitlement, privilege and domination over others, especially women?

Importantly, gendered drivers of violence don't operate in isolation. Efforts to address violent actions by boys and men will be strengthened if we take into account the broader contemporary forces that work against valuing the dignity of each person and support the degradation of women. This includes the ways in which these forces influence and intersect with how the problem of gender-based violence is played out. They include the alcohol industry, violent pornography, the pervasive impacts of gambling, and a range of ways that the degradation of women is given expression across the community, such as through media and social media. In the Australian context, these "reinforcing factors" and the underlying power structures that enable their negative impact merit greater and sustained attention as they relate to violence prevention.

These factors intersect with gender in a range of ways. For instance, men are much more likely to binge drink[6] and engage in problem gambling.[7] In some spheres, male dominance is the norm – consider any recent analysis of pornography, or the stories of off-field misbehaviour by our male "heroes" across sporting codes. We know there are institutions, communities and parts of our society which continue to support, condone or excuse violence against women through their attitudes, social norms, structures and practices.

We also recognise that specific forms of gender inequality and reinforcing factors intersect in complex ways for different groups, including for particular cultural groups. For some groups, these intersecting factors may be further complicated by trauma and entrenched social or political discrimination. For First Nations communities, there are unique intersections between contemporary forces which influence gender inequality and the ongoing impacts of colonisation and dispossession.

Mindful of the complex nature of violence and the factors that underpin it, those of us involved in this work – whether as practitioners, researchers, commentators, funders or policy makers – should be explicit about our approach, humble in our opinions, and committed to a learning mindset. As our paper argues, there are areas requiring deeper understanding and much greater focus if we are to make the rapid gains needed in preventing violence against women and children.

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[2] Hill, J. (2020). See what you made me do: Power, control and domestic abuse. Oxford University Press.
[3] Gehhard, K. T. et al (2018) Threatened-Masculinity Shame-Related Responses Among Straight Men: Measurement and Relationship to Aggression. Psychology of Men & Masculinity 20(3), September do10.1037/men0000177
[4] Zhang, Y. & Breunig, R. (2021) Gender norms and domestic abuse: Evidence from Australia. Tax and Transfer Policy Institution Working Paper 5, Australian National University Canberra, March.
[5] Kaukinen CE, Powers RA. The role of economic factors on women's risk for intimate partner violence: a cross-national comparison of Canada and the United States. Violence Against Women. 2015 Feb;21(2):229-48. doi: 10.1177/1077801214564686. Epub 2014 Dec 24. PMID: 25540258.
[6] Australian Bureau of Statistics (2023). Latest Release: Alcohol Consumption. (Weblink)
[7] Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2023). Gambling in Australia. (Weblink)
[8] See https://itstimewetalked.com/resources/articles-and-media/
[9] Our Watch (2024). Change the story and key frameworks. (Weblink)

The Man Box

Our Man Box 2018 study on being a young man in Australia was the first comprehensive study that focused on attitudes to manhood and the behaviours of young Australian men aged 18 to 30. The findings shed a new light on the social pressures that young Australian men experience to be a "real man", and the impact this can have on their wellbeing, behaviours and the safety of our wider community.[10]

We undertook a survey of 1,000 randomly selected young Australian men focusing on men's attitudes and behaviours in relation to a set of questions about gender. To do this work we used an analytical tool, the "Man Box", to understand the impact of strongly endorsing stereotypical ideas of masculinity. The Man Box attitudes are a set of stereotypical beliefs within society that place pressure on men to act in a certain way. The attitudes fall under seven pillars including self-sufficiency, acting tough, physical attractiveness, rigid masculine gender roles, hyper sexuality, heterosexuality and homophobia, and aggression and control.

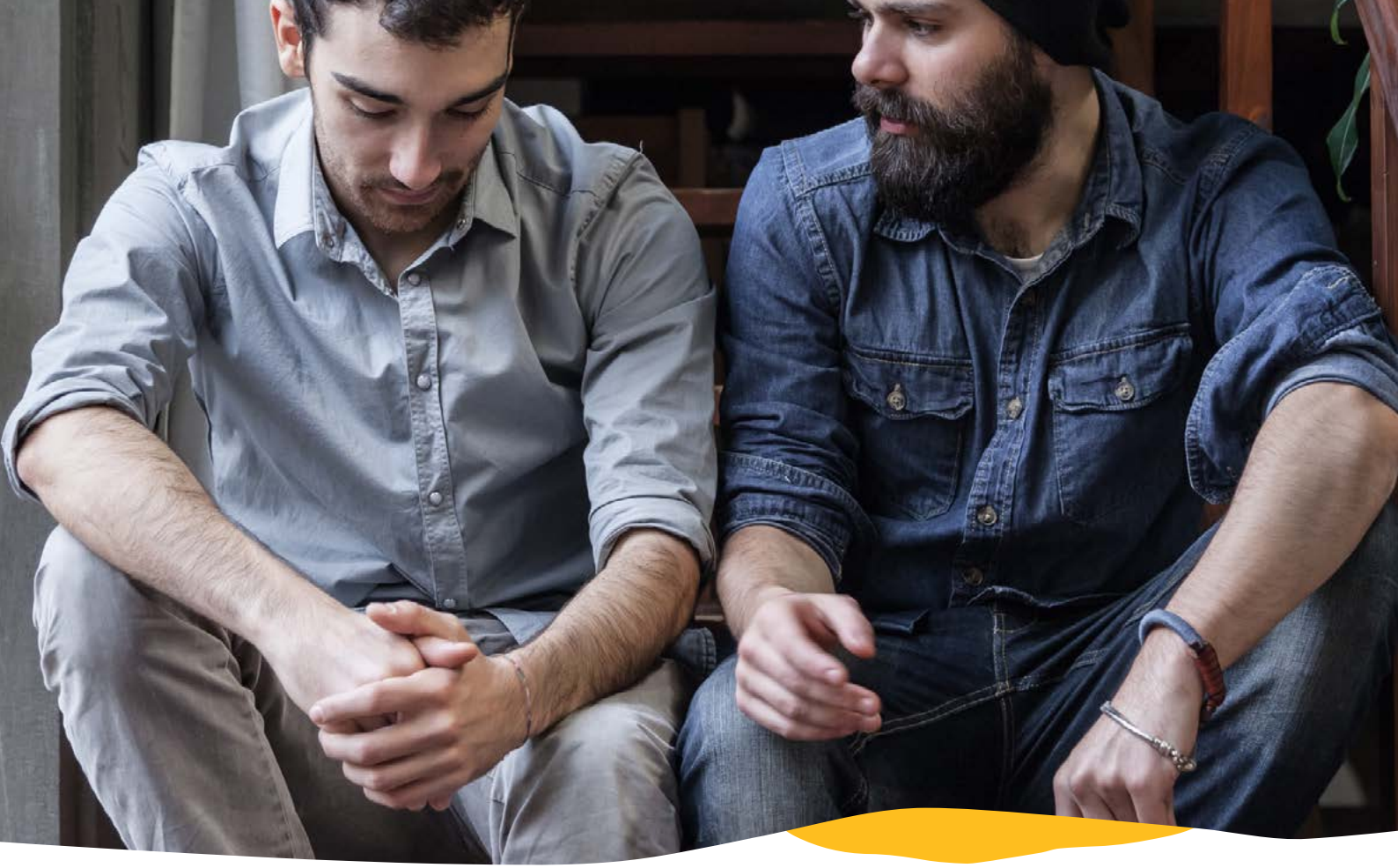
We found that the endorsement of masculine norms strongly correlated with a range of adverse outcomes and harmful attitudes and behaviours. Specifically, men who held such beliefs were 20 times more likely to self-report sexually harassing a woman, 14 times more likely to self-report the use of physical violence, and over twice as likely to experience suicidal thoughts.[11] For instance, with regards to suicidal thoughts, of those with the highest Man Box score (top 20 per cent) almost two-thirds self-reported having suicidal thoughts in the last two weeks compared to 27 per cent with the lowest Man Box score.

A further report, Unpacking the Man Box, built on these initial findings by understanding, through regression analysis, the unique contribution of the Man Box and its pillars to the wellbeing of young men. It found that conforming to Man Box norms had a stronger impact than demographic variables (education levels, where someone lives, or their cultural heritage) on predicting harmful outcomes, attitudes or behaviours.[12] Specifically, outdated attitudes related to gender were 25 times more likely to predict the use of physical violence, sexual harassment, verbal and cyber bullying.[13]

Our Man Box 2024 study, undertaken in partnership with Respect Victoria, sought to update the findings of previous reports and to explore the impact of a prescribed set of masculine gender norms (the "Man Box") on men's attitudes and behaviours. The study found that living up to the pressures of being a "real man" causes harm to young men and those around them, particularly women. For example, the men who most strongly agreed with the Man Box rules were:

- 31 times more likely to believe domestic violence should be handled privately
- 17 times more likely to have hit their partner
- nine times more likely to blame a woman for making a man hit her
- eight times more likely to have thoughts of suicide nearly every day
- six times more likely to have forced a partner to do something sexual that is degrading or humiliating
- six times more likely to exhibit signs of problem gambling (in fact, more than half of the men who most strongly agreed with Man Box rules met the criteria for problem gambling)
- twice as likely to binge drink.[14]

[10] The Men's Project & Flood, M, (2018). The Man Box: A Study on Being a Young Man in Australia. Jesuit Social Services: Melbourne. (Weblink)
[11] ibid, p.8
[12] The Men's Project & Flood, M. (2020). Unpacking the Man Box: What is the impact of the Man Box attitudes on young Australian men's behaviours and wellbeing? Jesuit Social Services: Melbourne. (Weblink)
[13] ibid, p.6
[14] The Men's Project & Flood, M. (2024). The Man Box 2024: Re-examining what it means to be a man in Australia. Melbourne: Jesuit Social Services. Pp. 58-108. (Weblink)



1. Understanding of the prevalence of violence against women and children

The rate of gender-based homicides across Australia has been rightly acknowledged as a national crisis. In 2022-23, 16 per cent of the 232 homicide incidents in Australia were intimate partner homicides and of these, 89 per cent were perpetrated against a female victim aged 18 years or over.[15] However, men's violence against women and children is far more pervasive when we consider violence that isn't lethal or homicidal.

Our Man Box 2024 study explored the association between adherence to traditional masculine norms and intimate partner violence, and the prevalence of specific forms of violence. In the study, 3,500 survey respondents were asked whether they had ever committed any of eight forms of sexual or physical violence against a current or former intimate partner (for example, kicking, dragging or beating up). Almost a third of men (28 per cent) reported that they had perpetrated at least one of the eight forms.[16] These results are likely to be under-reported due to the response options being 'yes', 'no' and 'prefer not to say'. They are consistent with victimisation rates reported in the 2021–22 Australian Personal Safety Survey, which found that 27 per cent of women in Australia had experienced physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner or family member since the age of 15.[17]

[15] Miles, H., & Bricknell., S, (2024). AIC Reports: Statistical Report 46. Homicide in Australia 2022-23. Australia Government: Australian Institute of Criminology. (Weblink)
[16] The Men's Project & Flood, M. (2024). Pp. 60-65. (Weblink)
[17] Australian Bureau of Statistics (2023). Personal Safety, Australia: financial year 2021-2022. (Weblink)

The most common form of intimate violence that Man Box respondents reported perpetrating was "pushed or shoved a partner" (11 per cent of respondents), followed by "had sexual intercourse with a partner when they were afraid of what you might do" (10 per cent) and "forced a partner to do something sexual that is degrading or humiliating" (10 per cent).[18] It is important to consider that these rates would likely be higher if they included other forms of violence and abuse, including emotional abuse, psychological abuse, financial abuse, and coercive control.

Further, a 2024 report by the Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) examined the prevalence of sexual violence perpetration in a community sample among young adults. Based on a survey of more than 5,000 Australians aged 18 to 45, it found almost a quarter of respondents (22.1 per cent) had perpetrated sexual violence since turning 18, while one in 14 had perpetrated sexual violence in the past 12 months.[19]

These shockingly high figures suggest the need for much more research into the dynamics of perpetration. Over the past decade we have learned more about modes of abuse, types of violence, and about the social context in which violence against women occurs. Yet we know too little about the men who perpetrate abuse and what motivates them; about the gradient and severity of violence; and about where violent tendencies have their roots. What proportion of the 28 per cent of younger men reporting intimate partner violence perpetration will go on to commit violence that is fatal, or potentially fatal? What can we learn from the many children who have witnessed or experienced violence as children and have not used violence as adults? An understanding of the real nature and prevalence of violence is needed to inform practical interventions that actually work.[20]

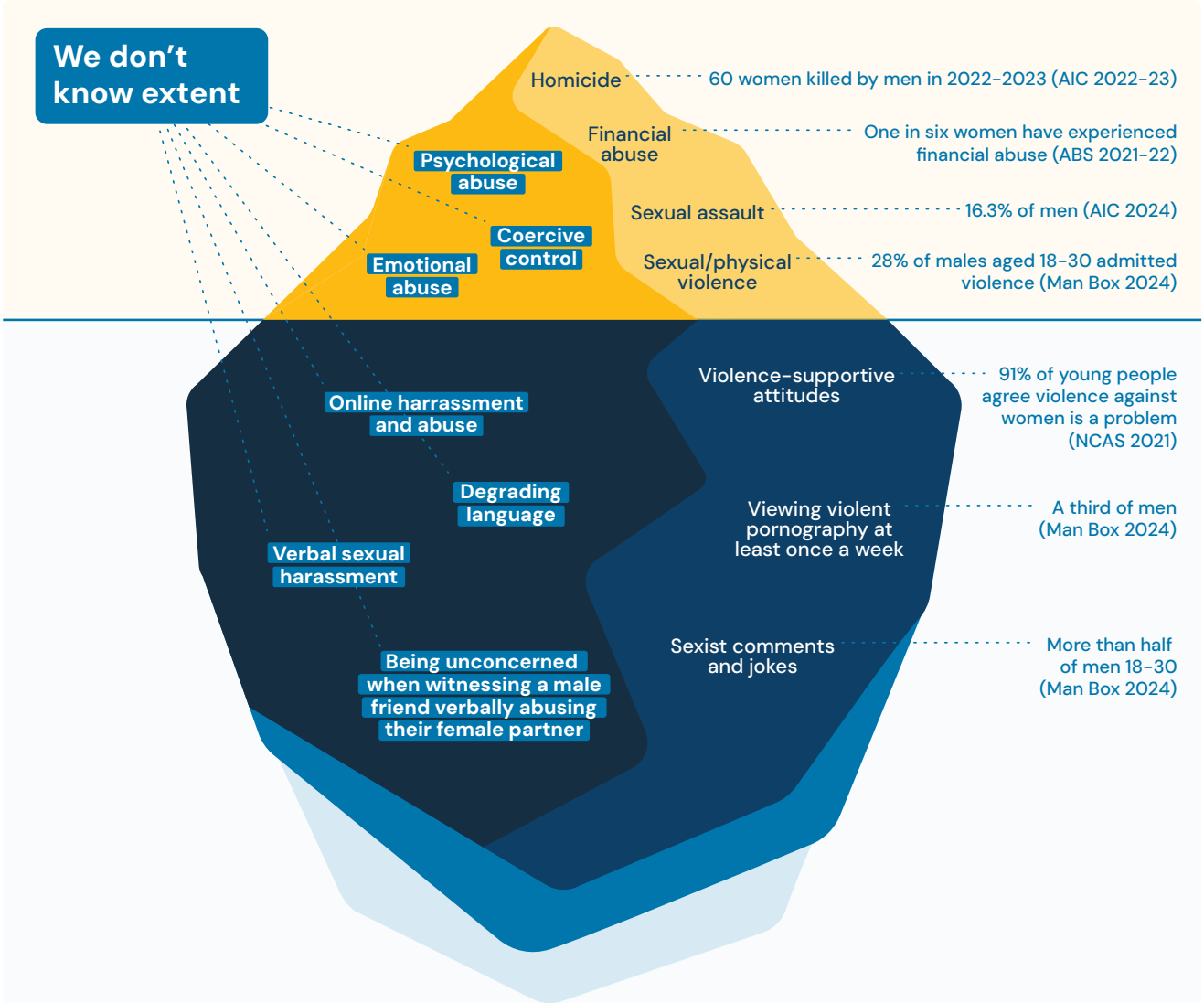
Figure 1 highlights that, despite a recent increase in efforts to understand the perpetration of violence against women and children, significant gaps remain in our understanding of gradients and pathways. We have data on the number of women killed by men each year in Australia; and we know from our own Man Box research that almost a third of males aged 18-30 have perpetrated some form of physical or sexual violence against a current or former intimate partner.

However, findings from our Man Box research do not provide holistic prevalence data including the frequency and severity of violence being used. We don't know the extent of sexist comments and jokes, or of degrading language or bullying – insights that could prove valuable given the assumption that specific forms of violence are not isolated or siloed. We need to mature our understanding of the relationship between forms of violence – for example, to what extent and in what circumstances does violence escalate? For instance, what is the relationship between participation in harmful cultures of masculinity, or use of sexist jokes and language, and behaviour that is widely recognised as violent?

While the Review's focus on homicides is understandable, we believe it risks pushing the national focus towards a set of solutions that is justice-led and far too narrow. It also risks missing an array of opportunities to intervene earlier.

[18] The Men's Project & Flood (2024), pp. 62-65
[19] Doherty., L. & Dowling., C. (2024). Statistical Bulletin 45: Perpetration of sexual violence in a community sample of adult Australians. Australian Government: Australian Institute of Criminology. P. 15. (Weblink)
[20] Flood, M., Brown, C., Dembele, L., and Mills, K. (2022). Who uses domestic, family, and sexual violence, how, and why? The State of Knowledge Report on Violence Perpetration. Brisbane: Queensland University of Technology. (Weblink)

Figure 1: Despite a recent increase in efforts to understand the perpetration of violence against women and children, significant gaps remain



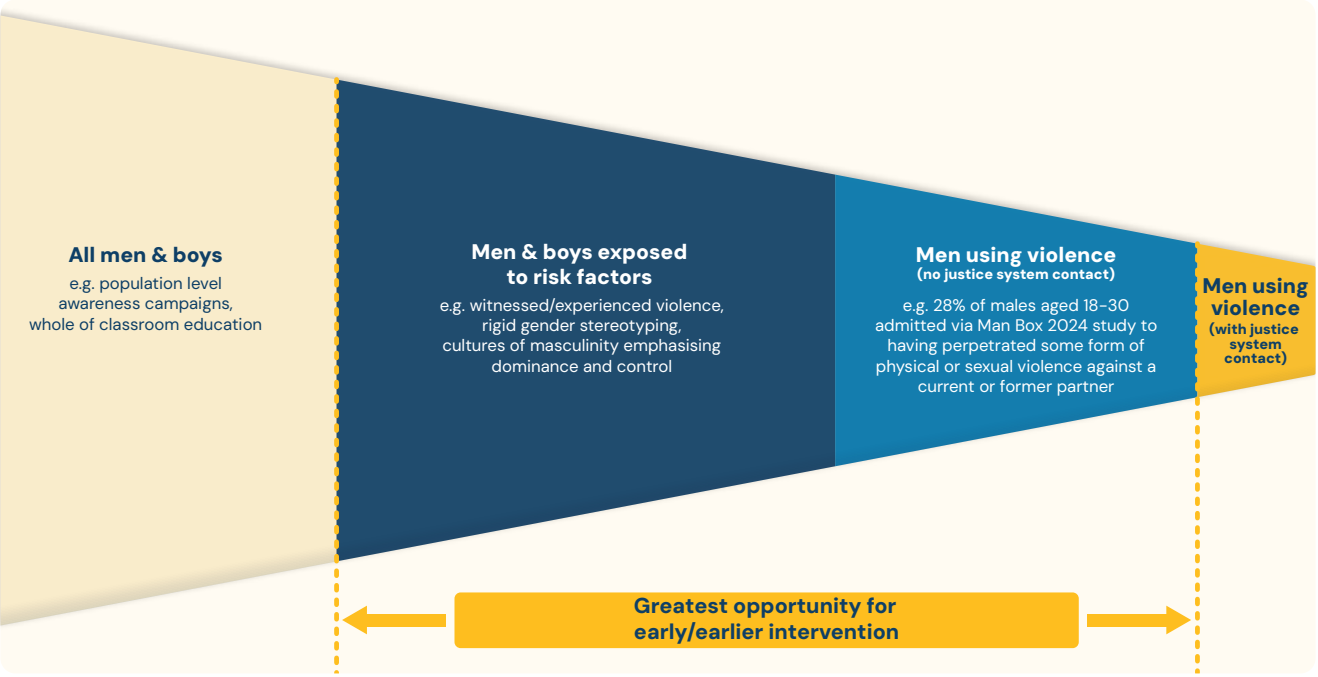
Recommendation 1:

We recommend investment in the collection of more and better data on the extent of perpetration as well as its dynamics and drivers. This requires further research into factors that increase the risk and severity of perpetration; factors which protect against it; and pathways and supports that address it. This should also include a focus on developing an understanding of the experiences of different population groups, places and settings. The data should be used to inform our prevention and early intervention efforts and investment.

2. Opportunities for early intervention, informed by an understanding of pathways to perpetration

Identifying opportunities for early intervention

Figure 2: There are significant opportunities to better target early intervention



The diagram above highlights the inadequacy of a heavy focus on justice system responses in addressing violence against women and children. For example, data from Victoria on the progress of family violence incidents through the justice system helps to demonstrate this limitation. In 2022-23 there were 69,263 family violence incidents (male respondents) recorded by police (41,182 unique respondents) and 13,7734 Family Violence Intervention Orders. 19,782 respondents were charged, and 8,826 charges were proven. Only 2,706 cases progressed to custody (and another 1,478 to community supervision).[21] This is a stark figure relative to what we understand about broader prevalence (e.g. 28 per cent of males aged 18-30 via our Man Box 2024 survey admitting to perpetrating at least one or more forms of violence). There is a range of reasons for such a small number of cases progressing to custody, including the limited trust that victim-survivors have in the justice system, which results in significant under-reporting. We therefore caution the limitations of relying on justice system responses vis-à-vis an exploration of early intervention opportunities informed by pathways to perpetration and gradients of violence.

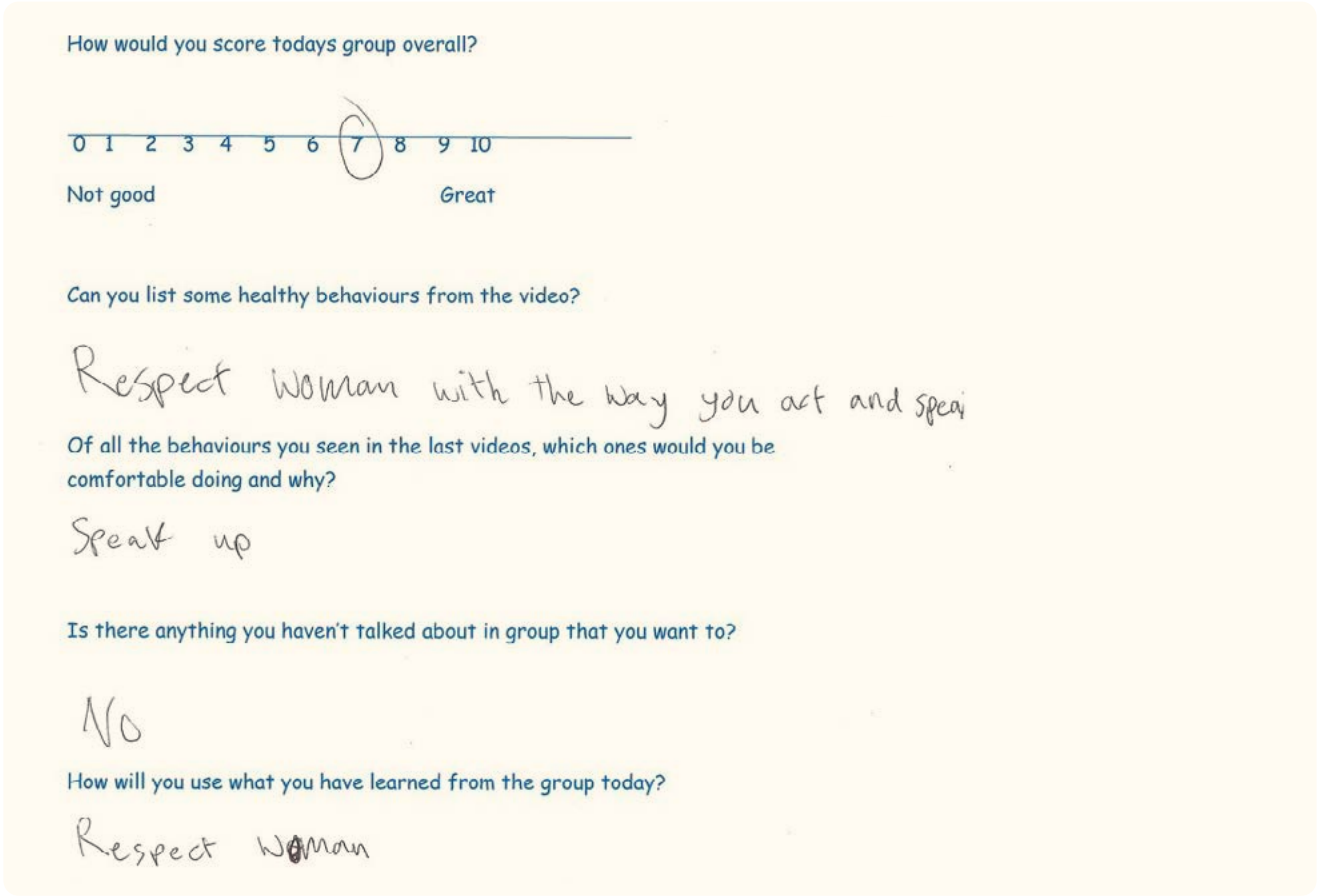
[21] Crime Statistics Agency (2023). Family Violence Dashboard, Victoria (Weblink)

Figure 2 also depicts the disconnect between the prevalence of perpetration of violence against women and children and our greatest areas of focus in addressing it. Significant, albeit still insufficient, funding in Australia is directed towards broad-based primary prevention initiatives. This is outstripped by enormous costs associated with the relatively small number of people who use violence who have contact with police and the courts, or who progress to charges and custody. We need better ways to target those men using violence who haven't come to the attention of police, and those who may not be perpetrating violence but who are using sexist language, making online threats of violence, or being swept into the influence of the "manosphere". We have a limited understanding of this group of men and boys – who and where they are – but a greater understanding could better identify cohorts and settings where early intervention work could be most effective.

At-Risk Youth Program

The At-Risk Youth Program (ARYP) is an early intervention pilot designed by The Men's Project to reduce the use of violence. It draws on a number of rigorously evaluated programs in other jurisdictions. The program targets at-risk young people aged 12-25 who are showing early signs of violence or are exposed to risk factors that make them more likely to use violence. Program content includes emotional literacy and regulation, non-violent problem solving, gender roles and inequality, healthy relationships, and bystander intervention. We also engage with staff who work with young people every day including highlighting the links between behaviour and attachment style. With support from the Victorian Government, the pilot is being delivered and evaluated between 2023 and 2026 across a range of settings, including flexible learning schools, sporting clubs and other recreational settings.

Figure 3: Feedback from At-Risk Youth Program participant


How would you score todays group overall?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Not good Great

Can you list some healthy behaviours from the video?

Respect Woman with the way you act and speak

Of all the behaviours you seen in the last videos, which ones would you be comfortable doing and why?

Speak up

Is there anything you haven't talked about in group that you want to?

No

How will you use what you have learned from the group today?

Respect Woman

The Men's Project's work with at-risk young people (see detail on At-Risk Youth Program) is designed for 12- to 25-year-olds showing early signs of violence or who are exposed to risk factors that make them more likely to use violence. Currently, we target this work by applying it in settings where these boys and young men are more likely to be, such as in flexible learning centres and sporting clubs in lower socio-economic locations – although this approach is highly imperfect. We believe there are significant opportunities to better target early intervention work through strengthened collection and application of data on where harm happens (including the contexts) and the risks young people face in communities where violence is used to solve problems. This research and data should inform more and better targeting of adolescents who are at risk; and exploration of place-based approaches.

Data on perpetration of violence

In Victoria, we welcome the development of the Family Violence Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management framework (MARAM) practice guidelines for Working with Adult People Using Violence. The guidelines have been tailored for "identification" – professionals addressing the universal needs of service users who may be in a position to identify or screen for family violence; and "intermediate" – professionals whose role is associated with family violence risk but not focussed on this risk alone. More recently, "comprehensive" guidance and tools were released for specialist services working with adult people using violence, including The Men's Referral Service and The Orange Door.[22]

Statewide implementation of behaviour assessment tools by specialist violence services could generate a valuable dataset on perpetration. The dataset and associated insights and evidence should be made available (i.e. regularly analysed, evaluated and released) to inform prevention, early intervention and response efforts. Importantly, the work of services using the MARAM comprehensive guidance and tools includes a focus on child wellbeing. This means the data generated could provide insights into men who have not been in contact with police or broader justice system i.e. who may have been the subject of a child protection report, Child FIRST or a self-referral. The unique insights gained could fill critical gaps in our understanding of perpetration. The behaviour assessments could also support identification of opportunities for early intervention across individuals or target cohorts (such as new fathers/dads).

Targeting victims of violence/adolescents who have used violence in the home

RESTORE

RESTORE was piloted based in the Melbourne's Children's Court between September 2018 and November 2022 and trialled restorative approaches to working with young people who had perpetrated family violence. It offered a Family Group Conference to help the young person and their family develop practical solutions to keep people safe and prevent further violence occurring at home after an intervention order (IVO) has been lodged. The RESTORE program responded directly to Victoria's 2016 Royal Commission into Family Violence, which recommended:

> *The Victorian Government trial and evaluate a model of linking Youth Justice Group Conferencing with an Adolescent Family Violence Program to provide an individual and family therapeutic intervention for young people who are using violence in the home and are at risk of entering the youth justice system.*[23]

In 2018, Jesuit Social Services commenced RESTORE as one of two new pilot projects trialling restorative approaches to working with young people who perpetrate family violence. It was developed in response to an identified absence of interventions for adolescents who use violence in the Family Division of the Children's Court. RESTORE intervenes at a later point in the cycle of violence – that is, after an IVO has been lodged in the Family Division of the Children's Court.

By engaging the family in a restorative conferencing intervention at this point, RESTORE aimed to reduce the risk of the young person being criminalised for breaching their IVO. The program sought to address the ensuing harm caused by the violence and prevent future harm from occurring.

The RESTORE program was initially funded by philanthropy, initially by John T. Reid Charitable Trusts and later by the Lord Mayor's Charitable Trust. The University of Melbourne conducted an evaluation of the RESTORE program in 2023. The evaluation found that RESTORE filled a significant service gap and provided a way to rebuild relationships, skills, strategies, and a sense of hope. Noting the program had been funded using philanthropic sources to date, the evaluation recommended continued investment in options for families experiencing adolescent family violence, including early intervention options. It also asserted that, given the positive outcomes reported by families who participated in RESTORE, there was merit in continuing funding for RESTORE to be able to further test its integrated therapeutic intervention in matters of serious harm associated with adolescent family violence.

Jesuit Social Services has been working with men and boys for nearly five decades, including people who have committed serious violent and sex offences. Too often, these same men and boys have been victims of violence and child sexual abuse. The Australian Child Maltreatment Study found that two in five Australian children have experienced exposure to domestic violence between a parent/caregiver and their partner, with 32 per cent of these reporting more than 50 incidents.[24] As many victim-survivors have pointed out, services and systems must engage with these children as victim-survivors of violence in their own right.

Research shows that adolescents who use violence at home – in many cases against their mother or a sibling – are more likely to have been victims of violence. These young people are significantly more likely to go on to use intimate

[23] Victorian Government (2017) Royal Commission into Family Violence recommendations. Rec 128. (Weblink)
[24] Haslam. D., Mathews. B., Pacella. R., Scott. J.G., Finkelhor. D., Higgins. D.J., Meinck. F., Erskine. H.E., Thomas. H.J., Lawrence. D., & Malacova. E. (2023). The prevalence and impact of child maltreatment in Australia: Findings from the Australian Child Maltreatment Study: Brief Report. Australian Child Maltreatment Study, Queensland University of Technology. P. 3. DOI: http://doi.org/10.5204/rep.eprints.239397

partner violence against an adult.[25] To be clear, childhood trauma does not inevitably lead to subsequent offending, nor are we excusing the use of violence. Yet failing to acknowledge the links between victimisation and perpetration means we are missing crucial opportunities to intervene earlier.

There is a lack of at-scale therapeutic responses, limited government funding for restorative family-based approaches, and few options available to police when responding to an incident and in the days that follow. There's also significant variation in practice models even across different regions of Melbourne, with expectations of caseloads that do not adequately reflect the complexity of the presenting needs. This is despite six recommendations in the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence explicitly focusing on adolescent family violence, and The National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032 committing to "address adolescent violence in family settings".[26]

There is an opportunity for the federal government to explore the potential of outcomes-based (and flexible) funding models to achieve better outcomes for adolescents using violence at home. Putting aside the tremendous human toll of adolescents using violence, there are significant associated costs which include the justice system, health system, housing and homelessness, and child protection. Given these young people are also more likely to use violence as adults, the case for early intervention is strong with the explicit goal of healing and recovery as well as decreasing subsequent perpetration. Rather than prescribe program models that are inadequately resourced in light of the needs of these young people, we call on the federal government to seek the views of organisations engaging with these young people in relation to the work required to have a long-term impact on violence prevention. Results (and avoided costs) would be rigorously tracked as part of determining outcome payments.

Place-based approaches

As discussed earlier, data and knowledge on gender-based violence perpetration in Australia is limited and disparate, with little known about the extent to which perpetration varies by geographic location. However, there is reason to believe disadvantage has an impact on both the perpetration and experience of violence in Australia.

For more than 20 years, Jesuit Social Services has produced research that examines complex disadvantage in communities around Australia, releasing a series of reports known more recently as Dropping off the Edge (DOTE). Our 2021 report again demonstrated the deep, complex and persistent nature of disadvantage including how various forms of disadvantage overlap and how this multilayered disadvantage becomes difficult to escape. Risk factors for family violence – both perpetration and victimisation – include insecure and unsafe housing, limited financial resources, lack of access to services, and alcohol use. The DOTE research clearly shows these factors often overlap within highly disadvantaged areas.[27]

Findings from DOTE suggest significant correlations between the number of family violence intervention orders (FVIOs) issued in particular Victorian communities and other indicators of local disadvantage. Of particular interest is the association between FVIO rates and rates of substantiated child maltreatment, non-working parents, and young people not in employment, education and training. This suggests there may be direct and indirect pathways between a range of adverse childhood experiences and family violence.

[25] Boxall H, Pooley K & Lawler S 2021. Do violent teens become violent adults? Links between juvenile and adult domestic and family violence. Trends & issues in crime and criminal justice no. 641. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology. (Weblink)
[26] Australian Government (2022). The National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032. Department of Social Services. P. 83. (Weblink)disadvantage in Australia, Jesuit Social Services: Melbourne. (Weblink)
[27] Tanton, R., Dare, L., Miranti, R., Vidyattama, Y., Yule, A. and McCabe, M. (2021). Dropping Off the Edge 2021: Persistent and multilayered disadvantage in Australia, Jesuit Social Services: Melbourne. (Weblink)

This analysis has important caveats. For example, the family violence indicator in DOTE research only represents cases that resulted in orders, and we know family violence cases are vastly underreported. However, it suggests that work to better understand what underpins potential variations in family violence in locations with particular risk indicators warrants further exploration. Place-based or targeted approaches can be tailored to particular population groups that need greater focus and resourcing. They also have the opportunity to harness the knowledge and expertise of those most affected, to connect with those most at risk, and implement effective strategies for change.

We welcome the trialling of a "saturation model" in Ballarat, Victoria, partly in response to a series of horrific violent crimes against women in that community. The model will support both new and existing programs and activities to "saturate" Ballarat with initiatives that seek to change the attitudes and behaviours that drive violence.

The model is targeting a range of settings including workplaces and businesses, schools and higher education spaces, community spaces, and health services. It is also testing and trialling innovations, including in the online space, recognising the role and influence of digital environments including social media.[28] If rigorously evaluated, the model presents significant opportunities for learning.

There is much more that needs to be researched and understood to build a picture of the demand for prevention, and how it should be targeted. Frontline staff working with people who use violence, for example, have often developed a unique understanding of the severity and complexity of coercive control and sexual violence and, alongside the insights of victim-survivors, this can also help build our understanding. This understanding needs then to be reflected in efforts to build workforce capacity including equipping people who work with and have influence in the lives of men.

Recommendation 2:

We recommend governments closely consider opportunities to intervene early to prevent violence against women and children, including through:

- use of emerging data sets, such as those that will be generated by the use of MARAM Working with Adult People Using Violence behaviour assessment tools in Victoria, to guide decisions about where to concentrate specific early intervention efforts
- better investment in targeted early intervention programs enabled by outcomes-based funding for adolescents who are at risk, including those who are victims of violence and those who have used violence in the home
- exploring place-based approaches – this should involve the examination of existing place-based research (such as Dropping Off the Edge) and evaluating place-based approaches to prevention of violence (such as Victoria's Ballarat "saturation model").

[28] Allen, J. M.P. (2024). World-Leading Action In Ballarat To Prevent Family Violence. Media Release. Victorian Government, Premier of Victoria. (Weblink)

3. Improve the articulation, documentation and co-ordination of practice approaches

Across the community, a wide spectrum of measures to address violence is required – from primary prevention to early intervention, having an effective system to manage risk and ensure perpetrator accountability, delivering crisis interventions, and offering ongoing support to individuals, families and communities to recover and flourish. Yet these efforts tend to be disconnected or piecemeal. Further, the language used to describe prevention interventions relating to masculinities and identities, and work with men and boys, is at times vague, with limited clarity regarding the practice approach. There is a risk that practitioners fall back on a sense that "we know what to do".

Writer Jess Hill and Professor Michael Salter have conceptualised Australia's violence prevention approach as a universal "gender equality approach" and argued that it has failed to reduce or prevent violence and achieved only marginal improvements to community attitudes over a decade.[29] Other commentators, such as Professor Michael Flood, have critiqued this argument as misrepresenting primary prevention in Australia, arguing that the approach is yet to be fully tried.[30] As these debates play out in the public sphere, there is a risk that misunderstandings about the work taking place in practice occur.

We believe organisations working at the frontline of prevention and early intervention have more work to do to articulate, document and continue to test our practice approaches. Jesuit Social Services has been working to move past generic phrases like "healthy masculinities" and "engaging men and boys" and instead be specific about exactly what different programs in different settings are seeking to achieve. Theories of change and associated practice approaches need to be documented and shared to stimulate discussion about what is needed to strengthen claims that link practice approaches to specific outcomes.

It's not enough to say that this work is about "meeting men and boys where they are at". This may be part of what is needed to facilitate engagement, but it says nothing about how that engagement is being used to prevent violence. Documenting practice approaches will enable exploration of fundamental questions such as: are (and should) programs be seeking to change attitudes akin to Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, or instead are programs seeking to decrease attachment to attitudes that underpin the use of violence (including stereotypical constructions of masculinities and identities), akin to Acceptance and Commitment Therapy? This question has been spurred, in part, by recent research which finds links between threatened-masculinity shame (when men fail to live up to masculine gender role expectations) and physical aggression.[31] We need a greater understanding of what we know and what we don't know, instilling a rigorous curiosity about practice approaches.

[29] Hill. J., & Salter. M. (2024). Rethinking Primary Prevention: A collaboration between Professor Michael Salter (UNSW) and Jess Hill. Position Paper. (Weblink)
[30] For example, Flood, M. (2024) Rethinking Primary Prevention – Comments by Michael Flood [White paper] (Weblink)
[31] Gehhard, K. T. et al (2018) Threatened-Masculinity Shame-Related Responses Among Straight Men: Measurement and Relationship to Aggression. Psychology of Men & Masculinity 20(3), September do10.1037/men0000177

We have proposed four practice directions which form part of The Men's Project's approach to violence prevention, noting this approach continues to evolve. Our programs aren't delivered in one-off workshops; rather, they require a holistic approach and ongoing engagement with people who can positively influence men and boys every day (e.g. teachers, social workers, sports coaches), as well as attention to structural inequalities which are often the result of, and reflected in, institutional and societal systems, policies and processes. Our approach has been informed by a range of partnerships including with Women's Health Services across Victoria.

1. Through engaging groups and communities in discussion, we must seek to increase the understanding of, and facilitate reflection on, the harms associated with stereotypical masculine norms. These conversations must be grounded in place-based knowledge, with a relational and non-judgmental approach being at the core of engagement. This should include an emphasis on power and control with a focus on challenging beliefs that often underpin the use of violence. We remain curious about whether attitudes can be changed or whether instead the focus here should be on decreasing attachment to attitudes and promoting psychological flexibility.
2. We need to support men and boys to be able to step away from stereotypical masculine norms by highlighting alternatives and challenging the felt pressure to conform. Work is needed to support boys and men to better perceive the gap between what they think society believes and what their peers in fact believe. The Man Box findings add to research that suggests men overestimate other men's sexist and violence-supportive attitudes while also understating men's willingness to intervene to prevent sexual assault.[32] Unsurprisingly, men who subscribe to Man Box attitudes are less likely to call out a sexist comment due to fears related to belonging.[33] We need to teach skills and create cultures that equip men and boys to intervene. While not all men are violent, all men have a role in preventing violence.
3. Demonstrating and promoting positive alternatives in the home, workplace, community and education settings is crucial. Professor Michael Flood from the Queensland University of Technology offers some helpful principles: healthier masculinities (or identities) are gender equitable, diverse, not unique to men and boys, and healthy for men and boys themselves.[34] There are so many influencers across our community – parents, teachers, social workers, supervisors – who can role model every day in big and small ways. Providing these influencers with the skills or support to encourage healthier attitudes and moving away from the Man Box is essential in making population wide change.
4. Men and boys need skills that enable a deeper connection with themselves and others. This includes building emotional literacy, self-regulation, identifying unhealthy behaviours and resolving conflict without the use of violence. Engaging men and boys from across our communities, and providing them with practical and applicable skills, can help them to better navigate the world and become positive influencers for their community, workplace or relationship culture.

We suggest the need for a "stocktake" of the work taking place to prevent violence. This should include consideration of evidence where it exists, and promotion of more specific discussions regarding the merits of various practice approaches and language.

Table 1 provides a high-level example comparison of a small sample of The Men's Project work focused on supporting young people. Our programs span settings from primary and secondary schools to social and community organisations, construction and trades, sports, higher education and more.

[32] Laker, J. A., & Davis, T. (2011). Masculinities in higher education: Theoretical and Practical Considerations. New York: Routledge.
[33] DiMuccio, S., Sattari, N., Shaffer, E., & Cline, J. (2021). Masculine anxiety and interrupting sexism at work. Catalyst. (Weblink)
[34] The Men's Project & Flood (2018), p. 53

Table 1: Comparison of The Men's Project work across different audiences

Setting	Audience	Practice model	Desired outcomes for participants	Related research & frameworks	Evaluation evidence
Secondary schools (mainstream)	Staff	Unpacking the Man Box Workshop Series	Understanding of the links between Man Box pillars and harmful attitudes and behaviours. Confidence to challenge Man Box attitudes and behaviours.	Practice wisdom, Theory of planned behaviour, The Man Box research, The Adolescent Man Box research, Berry Street Trauma Informed Practice, Transtheoretical Stages of Change model	Process learnings Independent process evaluation
Secondary schools (mainstream)	Students	Unpacking the Man Box workshop	Understanding of the types of pressures that people feel in relation to gendered expectations. Understanding of the impact that gendered pressures can have on individuals. Knowledge of the ways they can support people to step outside the Man Box.	Practice wisdom, Theory of planned behaviour, The Man Box research, The Adolescent Man Box research, Berry Street Trauma Informed Practice	Process learnings Post-survey
Secondary schools (mainstream)	Students	Critical media literacy workshops	Awareness of how media depicts men and women. Understanding of how media can influence us. Understanding of the impact of watching sexual media.	Practice wisdom, It's Time We Talked Project, Maree Crabb & Michael Flood: School-based education to address pornography's influence – A proposed practice framework, The Man Box research, Adolescent Man Box research	Process learnings Post-survey
Secondary schools (mainstream)	Teachers implementing the Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships curriculum	Modelling Respect and Equality	Confidence to challenge limiting and harmful stereotypes and promote respect and equality towards women. Greater awareness of masculine norms and their impact. Knowledge about how to model and promote positive change, and recognise and challenge problematic attitudes and behaviours. Confidence to make change using the whole of school approach.	Practice wisdom, Theory of planned behaviour, The Man Box research, SASA! Raising Voices Project, Transtheoretical Stages of Change model	Independent evaluation Process learnings, pre-post

Table 1: Comparison of The Men's Project work across different audiences

Setting	Audience	Practice model	Desired outcomes for participants	Related research & frameworks	Evaluation evidence
Flexible learning schools	Students	Targeted Early Intervention with At-Risk Young Men	Ability to describe feelings and link thoughts to emotions. Identification of options/strategies for solving problems. Respond to pressures on them and others without using violence (staff receive training on the link between attachment style and the use of violence). Identification of healthy/unhealthy behaviours and how to respond. Identification of different ways to safely stand up for themselves. School staff receive workforce training.	Practice wisdom, Change the Cycle model, Kasia Kozlowska: The Body Comes to Family Therapy – Using Research to Formulate Treatment Interventions with Somatising Children and their Families	Independent evaluation in progress with a focus on implementation /process Process learnings
Local soccer clubs	Adolescent players	Adapted Coaching Boys into Men model	Increased recognition of abusive or disrespectful behaviour. Increased gender-equitable attitudes. Greater intentions to intervene when witnessing disrespectful or abusive behaviour. Increased actual positive interventions when witnessing abuse among peers (i.e. saying or doing something to stop the behaviour). Reduced negative bystander behaviours (i.e. laughing, going along with it, or not saying anything). Decreased dating abuse perpetration.	Practice wisdom, Theory of planned behaviour, The Man Box research, The Adolescent Man Box research, Coaching Boys Into Men, Transtheoretical Stages of Change model	Independent randomised controlled trial (in progress) Process learnings

Recommendation 3:

We recommend the federal government commission a "stocktake" of prevention and early intervention work taking place across the country. This should map specific initiatives, target cohorts, existing data on violence perpetration, outcomes sought and evidence where it exists. The stocktake should be used to promote more specific discussions regarding merits of practice approaches and ultimately ensure investment in prevention and early intervention is genuinely connected to the scale and nature of the problem of violence. It should inform and be linked to an evidence framework (see recommendation below).

Man Box in Schools

Our Man Box in Schools is a strengths-based, healthier masculinities (or identities) approach to support young people to be their best selves. We work with each school to meet the needs of the school community. This includes:

1. Identify – Understand areas of the whole-school approach that need to be strengthened
2. Plan – Co-design and tailor workshops to meet the needs of the audience: teachers, students or parents
3. Act – Enable delivery of program and sustainability of work
4. Assess – Measure impact and consider next steps

To drive this work, we have designed a series of Unpacking the Man Box workshops and resources for schools. These encourage conversations among students, teaching staff, and their wider school communities about the negative consequences associated with gender stereotypes and the tools and resources to foster healthier forms of masculinities (or identities), respectful relationships, and positive wellbeing. Our work is aligned with the Victorian Government's Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships curriculum and whole-school approach. We commend the Victorian Government on the progress they have made implementing this curriculum in schools.

We have also adapted these sessions to other contexts including workplaces, early childhood education, justice, and maternal and child health settings. We deliver the workshops to a range of participants, namely social workers, wellbeing staff, teachers, students, faith leaders and parents.

Evaluation of Unpacking the Man Box workshops found participants reported a number of beneficial outcomes including:

- understanding that some behaviour among men and boys is driven by the Man Box rules and society's promotion of these rules
- understanding the importance of adopting healthier ways of being a male
- increased level of knowledge and confidence in getting out of the Man Box
- increased insights into strategies/activities that will bring about change in the attitudes and behaviours of men and boys
- the importance of role modelling in shaping the attitudes and behaviours of men and boys
- wanting to know more about how to work with men and boys to assist them in their development.

Unpacking the Man Box

The Men's Project at Jesuit Social Services developed the Unpacking the Man Box training package for schools and community groups in response to findings from several rounds of Man Box research conducted since 2017. The training explores the pressures on boys and men in Australia, while actively promoting healthy masculinities (or identities), respect and equality at school, home and the wider community. Last year we delivered over 120 Unpacking the Man Box workshops in both schools and community settings.

Nina* participated in the Unpacking the Man Box training last year after beginning a new role as Wellbeing Leader at her school. The session's focus on breaking down harmful gender stereotypes with her students strongly resonated with her because at the time she was experiencing the negative behaviour of a young boy in her care.

"One thing that struck me straight away in the session was the idea that 'the behaviour you walk by is the behaviour you accept,'" says Nina. "I could see this type of behaviour but had not thought to see what is behind it and driving it as the root cause."

Oliver* was highly academic yet was suffering low self-esteem at school. He began manifesting his negative feelings through anger and frustration as he thought these were the appropriate emotions for a boy to express. He felt like he was always in trouble and therefore began to disengage from his schoolwork.

Oliver believed if he shared his thoughts and feelings he would be perceived as weak, and this gendered stereotype meant his behaviour became aggressive, with him using derogatory and disrespectful language towards his teachers and classmates.

"He started to believe that he had to be strong and fight and that he couldn't show any weakness. But this masked who he really was: a sensitive, empathetic and caring individual," says Nina.

The Unpacking the Man Box training gave Nina the insight that Oliver was showing signs of being in the Man Box and that the traditionally punitive response to Oliver's negative actions was harming him. She sought to change the approach to a positive one of modelling respect to promote healthy behaviours for Oliver.

Nina was able to create a safe environment for Oliver to talk about and explore a healthier version of his masculinity while also keeping him accountable for his actions. His self-esteem flourished and he now understood that it was ok to be his true self.

Nina recognises that as teachers "we are good at building relationships, but we don't always have those difficult and uncomfortable conversations because we don't want to break those bonds." Since the training, the conversations she and the other teachers have with their students are intentional, relational and are keeping both them and the students accountable in a positive way.

4. A more rigorous approach to the use of research evidence

Evidence underpinning prevention approaches varies significantly. There are some programs we know are showing promise – for example, an evaluation of our Modelling Respect and Equality (MoRE) program found significant change in the level of knowledge, confidence, and motivation to bring about change among the men and boys with whom the participants worked.[35] Yet there are few programs with a rigorous measurement of effectiveness (including MoRE), and our knowledge of "what works" in changing behaviour and keeping women and children safe is lacking. Despite this, there are often claims that programs are "evidence-based" or "good outcomes were achieved". Without an improvement in the quality of the evidence base and a critical eye on evidence-based claims, there is a risk that program funding and associated practice evolves based on a series of rhetorical claims and counter claims with little underlying rigour.

[35] Jesuit Social Services (2023). Modelling Respect and Equality. The Men's Project. (Weblink)

Modelling Respect and Equality

Research and practice expertise suggest that role models – of all genders – in the places where boys and men live, work, and meet are crucial to prevention efforts. Jesuit Social Services has developed the Modelling Respect and Equality (MoRE) program to support role models who interact with boys and men on a regular basis so they can challenge limiting and harmful stereotypes and promote respect and equality towards women

The program supports participants to develop greater self-awareness of masculine norms and their impact, learn how to model and promote positive change, and recognise and challenge problematic attitudes and behaviours. Participants include teachers, social workers, sports coaches, leaders in workplaces, and leaders in faith communities.

In 2024, MoRE was funded by the Victorian Government to expand from 100 to 240 schools over the next four years. While some larger workplaces could fund this themselves, smaller workforces are likely to need government funding to support these efforts.

Evaluation of MoRE found significant change in the level of knowledge, confidence, and motivation to bring about change among the men and boys that the participants worked with.

Coaching Boys into Men (CBIM) Randomised Controlled Trial[36]

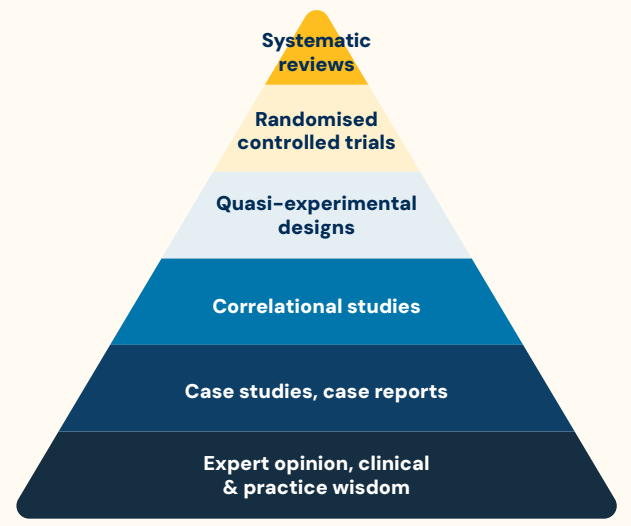
CBIM is a program delivered in the USA intended to alter norms that foster dating violence perpetration. It engages athletic coaches as positive role models to deliver violence prevention messages to adolescent male athletes. The program consists of a 60-minute training for coaches led by a trained violence prevention advocate to introduce the Coaches Kit (found here) which provides strategies for opening conversation about violence against women with athletes. Eleven "Training Cards" guide coaches to lead brief (10-15 minute) weekly discussions with athletes about respect and dating violence prevention throughout the sports season. The advocate is available to assist coaches with concerns that arise during program delivery, including disclosures. Through this brief coach-led intervention, the CBIM program is intended to translate into measurable, positive changes in athletes' attitudes and behaviours.

A cluster-randomised controlled trial examined the effectiveness of the program. A parallel group of athletes in schools randomised to the control condition received coaching as usual, meaning the coaches were asked to interact with their athletes as they usually would, without additional guidance. These students were assessed using identical surveys and measurement tools.

The trial supported the effectiveness of the CBIM program as a promising strategy to reduce dating violence perpetration as an adjunct to school-based prevention efforts. It found small to moderate increases in youth interventions to intervene in peer abuse perpetration, positive bystander behaviours, and recognition of abusive behaviours. The Men's Project will be adapting this program to an Australian context and, with support from the Federal Government, delivering this program to 30 soccer clubs in partnership with Football Federation Victoria.

[36] Miller, E et.al., (2012). "Coaching boys into men": A cluster-randomized controlled trial of a dating violence prevention program. Journal of adolescent health, 51(5), 431-438. doi: 10.1016/j.jadohealth.2012.01.018.

Figure 4: Levels of evidence for effectiveness[37]



Building on our call to develop a shared understanding of what is currently occurring across work with men and boys to prevent violence (including work with people of all genders who work with men and boys) we need to strengthen our prevention efforts by ensuring they are underpinned by clear standards of evidence. Our focus here is on the effectiveness of violence prevention programs/interventions as against frameworks and other research which seek to explain the causes of violence (noting these are of course crucial to informing program/intervention development). A shared evidence framework for prevention and early intervention, including standards of evidence, could help us work towards agreement about what we do and don't know to inform a robust theory of change.

Noting the value of drawing on practice wisdom to inform program design, delivery and evaluation, our focus here is on establishing objective and reliable approaches to measuring program effectiveness. A more rigorous approach is possible – consider the randomised controlled trial of Coaching Boys Into Men or, more recently, a randomised controlled trial which found an Acceptance and Commitment Therapy based curriculum was more effective than a Duluth Model curriculum for 338 men who were court-mandated to complete a domestic violence program.[38]

We would like to see the development of practice standards across different types of prevention work; a more informed understanding of what is needed to fill existing gaps in our knowledge; and agreement about how prevention and early intervention work should be progressed. Ultimately, the work must be commensurate with the pervasive prevalence of violence perpetration, and able to scale up across jurisdictions and nation-wide as required.

Recommendation 4:

We recommend the Federal Government commission the development of an evidence framework for gender-based violence prevention and early intervention. The framework should include standards of evidence and could:

- provide a consistent way of assessing the evidence used and generated
- offer shared language for the way we think and communicate about evidence as it pertains to prevention and early intervention
- promote a shared understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of different evidence claims
- clearly articulate the evidence requirements for programs and initiatives across the continuum of work to prevent violence against women and children
- come with regular grant rounds to fund more rigorous and long-term evaluation.

[37] Based on Zwi, K., Woolfenden, S., Wheeler, D., O'Brien, T., Tait, P., & Williams, K. (2007). School-based education programmes for the prevention of child sexual abuse. Campbell Systematic Reviews, 3(1), 1-40. doi: 10.1002/14651858.CD004380.pub3.

[38] Zarling A, Russell D. (2022) A randomized clinical trial of acceptance and commitment therapy and the Duluth Model classes for men court-mandated to a domestic violence program. J Consult Clin Psychol. Apr;90(4):326-338. doi: 10.1037/ccp0000722. PMID: 35446078.

5. Building workforce capability

A variety of skilled workforces are needed to effectively prevent, intervene and respond to gender-based violence. While interconnected and concurrent, each part of this continuum sets out to achieve different things, meaning distinct sets of skills and capability need to be built across workforces. Further, there are opportunities being missed to prevent violence when working with men who have used, or are at risk of using, violence as part of delivering programs that are not violence-specific (e.g. residential programs post-release from prison; substance use; school disengagement).

Workforce capability should view a range of work as prevention including: work with people who have the ability to positively influence men and boys in universal community settings (e.g. sport, school, workplaces in particularly male dominated industries, places of worship); engagement at critical and higher risk points in men's lives (e.g. relationship breakdown, birth of a child); delivery of non-specialist family violence programs to men and boys who are at-risk of using violence; and healing and recovery work with both victim-survivors and people who use violence.

In order to achieve these aspirations, there is a need to strengthen workforce capacity and reform funding models to allow more time to focus on violence prevention (e.g. either through lower caseloads or additional staff/time with participants). Prevention of violence requires a set of capabilities which are related although distinct from other social services work (e.g. working with and being aware of male entitlement/privilege; understanding the risks of collusion). However, even if these skills are built, the approach will not work if an emphasis on prevention of violence is "another thing" on top of an already stretched workforce. Funding for a substance use program, for example, should account for and resource opportunities to prevent violence.

Residential programs for young people intersecting with the criminal justice system

While prevention is often associated with broad awareness-raising campaigns and universal initiatives, our experience shows that programs engaging men and boys who are at risk of using violence (beyond specialist family violence programs) present opportunities for prevention.

For example, Jesuit Social Services runs two residential-based living skills programs for justice system-involved young people. "Perry House" works with justice system-involved young people of all genders who have an intellectual disability. "Dillon House" works with justice system-involved young men who are at risk of, or are experiencing, homelessness. Some of the young men in these settings have committed violent crimes against women or girls.

While they don't necessarily align to traditional prevention frameworks, Perry House and Dillon House provide an opportunity for healing and recovery which can itself be central to prevention. They offer the support and stability residents need in order to address the issues that contributed to their offending, and to build a new and flourishing life. This includes addressing their mental and physical health issues; supporting engagement with education, training and employment; connecting with pro-social activities within the community; managing risk-taking or criminal behaviour; and finding suitable long-term housing in the community.

Staff are present 24 hours a day because of the intensity of the support provided. Because work is being done with young people in their home, there is the capacity for staff to have meaningful and transformative conversations that can contribute to behaviour change. Therefore, there are opportunities to better equip the workforces in such settings (together with additional resourcing) with an understanding of the drivers of violence, including the gendered drivers, and to support them to engage participants in ways that can genuinely break the cycle of violence.

Opportunities for better integration of prevention and response

There are also opportunities to better deliver and integrate training. The introduction of MARAM in Victoria, including the more recent expansion of its practice guidance to include adult people using violence as well as victim-survivors, points to opportunities for a more integrated approach to workforce capacity building across prevention and response. A wide range of organisations that are authorised through regulations, as well as organisations providing funded services relevant to family violence risk assessment and management, must align their policies, procedures, practice guidance and tools to the MARAM Framework.[39] Many of these organisations (and their workforces) have an important role to play in prevention (and vice versa, i.e. many organisations and their workforces that are, or should be, leading prevention efforts also have an important role to play in response).

Every year, a wide range of professionals undertake MARAM training in the identification, assessment and management of family violence risk. Such training falls into the "response" category. Some of these professionals – such as child, youth and family services or teachers, – will also participate in some form of "prevention" training in promoting positive change around gender norms with their participants or students (such as our Modelling Respect and Equality program). In an ideal scenario, social workers, teachers and a variety of other professional or community "leaders" would be equipped to play a role across the continuum of prevention, early intervention and response. Noting the different capabilities required to deliver this training, there are missed efficiencies and opportunities to integrate the way we build and embed both the commitment and capability to prevent and respond to gendered violence and abuse across workforces and their broader organisations or settings – for example by combining or at least coordinating the development and delivery of response and prevention training initiatives for key workforces.

Maribyrnong Community Residential Facility

The Maribyrnong Community Residential Facility (MCRF) is an initiative funded by the Victorian Department of Justice and Community Safety (DJCS) that was established in response to the COVID 19 pandemic. The facility houses individuals exiting custody from men's prisons who are at risk of homelessness or have no other accommodation option. Jesuit Social Services' Transitional Support Program (TSP) is based at the facility and delivers outreach-based case management support to assist individuals to transition from custody to the community.

People eligible to reside at the facility are assessed for risk based on their offending history and behaviour. Residents agree to a code of conduct, which includes agreeing to engage with support services while living at the facility, and agreeing to a curfew. Residents stay at the facility for 6-9 months while they develop the skills and strategies to successfully move into independent accommodation in the community.

MCRF provides an opportunity for individuals to address a range of issues that have contributed to their offending. With safe, secure accommodation and wrap around support, individuals are able to participate in education, training and paid employment; address their mental health and substance use issues; and reconnect and rebuild relationships with families, partners and children in a safe way.

For men who have histories of using family violence, the TSP aligns with best practice principles of keeping the user of violence in view, increasing the safety of the victim survivors, whilst holding the user of violence accountable for their actions. TSP case managers discuss with participants their use of family violence from a justice system perspective – for example the legal consequences of breaching an intervention order. They also have conversations about the harm that their use of violence has caused their partners, children and families.

The TSP works toward supporting men to be accountable for their behaviour, to have the opportunity to change their behaviour, and to put in place strategies to reset relationships with their families in a safe and supported way. It allows participants and their families to take time to reunite, to set boundaries and to approach reintegration from prison to the community differently.

TSP takes a restorative approach in which it seeks to do no further harm, works with men not for them, and supports them to reset relationships. However, it also holds the men accountable for their behaviour and speaks directly to their use of violence as harmful for those the men say they care for the most.

Results from a DJCS evaluation indicate that men supported by MCRF are 30 per cent less likely to reoffend.

Recommendation 5a:

We recommend every Australian state and territory should have a violence prevention workforce strategy which foregrounds working with men and boys across a range of settings. The strategies should view a range of work as prevention, including work with people of all genders who can influence men and boys; and working with men and boys who have already perpetrated violence.

Recommendation 5b:

We recommend that governments consider place-based approaches or saturation models (such as the model that commenced in Ballarat, Victoria in 2024) as an opportunity to test integrated prevention workforce strategies and approaches via a pilot with adequate funding and duration. Opportunities to reform funding models that allow greater integration of violence prevention within programs working with men and boys at-risk of using violence should be explored.

Recommendation 5c:

We recommend investment in more supportive housing models for young men and boys exiting custody who have committed violent crimes (based on models such as Perry House and Dillon House, run by Jesuit Social Services). These settings should provide safe and secure environments for those coming out of custodial settings who don't yet have the skills to live independent and productive lives that are free from violence. Appropriately trained workforces should offer the support and stability these young people need in order to address the issues that contributed to their offending (including conversations about the thoughts and beliefs that contributed to the violence) thus breaking the cycle of offending.

Recommendation 5d:

We recommend investment in training which builds capability to prevent and respond to gendered violence, specifically tailored to workforces in residential settings for young people exposed to risk factors. This should include residential out-of-home-care settings in addition to those focussed on young people exiting custody.

[39] Victorian Government (2023). Family Violence Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework. (Weblink)

6. Using digital approaches is critical for reach and scale

A well-informed prevention approach needs to consider the seminal role that technology and media play in most people's lives, including in the construction of violence-supportive attitudes. We argue there are two critical areas where digital approaches to prevention and early intervention should be considered in order to achieve impact, reach and scale in violence prevention: i) online tools which interrupt problematic or illegal online engagement and which offer access to help; and ii) digital tools which can be widely disseminated to build the capability of people who are well positioned to engage with men and boys, to help them confidently foster discussions that prevent violence.

'reThink' chatbot trial[40]

Over the past two years, the UK-based child protection charity Lucy Faithfull Foundation has partnered with the Internet Watch Foundation and Aylo (the parent company of Pornhub UK) to trial a first-of-its-kind chatbot and warning message aiming to reduce the number of online searches that may potentially be indicative of intent to find sexual images of children.

The trial involved use of a 'reThink chatbot' which engages in conversation with users attempting to search on Pornhub for these images. Alongside a static warning page, the chatbot tells users these images are illegal and signposts them to Stop It Now where they receive help and support to stop their behaviour.

An evaluation by the University of Tasmania found there was a decrease in the number of searches for sexual images of children on Pornhub in the UK during the time the chatbot was deployed. The vast majority of users (82 per cent) whose searches triggered the warning and chatbot did not appear to search again for sexual images of children.

Hundreds of people also clicked through to the Stop It Now website or called the helpline during the trial. The chatbot resulted in 1,656 requests for more information about Stop It Now services, 490 click-throughs to the Stop It Now website, and approximately 68 calls and chats to the Stop It Now helpline.

[40] University of Tasmania (2024) Pioneering chatbot reduces searches for child sexual abuse material. Media release 4 March (Weblink)

Online places where people can access help

While there is clearly value in targeting individuals who are at high risk of perpetrating abuse, there are challenges identifying those individuals if they have not come to the attention of law enforcement or other relevant professionals. Yet online places can effectively reach individuals accessing online content across a spectrum, whether it's engaging with misogynistic influencers, or consuming content that shows, promotes or instructs people to engage in violent acts. The online world has extensive reach, which offers a critical advantage in addressing a problem that is so widespread it can never be adequately addressed by in-person facilitators working with 30 people at a time. Further, online spaces can be anonymous, which can help to overcome the stigma that may otherwise prevent help seeking.

The rapid development of technology provides new opportunities to influence people's behaviour. This includes the use of strategically placed pop-up warnings and interactive chat bots. An online early intervention service/deterrence campaign could be codesigned with technology companies and experts in the field of violence prevention. It could seek to reach people who, based on their online activity, are displaying risk factors related to the use of violence but may not have yet offended or come to the attention of the justice system. It could then promote help-seeking by referring or redirecting them to proven support channels. Such a service would also present a significant opportunity to gather new data about perpetration and early intervention, and ultimately has potential to reduce burden on the criminal justice system.

Lessons can be drawn from promising work underway to deter child sexual abuse. Results of the University of Tasmania's evaluation of a child sexual abuse deterrence trial (see call out box: 'reThink chatbot trial') showed the approach working in two ways: for some people, instructing them that what they are doing might be illegal is enough to get them to change their behaviour, while others need more in-depth support from trained advisors or through online self-help.[41]

While work to address the likely pathways to perpetration of violence against women presents a different set of legal and moral conundrums from work to stop child sexual abuse (for example it is not necessarily illegal to espouse misogynistic ideas or engage with such content), opportunities to intervene digitally should be seriously examined as a way to intervene at the earliest stage to get people to stop violence against women and children, or not to start in the first place.

[41] University of Tasmania (2024) Pioneering chatbot reduces searches for child sexual abuse material. Media release 4 March (Weblink)

Worried about Sex and Pornography Project (WASAPP)

WASAPP is an action research collaboration between Jesuit Social Services and the University of Melbourne that commenced in 2018 and aims to work with young people concerned about their sexual thoughts and behaviours. It developed alongside advocacy work between the two organisations to establish the Stop it Now! program in Australia. WASAPP is funded by The Daniel Morcombe Foundation and The Neilson Foundation.

Although there are a range of well-established services that respond to harmful sexual behaviour, there are currently no national secondary prevention services in Australia that work with children and young people who are worried about their sexual thoughts or behaviours. Some progress has recently been made internationally, such as the UK (Shore) and US (Help Wanted). This gap in early intervention services was highlighted by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (2017).

WASAPP aims to address this service gap by establishing and refining an early intervention service for children and young people who have engaged in or are at risk of engaging in harmful sexual behaviours. WASAPP aims to synthesise current evidence and generate new evidence about intervening early in problematic or harmful sexual behaviour, and to apply that evidence to the codesign of an online early intervention service for children and young people worried about their sexual behaviours. This includes:

- exploring pathways to onset of harmful sexual behaviour
- designing an online early intervention service for children and young people worried about their sexual thoughts and behaviours, including pornography use
- implementing and refining an online early intervention service for children and young people worried about their sexual thoughts and behaviours, including pornography use.

We have published research with children, young people, professionals and experts in the field to help inform the service. Currently, we are interviewing children and young people who have displayed harmful sexual behaviours to listen to their voices on the kinds of early intervention resources they would find helpful and engaging. These findings are being collated into a scoping study which will guide our development and implementation of a secondary prevention service for young people concerned about their sexual thoughts and behaviours. Without funding and investment, the options, scale and sustainability of this service will be significantly limited.

Using digital tools to support the capacity of those working with men and boys

The proliferation of online content reinforcing harmful gender stereotypes far surpasses the reach of an approach which relies on in-person program delivery (no matter how effective) to counter this influence. Furthermore, levels of funding to achieve the required reach through programs alone (e.g. workshops with teachers, sports coaches, social workers; curriculum delivered specifically to adolescents) are unlikely to be obtained. We simply cannot reach everyone who needs to be reached without the use of digital materials targeted at people who are well positioned to foster discussions with men and boys that can prevent violence.

Digital tools to build and support the capacity of workforces and parents should be preceded by rigorous trialling and evaluation of teaching and learning approaches. That is, once we know what works, we can embed it in digital materials, then regularly update it with the ongoing input of leaders in the field of prevention education and informed by the latest research. Engaging content can be tailored to specific age groups and cohorts, and tools can be accompanied by advice and strategies for parents, teachers and other professionals who feel less confident with the material/with conversations about gender norms and violence prevention, or who are concerned about pushback from students. Ultimately such tools can be disseminated across the country including to remote or difficult to reach areas.

ClickView partnership with The Men's Project

A partnership between The Men's Project and ClickView offers a small proof of concept for a potentially broader approach to digital education tools that can challenge and address violence supportive ideas and behaviours. The design of this approach is premised on the understanding that face to face facilitated sessions are severely limited in their reach.

ClickView hosts a wide range of classroom friendly content aligned to the Victorian Curriculum (Foundation to Year 10). Based on a subscription model, it provides teachers with resources and features to help facilitate engagement and customise teaching and learning.[42] In 2023, ClickView identified the need for educational support to engage students in conversations about stereotypical ideas and behaviours around masculinity. The Men's Project was approached to partner in the development of these resources.

Philanthropic funding enabled a prevention educator from The Men's Project to support and oversee development of content, which includes short narrative clips, interviews with young men about their personal views and experiences, and teaching resources. The clips, currently in development, are based on the four Man Box pillars for adolescents: constant effort to be manly, emotional restriction, heterosexism, and social testing. They sit alongside resources which support teachers to unpack and discuss the clips, with a focus on supporting safe conversations that foster critical reflection and provide alternatives to harmful norms. This includes:

- language about masculinity
- how to navigate resistance to the ideas if it arises
- links to VicHealth's Encountering Resistance guide and the Man Box report
- guidance on how to manage online influencers.

The series will be launched from mid-August 2024 and accessible through the ClickView online portal for schools to use. The Men's Project will seek data analytics on uptake and use of the resources in schools via ClickView.

Recommendation 6a:

We recommend governments fund organisations which specialise in work with people who use violence and the prevention of violence to partner with technology and social media platforms to develop and implement an evidence-based online deterrence/early intervention campaign to prevent violence against women and children. This work should draw on international evidence and best practice in deterrence, including in area of child sexual abuse prevention.

Recommendation 6b:

We recommend governments invest in digital tools to support the capacity of critical workforces (e.g. teachers, social workers, sports coaches) and parents to confidently foster discussions with men and boys about gender norms and use of violence, and to counter negative influences. The tools should be developed with the input of appropriately qualified organisations and based on evidence. They should be open source and widely disseminated. This approach acknowledges that in-person facilitated workshops to counter negative influences can never achieve the reach and scale required.

[42] ClickView (n.d.). ClickView: Reach every student through video. (Weblink)

7. Re-imagining prisons

Jesuit Social Services believes there is value in trialling approaches to working with people convicted of gender-based violence offences during their incarceration, with the goal to prevent re-offending. Our perspectives bring together some limited international evidence; our experience supporting people with justice system involvement; our work in gender justice; and our belief that supporting people recovering from violence and its effects can itself be preventative.

The fundamental challenge of the prison environment

The prison system has been described as a "hypermasculine and hostile environment that creates an atmosphere of fear and isolation and presents considerable challenges for therapeutic efforts that aim to address the antecedents and risk factors associated with sexual offending."[43] According to Sir Martin Narey, former head of the Prison Service in England and Wales, "investment in the mass delivery of rehabilitation [in prisons] yielded poor returns, and the money would have been better directed to simply making prisons better, more decent and more moral places."[44] Add to this context the large proportion of incarcerated people who are themselves victims of crime, including violence, sexual abuse and other trauma: people in prison are often homeless, isolated and facing challenges related to mental health, alcohol and other drugs, or an acquired brain injury; they may face barriers to inclusion in employment or education; and may have disability.

A holistic examination of participants' existing needs is clearly a prerequisite to the success of any targeted program, as when these factors go unaddressed, and are compounded by the challenges of the prison environment, they increase the likelihood of a person reoffending. The greater challenge, however, is an examination of the culture and conditions in which people are incarcerated. A realistic consideration of the ways in which the prison environment hinders the chances of success of any intervention should precede and inform any examination of the effectiveness of specific prison-based behaviour change approaches. Current prison conditions and culture constitute a major hindrance to the success of therapeutic interventions.

[43] Ware, J., & Galouzis, J. (2019). "Impact of prison climate on individuals with sexual convictions: Desistance and rehabilitation," in N. Blagden, B. Winder, K. Hocken, R. Livelesley, P. Banyard and H. Elliott (Eds.), Sexual Crime and the Experience of Imprisonment (pp. 35–60). London, UK: Palgrave McMillan. Cited in Day, A. "At a crossroads? Offender rehabilitation in Australian prisons," Psychiatry, Psychology and Law, 2020, Vol. 27, No. 6, 939–949, (Weblink), p. 942.

[44] ibid, p. 939.

Evidence

There is limited evidence regarding programs within prisons targeting people convicted of family or sexual violence offences. This is in part explained by a scarcity of rigorous evaluation of programs.[45] However, where evaluations have occurred, they often show disappointing results or are subject to significant limitations.

University of Melbourne criminologist Professor Andrew Day argues that rates of recidivism in Australia could suggest that the current system of rehabilitation in the criminal justice system has a 'negligible' impact:

> *[It is] surprisingly hard to locate evidence that current offending behaviour programs are resulting in lowered rates of re-offending, with recent reviews of both sexual offender rehabilitation treatment and violent offender rehabilitation failing to identify any studies conducted in Australian correctional settings that meet widely accepted criteria for inclusion.*[46]

A 2013 literature review of programs worldwide for domestic violence and sex offender interventions (both in and out of prisons) found mixed results. It also showed that, where program types had relatively greater demonstrated success, this may have been due to a greater number of evaluations of that type of program – specifically, programs utilising cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT).[47]

Nevertheless, there are programs which have demonstrated some success, elements of which could inform future trials. For example, a program targeting "domestic violence perpetrators" which employed varying levels of intensity according to participant characteristics showed that recidivism was substantially lower among those who completed the program.[48] While it should be noted that perpetrator programs overall are contested, and may not constitute best practice,[49] varying intensity and tailored approaches appear to influence success.

Sexual offender intervention programs that adhere to the "risk, need and responsivity" principles (RNR) have been found to be more effective in reducing recidivism.[55] These principles guide the need to: match the intensity of treatment with the risk level of the offender; match treatment programs to elements of the offender's psychological, social and emotional functioning linked to their criminal behaviour; and match the therapy (stipulated as CBT) to the offender's learning style, cognitive capacity, motivations, personality and cultural background. Others have emphasised the need for the intervention to be matched to the person's stage of readiness for change.[51]

A US study of the Custody-Based Intensive Treatment (CUBIT) and CUBIT Outreach (CORE) found that rates of recidivism were lower than expected for sexual and violent offences. This program is also based in CBT.[52] An evaluation of the CUBIT and CORE Outreach program delivered in NSW also showed decreased recidivism among those who completed the program.[53] The NSW program began in 1999 and is offered to male inmates who have committed a proven sex offence. It is targeted at offenders who present a moderate to high risk of recidivism or high treatment needs and is delivered over 6–12 months, during which participants live

[45] Day, op. cit, p.941.
[46] ibid, pp.940-941.
[47] Literature Review on Domestic Violence Perpetrators, URBIS, 2013. (Weblink)
[48] Coulter, M., & VandeWeerd, C. (2009). Reducing domestic violence and other criminal recidivism: effectiveness of a multilevel batterers intervention program. Violence and Victims, 24(2), 139–152.
[49] See, for example, the United Kingdom National Institute for Health and Care Excellence's public health guideline on Domestic violence and abuse: multi-agency working, 2014, p.40. (Weblink)
[50] Murphy, W. D., & McGrath, R. (2008). Best Practices in Sex Offender Treatment. Prison Service Journal, 178, 3–9; and Olver, M. E., Stockdale, K. C., & Wormith, J. S. (2011). A Meta-Analysis of Predictors of Offender Treatment Attrition and Its Relationship to Recidivism. Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 79(1), 6–21. Cited in URBIS, p. 14.
[51] Casey, S., Day, A., & Howells, K. (2005). The application of the transtheoretical model to offender populations: Some critical issues. Legal and Ciminological Psychology, 10, 1-15. Cited in URBIS, p. 14.
[52] Gelb, K. (2007). Recidivism of sex offenders : research paper. Melbourne: Sentencing Advisory Council; and Woodrow, A. C., & Bright, D. A. (2011). Effectiveness of a Sex Offender Treatment Programme: A Risk Band Analysis. International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology, 55(1), 43–55. Cited in URBIS, pp. 15–16.
[53] Hoy, A. & Bright, D. A. (2008) Effectiveness of a Sex Offender Treatment Programme: A Risk Band Analysis (unpublished). Cited in Macgregor, S. (2008). Sex offender treatment programs: effectiveness of prison and community based programs in Australia and New Zealand. Indigenous Justice Clearinghouse Research Brief, pp. 2–3. (Weblink)

in self-contained therapeutic communities. Therapy sessions are delivered in groups by psychologists, with up to 10 participants per group. However, doubts have been raised about the effectiveness of this program.[54]

In summary, elements which appear to make an in-prison behaviour change program more successful are:

- a rigorous and holistic initial assessment of each participant
- an approach that can be tailored to the participant's risk level, needs and characteristics, including comorbidities, socioeconomic and employment status, family status, cultural background, criminal history, and motivation for change
- the ability to address additional challenges (such as mental health or addiction) concurrently
- supporting and regularly informing the participant's partner where relevant.

The bottom line, however, is that an in-prison program seeking to address gender-based violence is likely to have limited success unless prisons are radically transformed to be more home-like. Moreover, interventions should continue to offer support through the person's transition back into the community and in their life post-release.

Mellow Dads Parenting Program delivered in prison

The Mellow Dads Parenting Program[55] is a 14-week evidenced based course, designed to enhance parent-child relationships through increasing participants' understanding of themselves and their fathering role.

Delivery of the program to incarcerated fathers was trialled at Her Majesty's Prison Oakwood, facilitated by trained staff from Walsall Council Family Interventions Team and a prison officer. While not specifically targeted to men with a history of gender-based violence, the trial is of interest in that it is underpinned by an acknowledgment that families can be a source of strength for prisoners, and can be central to reducing reoffending rates. Yet prison policies generally do little to support such a position.

During the program, children and their mothers were transported to the prison while the fathers undertook morning sessions, but over lunch the fathers had sole responsibility for their children. After lunch, the children returned home with their mothers while the fathers reflected on their own and each other's parent-child interactions.

A mixed-method study of the trial found that the Mellow Dads Parenting Program is effective in assisting participants to reconsider their parenting styles and acquire more positive parenting behaviours, which contributed to changes to the parent-child relationship. Most significant was the program's effectiveness in legitimising the fathering role.

Of concern, however, was the contrast reported between the reflective and nurturing culture promoted through the program, and the negative and critical environment within the prison, raising doubts about how changes reported within the study would be maintained on completion of the program.

[54] See https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/he-just-told-them-what-they-wanted-to-hear-doubts-over-success-of-program-for-highrisk-sex-offenders-20170818-gxz0ap.html

[55] See https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/college-social-sciences/social-policy/family-potential/invisible-fathers-jessica-langston.pdf

Me and My Family: An early example of a program focussed on incarcerated men

'Me and My Family"[56] was funded by the Department of Family and Community Services through the Men and Family Relationships Initiative from 1997 to 2003. Jesuit Social Services conducted a small trial program within prisons in Victoria with objectives that included:

- engaging marginalised or difficult to engage men
- assisting the men engaged in understanding the benefits of improved family relationships
- assisting these men in dealing with personal obstacles to enhancing their family relationships, for example their attitudes and behaviours
- assisting these men in understanding how to seek and access family relationship services.

While not specifically targeted at men convicted for family violence offences, the program successfully engaged with men in prison who had identified that they experienced difficulty in maintaining non-conflictual family relationships.

The program worked with a small number of men over a short timeframe but showed promise in engaging a hard-to-reach group of men. It was particularly successful in reducing the anxiety of the participants about discussing their family relationships in a group setting, and in helping them realise that they could develop solutions to their own relationship difficulties. The trial has implications for how a therapeutic approach for people who use family violence who are in prison might best be designed.

Recommendation 7:

Notwithstanding the complexities and challenges of providing an effective therapeutic response to men in prison for gender-based violence offences, in-prison behaviour change approaches warrant further investigation. New approaches should be trialled, drawing on existing evidence and with adequate funding and further evaluation, noting that such trials would need to be supported by concomitant changes in prison conditions and culture. Important considerations will include the holistic needs of individual participants as well as the environment of hyper-masculinity, fear and isolation that characterises most prisons.

[56] Men and Family Relationship Project, Parenting Australia, A program of Jesuit Social Services. Final Report 2002. A National Project funded by the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services through the Men and Family Relationships Initiative.

Appendix 1: Summary of recommendations

Recommendation 1:

We recommend investment in the collection of more and better data on the extent of perpetration as well as its dynamics and drivers. This requires further research into factors that increase the risk and severity of perpetration; factors which protect against it; and pathways and supports that address it. This should also include a focus on developing an understanding of the experiences of different population groups, places and settings. The data should be used to inform our prevention and early intervention efforts and investment.

Recommendation 2:

We recommend governments closely consider opportunities to intervene early to prevent violence against women and children, including through:

- use of emerging data sets, such as those that will be generated by the use of MARAM Working with Adult People Using Violence behaviour assessment tools in Victoria, to guide decisions about where to concentrate specific early intervention efforts
- better investment in targeted early intervention programs enabled by outcomes-based funding for adolescents who are at risk, including those who are victims of violence and those who have used violence in the home
- exploring place-based approaches – this should involve the examination of existing place-based research (such as Dropping Off the Edge) and evaluating place-based approaches to prevention of violence (such as Victoria's Ballarat "saturation model").

Recommendation 3:

We recommend the federal government commission a "stocktake" of prevention and early intervention work taking place across the country. This should map specific initiatives, target cohorts, existing data on violence perpetration, outcomes sought and evidence where it exists. The stocktake should be used to promote more specific discussions regarding merits of practice approaches and ultimately ensure investment in prevention and early intervention is genuinely connected to the scale and nature of the problem of violence. It should inform and be linked to an evidence framework (see recommendation 4).

Recommendation 4:

We recommend the Federal Government commission the development of an evidence framework for gender-based violence prevention and early intervention. The framework should include standards of evidence and could:

- provide a consistent way of assessing the evidence used and generated
- offer shared language for the way we think and communicate about evidence as it pertains to prevention and early intervention
- promote a shared understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of different evidence claims
- clearly articulate the evidence requirements for programs and initiatives across the continuum of work to prevent violence against women and children
- come with regular grant rounds to fund more rigorous and long-term evaluation.

Recommendation 5a:

We recommend every Australian state and territory should have a violence prevention workforce strategy which foregrounds working with men and boys across a range of settings. The strategies should view a range of work as prevention, including work with people of all genders who can influence men and boys; and working with men and boys who have already perpetrated violence.

Recommendation 5b:

We recommend that governments consider place-based approaches or saturation models (such as the model that commenced in Ballarat, Victoria in 2024) as an opportunity to test integrated prevention workforce strategies and approaches via a pilot with adequate funding and duration. Opportunities to reform funding models that allow greater integration of violence prevention within programs working with men and boys at-risk of using violence should be explored.

Recommendation 5c:

We recommend investment in more supportive housing models for young men and boys exiting custody who have committed violent crimes (based on models such as Perry House and Dillon House, run by Jesuit Social Services). These settings should provide safe and secure environments for those coming out of custodial settings who don't yet have the skills to live independent and productive lives that are free from violence. Appropriately trained workforces should offer the support and stability these young people need in order to address the issues that contributed to their offending (including conversations about the thoughts and beliefs that contributed to the violence) thus breaking the cycle of offending.

Recommendation 5d:

We recommend investment in training which builds capability to prevent and respond to gendered violence, specifically tailored to workforces in residential settings for young people exposed to risk factors. This should include residential out-of-home-care settings in addition to those focussed on young people exiting custody.

Recommendation 6a:

We recommend governments fund organisations which specialise in work with people who use violence and the prevention of violence to partner with technology and social media platforms to develop and implement an evidence-based online deterrence/early intervention campaign to prevent violence against women and children. This work should draw on international evidence and best practice in deterrence, including in area of child sexual abuse prevention.

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We recommend governments invest in digital tools to support the capacity of critical workforces (e.g. teachers, social workers, sports coaches) and parents to confidently foster discussions with men and boys about gender norms and use of violence, and to counter negative influences. The tools should be developed with the input of appropriately qualified organisations and based on evidence. They should be open source and widely disseminated. This approach acknowledges that in-person facilitated workshops to counter negative influences can never achieve the reach and scale required.

Recommendation 7:

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