Royal Commission into Family Violence

MAV Submission

May 2015

MUNICIPAL ASSOCIATION OF VICTORIA

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The MAV is the statutory peak body for local government in Victoria, representing all 79 municipalities. The MAV would like to acknowledge the contribution of those who provided their comments and advice during this project.

While this paper aims to broadly reflect the views of local government in Victoria, it does not purport to reflect the exact views of individual councils.

This MAV submission to the Royal Commission into Family Violence has been endorsed by the MAV Board.

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1 Executive summary and recommendations

Family violence is occurring everywhere, and too often. Local government has a significant role to lead cultural change, that can influence community attitudes towards violence against women through gender equity and early intervention.

This submission focuses on Victorian local government's role in primary prevention of violence against women — that is, stopping violence before it occurs, as well as a range of early intervention strategies. It has been developed with contributions from members of the MAV Gender Equity (Preventing Violence Against Women) Leadership Group and the MAV Preventing Violence Against Women Network.

The MAV commends the Family Violence Royal Commission's goal of 'fostering a violence-free society'. However, we encourage the Commission to extend this important goal to address the key cause of men's violence against women, being gender inequality.

Funded through successive state governments, the MAV has delivered a statewide local government prevention of violence against women initiative since 2010. Through the State's commitment to preventing violence against women, the MAV has been successful in providing advocacy, building capacity, promoting local government's role and supporting councils.

Victorian councils are working proactively and strategically through their existing services and programs to prevent violence against women. At the core of this work is education and awareness around gender equity, which starts within councils and filters into the communities they serve. We call it '*applying the gender lens'*.

Throughout this submission there are examples of how our civic leaders — councillors and officers — are successfully reaching and accessing their local communities through this front-line, whole-of-life, service delivery. Councils are introducing gender equity strategies through their day-to-day work in areas such as: Maternal & Child Health, local laws, early years, youth services, libraries, arts, emergency management, sports & leisure and transport, to ultimately prevent violence against women.

International research shows that where greater gender equity exists between girls and boys, and women and men, lower rates of violence against women occur.

It is concerning that women in Australia still do not enjoy equity with men. This is evident through the low numbers of women elected to Parliament and represented in executive roles; the widening gender pay-gap; the continued unacceptable sexual objectification of women in Australian media; and the high rate of violence against women and girls.

This needs to change.

Funding primary prevention is critical to addressing the underlying culture, attitudes and systems that cause violence against women. While local government has made good progress, the rate of improvement is slow due to the effort being resourced amongst a myriad of competing priorities. A more focused, well-resourced prevention effort could achieve improvement more quickly.

Local government is well placed to contribute to the primary prevention of violence against women, through influencing community attitudes, to gender equity and early intervention. The MAV is committed to working with the State, across all settings, to develop place-based responses to family violence.

While this submission focuses on the role of local government, the MAV will continue to work with other key stakeholders to develop partnerships that will lead to better outcomes in preventing family violence, particularly men's violence against women.

Recommendations

The increasing engagement and leadership shown by the MAV and Victorian councils in the primary prevention of violence against women, as well as through early intervention and tertiary responses, demonstrates an understanding of the opportunities and responsibilities we all share to ultimately achieve healthy, safe and connected communities.

The MAV acknowledges the goal of the Royal Commission to 'fostering a violence-free society', and believes this will only occur through 'fostering a violence-free *and gender-equitable* society'.

The MAV seeks the Royal Commission consideration for making the following recommendations to the Victorian Government.

IN THE PRIMARY PREVENTION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Recommendation 1:
Support councils' role and capacity to progress gender equity and influence attitudinal change through resourcing all councils as civic leaders to promote attitudinal change, and facilitate community based local responses through allocation of development officers — similar to the DHHS Building Inclusive Communities program (Metro and Rural Access).

Recommendation 2:
Support local government's role and capability to progress gender equity and influence attitudinal change through resourcing the MAV in an advisory capacity to coordinate and inform sector efforts, and partner with the State Government and other key stakeholders.

Recommendation 3:
The next State Health Plan includes preventing family violence and the primary prevention of violence against women as distinct priority areas necessary to increase the safety, wellbeing and gender equality experienced by Victorian women.

Recommendation 4:
Collection of data and information to inform evidence-building practice and interventions at a local level through the National Community Attitudes Survey (NCAS) being conducted at the local municipal level over time periods.

Recommendation 5:
Collection of data and information to inform evidence-building practice and interventions at a local level through development of a gender equity index for major state and local government strategic plans which can inform reporting over time.

Recommendation 6:
Consider the findings and recommendations made by the Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) of the local government cluster project in the Preventing Violence Against Women in our Community program evaluation.

Recommendation 7:
Build local government elected member commitment to gender equity and councils' workforce capacity through systemised and evaluated training opportunities, including primary prevention of violence against women, gender analysis, challenging sexism bystander approaches, incorporating a diversity and inclusion (intersectional) lens.

Recommendation 8:
Support local government's role and capacity to progress gender equity and influence attitudinal change through developing a local government communications/key messaging guide for working with the community and the local media.

Recommendation 9:
Build capacity of the early years sector by advocating for review of the National Quality Framework and Early Years Learning Framework to apply a gender lens with the view to ensuring programs and services support young girls and boys to enjoy equal access and opportunity, not limited by unintended bias and gender stereotyping.

Recommendation 10:
Acknowledge and invest in councils' youth services in working to build civic engagement, leadership and respectful relationships programs in schools and community settings.

Recommendation 11:
Introduce legislation restricting the publication and broadcasting of sexist and discriminatory advertising as a way of promoting gender equity and reducing the risk of violence against women.

Recommendation 12:
Develop a gendered urban planning and infrastructure design toolkit for local government to use that can be tailored for particular settings and disciplines.

THROUGH EARLY INTERVENTION STRATEGIES

Recommendation 13:
Support and improve prevention and early intervention to councils' MCH services, youth and family services through increasing the Enhanced MCH Services' capacity to provide continuity in meeting the needs of vulnerable families and children, by extending the program from antenatal to two years of age (it is currently birth to one year).

Recommendation 14:
Building on the evidence base and evaluation findings of new parent programs that engage new mothers and fathers; adapt and target through Enhanced MCH Services across the state to reach more vulnerable families.

Recommendation 15:
Support and improve prevention and early intervention by councils' MCH services, youth and family services through the roll-out of the 'Patchwork' tool statewide with the MAV to better link agencies in supporting families, children and young people across universal, secondary and tertiary services.

Recommendation 16:
Improve data collection through the new statewide Child Development Information System (CDIS), enabling improved follow-up of families falling through the gaps (CDIS currently being developed by MAV for the MCH service).

Recommendation 17:
Support legislative reform to enable state and local government to meet their legislative responsibility for harm minimisation in gambling and alcohol licensing decisions.

Recommendation 18:
Build councils' workforce capacity through systemised and evaluated training opportunities, including early intervention and risk assessment training, tailored to particular professions and work environments (for example libraries, local laws, MCH, kinder/childcare, youth workers, Home and Community Care staff), incorporating a diversity and inclusion (intersectional) lens.

Recommendation 19:
Acknowledge the specific contextual factors that exacerbate experiences of family violence in both growth council areas and regional/rural communities by investing in long-term primary prevention, early intervention and family violence prevention, delivered with the support of local government to end family violence against women and their children.

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RESPONDING TO FAMILY VIOLENCE

Recommendation 20:
Develop a Victorian affordable housing strategy that addresses the link between family violence, housing and homelessness.

Recommendation 21:
Increase capacity of existing networks, such as Child FIRST Alliances, to work with local government to enhance the level of collaboration between universal, secondary and specialist services.

Recommendation 22:
Increase capacity of specialist family violence services to provide outreach through universal services such as local hubs and MCH centres.

Recommendation 23:
Support infrastructure funding applications from councils building community hubs to enable family-violence related services (for example, community legal service and counselling support) to be co-located/accommodated in universal, accessible, safe and confidential environments.

Recommendation 24:
Support the development of statewide family violence resources for women and men, for each region, with relevant information displayed at a local government level, available from accessible locations including customer service centres, MCH, libraries, community health services and police stations.

Recommendation 25:
Collection of data and information to inform evidence-building practice and interventions at a local level through development of a state elder abuse database and advocacy for development of a national elder abuse database.

Recommendation 26:
Provide equitable and proportionate funding increases to regional specialist family violence services and men's behaviour change programs, specifically to reduce the differential access to specialist family violence support experienced by residents in growth council and regional/rural communities.

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2 Background

No Victorian municipality is free from family violence. From the most affluent municipalities to the most remote corners of our state, family violence — as well as other forms of violence against women — is occurring every day. While violence against women is serious and prevalent, it is also preventable. As is the case with many issues that affect the health, wellbeing and safety of communities, local government has a critical role to play in leading the work that can profoundly influence cultural change.

Local government works across the continuum of preventing violence against women activity and is particularly influential in the realms of primary prevention and early intervention. Councils also have a number of 'soft' entry points for response and through referral to specialist services such as Maternal and Child Health (MCH), Home and Community Care (HACC), emergency management recovery, youth services, and family support.

This submission largely focusses on the role of local government and contribution to the primary prevention of violence against women — that is, stopping violence before it occurs. Primary prevention involves coordinating mutually reinforcing efforts to address the underlying causes of men's violence against women. This submission highlights the need for the Commission to extend the goal of 'fostering a violence-free society' to address the key cause of men's violence against women — gender inequity.

Addressing gender inequity is essential to preventing all forms of men's violence against women, including family violence. It is also an important goal in itself, offering much broader gains at individual, relationship, organisation, community and societal levels.

As set out in the table below, focusing on gender equity delivers gains across community health and social wellbeing, organisational performance, and the prevention of violence against women; all contributing to the ultimate outcome of a community that is inclusive, respectful, fair and safe for people of all genders.

City of Whittlesea Gender Equity Strategy key policy areas – Rationale

Health and social wellbeing	Improved organisational performance	Preventing violence against women
Gender equity addresses the unequal status of diverse groups of men and women, boys and girls and aims to:	In the workplace, gender equity seeks to address barriers to equal workforce participation and eliminate bias based on gender. Higher levels of gender equity at work is proven to:	Gender equity is key to ending violence against women. The strongest predicator of high levels of violence against women is unequal power between men and women.

• reduce disadvantage • improve physical, mental and social health and wellbeing • improve access to safe, respectful and inclusive public facilities, programs and services • reduce health inequalities across diverse communities • reduce barriers to economic participation and access to financial resources.	• improve organisational performance • attract the top talent from the whole talent pool • reduce expenses through increased retention • manage risk and anticipate community need more effectively • diverse teams, ensures diverse ideas.	• International evidence shows where there are high levels of gender equity • valuing women's participation and representation • few economic, social or political differences in power between men and women • there are significantly lower levels of intimate partner and sexual violence.

Ref: City of Whittlesea Gender Equity Strategy 2015 [i]

VicHealth, through their seminal *Preventing Violence before it Occurs: A Framework and Background Paper to Guide the Primary Prevention of Violence against Women in Victoria*[ii], developed a framework to guide efforts to address the causes of, and factors contributing to men's use of violence against women. VicHealth's primary prevention framework identifies local government as a priority setting to implement whole-of-population interventions. Councils engage with individuals, families, organisations and communities, and they can therefore play an important role in influencing norms at these levels. Local government engages people in their *own communities*, responding to local issues and priorities.

Local government is also intrinsically linked to other priority settings identified in the VicHealth framework — for example, it is a significant workplace in its own right, employing over 45,000 Victorians. As a large local business, councils are well positioned to model and lead an organisational culture of gender equity for other community organisations and local businesses to aspire to. Councils also intersect with the media, sport and recreation, education and community services — other important settings in which prevention work should occur.

Over the last decade, Victorian councils have increasingly become leaders in preventing violence against women, with a commitment to address gender inequality throughout policy, plans and programs, and to create safe, inclusive and respectful communities and workplaces.

2.1 The causes of violence against women

"Violence against women is deeply rooted in discrimination and inequality between men and women[iii]*." (UNIFEM, 2010)*

The VicHealth framework highlights three broad causes of men's violence against women. These are:

- Individual attitudes, beliefs and behaviours, including beliefs in rigid gender roles and male dominance in relationships
- Sexist peer and organisational cultures

- Structural factors, including institutional or cultural support for gender inequity — or weak sanctions against it.

As Michael Flood, who was instrumental in developing the framework notes, 'the most consistent predictor of attitudes supporting the use of violence against women is attitudes towards gender roles — beliefs about appropriate roles for men and women'[iv]. Gender unequal attitudes are then reproduced through peer and organisational cultures. There is a strong link between sexist peer and organisational cultures, including sporting, military and university cultures, and the perpetration of violence against women. Male privilege is also embedded in the structures of our societies, including in our institutions. As anti-violence activist Bob Pease notes, this privilege can be seen in the '…respect, authority, services from women, monetary benefits [and] institutional power that men enjoy at women's expense'[v].

Gender inequity at the levels of the individual, interpersonal relationships, community and society set the conditions for men's use of violence against women. The graph below shows four different measures of gender inequity across 56 countries, compared against rates of violence in those countries[vi].

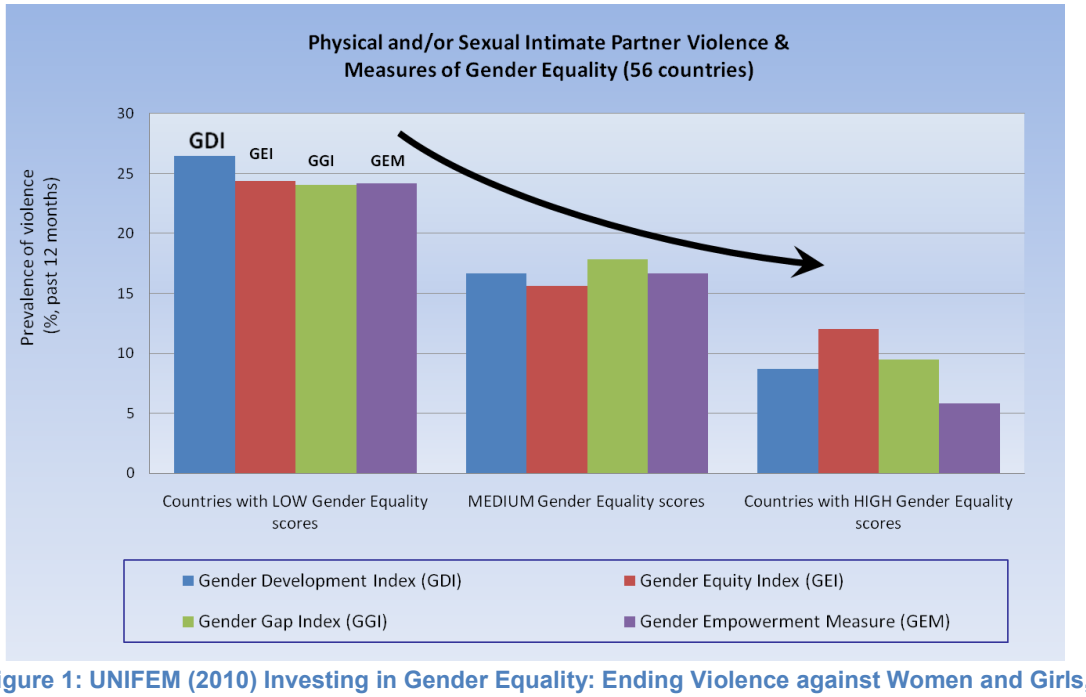

Figure 1: UNIFEM (2010) Investing in Gender Equality: Ending Violence against Women and Girls, http://www.unwomen.org/en/digitallibrary/publications/2010/1/ending-violence-against-women-and-girls-unifem-strategyand-information-kit

As this, and other international research shows, societies, communities and families have lower rates of violence against women when greater equality exists between women and men and girls and boys.

Women in Australia still do not enjoy equity with men. This inequity can be seen through the low numbers of women elected to Parliament, the lack of representation of women in executive

roles, the large and widening gender pay gap, the sexual objectification of women in our media, and the unacceptably high rates of violence against women and girls.

2.2 Factors contributing to violence against women

While we know that gender inequity is the sole predictor of men's use violence against women, there are a number of other factors that contribute to the likelihood, type and extent of the violence. The diagram below articulates the relationship between the determinants and contributing factors of violence against women based on a breadth of recognised evidence[vii].

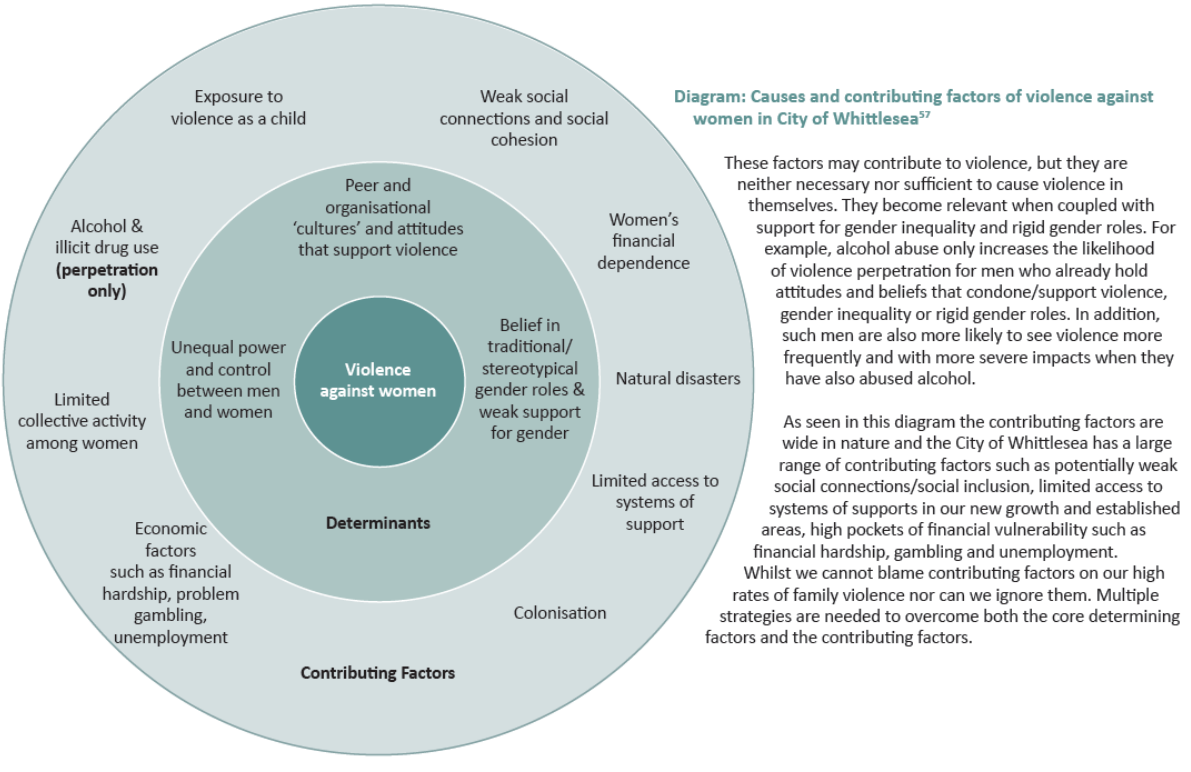

Figure 2: Safe in our homes Safe in our communities Family Violence Strategy 2014-2018, City of Whittlesea: https://www.whittlesea.vic.gov.au/your-council/plans-strategies-and-policies/family-violence-strategy

It is important to note that alcohol is a significant contributing factor to violence against women, but is not a cause. As *Victoria's Action Plan to Address Violence Against Women and Children (2012-15)* notes: most men who drink alcohol do not use violence against women. However, in the 2009-2010 data, police identified alcohol as a definite factor in 43 per cent of family violence incidences (either party) — alcohol is a contributing factor of individual men's violence against women and children rather than a cause. Financial difficulties and psychological illness or depression were also identified in more than one in ten reports of family violence. These factors do not cause family violence nor do they mean that a person who has a psychological illness or is experiencing financial difficulty will use violence against women[viii].

Exposure to violence in childhood is also 'neither a necessary nor sufficient condition for the future perpetration of abuse'[ix]. Many men who use violence against women as adults were not subject to, or the witnesses of such violence in childhood. National cultures have also never been shown to *cause* violence against women. However, being from a culturally and

linguistically diverse (CALD) background can create vulnerabilities for women by creating barriers to accessing support. Likewise, Aboriginal women experience violence at much higher rates than non-Aboriginal women in Australia, because of the impacts of colonisation and lack of access to supports.

2.3 Addressing the causes of violence against women: primary prevention

The MAV commends the Royal Commission for setting a suite of aspirational goals that aim to ultimately eliminate family violence. However, the MAV believes the Royal Commission needs to extend the goal of 'fostering a violence-free society', to acknowledge that this can only occur through 'fostering a violence-free *and gender equitable* society'.

Addressing gender inequity will allow us to respond to all forms of violence against women, including family violence. Violence against women exists along a spectrum from sexist jokes, gender based discrimination, street harassment and sexual harassment, to assault, rape and murder. Violence against women in the public sphere directly influences and reinforces attitudes about women in interpersonal relationships, and vice-versa. We need to create equity between men and women across all settings where people live, work, learn and play, and in all relations, in order to address the pervasive gendered power imbalance and achieve an end to men's violence against women, including an end to family violence.

The seminal work of VicHealth over the past decade has guided much of the primary prevention work happening in Victoria, including through the MAV and Victorian councils. Councils are perfectly placed to work on primary prevention, which will ultimately take pressure off response services. Primary prevention of violence against women and family violence response are complementary, yet distinct disciplines that require a different expertise and skill-set. Primary prevention is long-term work that requires funding and support. It is not an add-on to an existing position or plan, but a separate goal to embed across local government communities and society, at large.

The MAV endorses the joint statement submitted to the Royal Commission by Our Watch[x], *Getting serious about change: the building blocks for effective primary prevention of men's violence against women in Victoria,* and the evidence that underpins primary prevention work.

We recognise that primary prevention activity will not achieve its purpose (to prevent violence against women before it occurs), unless there is an adequately resourced, culturally appropriate and accessible specialist response sector in play. This includes a 24/7 crisis response, casework and support services, legal services and court support, long-term counselling services for women and children, as well as men's behaviour change programs.

We know that a lack of accessible and affordable housing deters victims from leaving violent relationships, pushes victims into homelessness, and can make perpetrators more isolated and increase the risk of repeated or escalated violence. There is a need for a long-term affordable housing strategy that addresses the nexus between family violence and homelessness, including options for women and children to live safely, where possible in their own homes, and

affordable housing pathways for perpetrators to ensure they remain engaged with relevant services to help prevent the risk of further violence.

Opportunity:
Councils can play a role in making accommodation available to family violence related services, such as community legal services or counselling support, in universal and safe, non-identifying environments such as customer service centres, libraries and community hubs.

Recommendation:
Develop a Victorian affordable housing strategy that addresses the link between family violence, housing and homelessness.

Recommendation:
Support infrastructure funding applications from councils building community hubs to enable family-violence related services, such as community legal service and counselling support, to be accommodated in universal, accessible, safe and confidential environments.

3 Context

3.1 State – Local Government Partnership platform for systemic reform

The role of local government in working in partnership with the State on the prevention of family violence, and the primary prevention of violence against women is supported by the Victorian State Local Government Agreement (signed by the Premier and the President of the MAV in September 2014).

To give effect to this Agreement in the social policy and human services areas, the MAV also has specific Partnership Agreements/Protocols with the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and the Department of Education and Training (DET).

At a place based level, all councils are active participants in forming the new sub-regional Children and Youth Area Partnerships. This is a new approach to area based governance, designed to bring together senior representatives from all councils, government, the community sector and the broader community, to better address child and youth vulnerability.

This platform for area-based policy and program design could be utilised to plan systemic place based prevention and intervention responses to family violence, and strengthen the integration of universal, secondary and tertiary services for women, children and young people.

3.2 Municipal planning role

Local government has a legislative responsibility to govern on behalf of their municipal district, to ensure their operations and practice is consistent with creating safe, inclusive and healthy communities. This is articulated in various instruments including the *Local Government Act*, the *Health and Wellbeing Act*, *Disability Discrimination Act* and the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act*, some of which require activity reports from councils.

Councils facilitate local interventions to local issues, whether in response, early intervention or primary prevention, and demonstrate their strength in coordinating whole of community partnerships. There are several key plans that provide the foundation and strategic direction for this work, including:

- Municipal Strategic Statement
- Council Plan
- Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan
- Disability Action Plan
- Emergency Management Plan
- Municipal Early Years Plan
- Cultural Diversity Plan
- Human Rights Charter

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The Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plans are particularly important to the issue of preventing violence against women. In the 2013-17 plans, a significant number of councils prioritise the issue of violence against women, recognising this as a new area of work they are well placed to redress. Whilst the existing State Health Plan does not have a category specifically about family violence or the prevention of violence against women, only mentioned in a comment under priority area *7.7 mental health promotion* and *7.6 Sexual and reproductive health promotion,* councils have demonstrated they are committed to working in this area with 148 family violence related actions included in their plans.

There is an opportunity to scrutinise these actions further and measure where they sit in relation to the social determinant of health framework. This would provide important benchmark data for measuring progress and comparison to future plans that will be developed in the next planning cycle following local government elections in 2016.

The MAV believes the efforts of councils at the local municipal level needs to be reflected in the next State Health Plan, to ensure family violence and the prevention of violence against women are given the priority attention necessary to increase the safety, wellbeing and equality experienced by Victorian women.

We need an agreed systems approach, that includes embedded data collection and reporting through already legislated reporting processes of state and local strategic documents. Councils are ideally placed to apply a 'gendered lens' across key councils strategies and plans, and with adequate resourcing, can work to drive and embed a gendered analysis in these key instruments of councils business.

Opportunity:
The Royal Commission has the opportunity to seek further data analysis of the 148 family violence related actions included in current Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plans by contacting:
Geoffrey R Browne
McCaughey VicHealth Community Wellbeing Unit
Population & Global Health
The University of Melbourne
[redacted] or [redacted]

Recommendation:
The next State Health Plan includes preventing family violence and the primary prevention of violence against women as distinct priority areas necessary to increase the safety, wellbeing and equality experienced by Victorian women.

Recommendation:
Collection of data and information to inform evidence-building practice and interventions at a local level through the National Community Attitudes Survey being conducted at the local municipal level over time periods.

Recommendation:
Collection of data and information to inform evidence-building practice and interventions at a local level through development of a gender equity index for major state and local government strategic plans which can inform reporting over time.

3.3 MAV leadership in the prevention of violence against women

The MAV has benefited from various levels of funding support, initially from VicHealth, and from successive state governments since 2010, to deliver a statewide local government prevention of violence against women initiative. We also note the important role of the Department of Justice Community Crime Prevention Unit, particularly their investment through the reducing violence against women and children grants (2012-2015) and their current funding support for the MAV Preventing Violence Against Women Initiative (2014-2016).

Having this expertise in-house, enables us to harness the growing momentum around prevention of violence against women in our sector, as well as share learnings, build the capacity of councils newer to this work and contribute to building the diversity, sophistication and evidence-base of the work being done by more advanced and better-resourced councils.

The MAV Strategic Plan 2015-16 notes that men's violence is the leading contributor to preventable ill health, death and disability among Victorian women aged 15 to 44, and that violence against women costs the Australian economy $13.6 billion annually. There is a dedicated action in the Strategic Plan for the MAV to advocate for support of councils' leadership role, and in particular, advocacy for investment in local government towards the primary prevention of violence against women.

There are many examples of the work that is being undertaken by the MAV to assist councils in the prevention of violence against women, and gender equity more broadly. Some of the key initiatives from our program of work are summarised below:

Increasing participation of women in local government

The MAV has a strong commitment to encouraging greater participation of women in local government, both as councillors and senior management positions, in recognition of ongoing under-representation of women in these roles.

In Victoria currently, only 34 per cent of councillors are women. The council elections held in November 2012 resulted in all 79 councils having at least one female councillor for the first time, but 10 councils still have only a single female councillor – considerably less than the percentage of women making up their communities.

At the MAV State Council meeting in May 2015, a motion was passed to endorse the Victorian Government's policy of at least 50 per cent female representation in future judicial and paid board appointments.

The MAV has also commited to undertaking a campaign to lift the number of women standing for council, as research has shown that when women stand for council they are just as likely as men to be elected; however, they often don't stand for election without targeted encouragement.

The MAV also shows support for increasing the number of women participating in local government by:

- Endorsing the Victorian local government Women's Charter principles which are gender equity, diversity and active citizenship
- Promoting the activities of the Australian Local Government Women's Association
- Ensuring that our events and training that encourage people to stand for council election are welcoming and accessible to female participants
- Encouraging councils to consider initiatives which will increase the participation of women at political and community levels
- Promoting gender equity within local government to assist in the prevention of violence against women, as highlighted throughout this submission.

At the May State Council meeting, there was also a motion passed to encourage councils to actively lift female representation amongst the ranks of council CEOs and senior executives. The MAV will consult with our Gender Equity Prevention of Violence Against Women Leadership Group for their insights to support this commitment.

MAV Prevention of Violence Against Women Leadership Statement

Another way that the MAV has progressed its gender equity work is through the Prevention of Violence Against Women Leadership Statement, launched at the State Council meeting in 2012. In this, the MAV commits to provide leadership in promoting gender equity and preventing violence against women through:

- **Advocacy to other levels of government** to increase the resources in clarifying, enhancing and implementing legislation, and influencing social norms for more equal relationships between men and women
- **Building capacity within this organisation, and the sector**, to understand the prevalence, seriousness and preventable nature of the problem, and the roles that local government can play in addressing gender equity and promoting respectful relationships
- **Promoting local government's role**, achievements and best practice in preventing violence against women to the sector and other levels of government. In addition, championing 'whole-of-community' approaches to raising awareness and responding to opportunities to promote respectful relationships
- **Supporting local councils** in their community leadership roles by facilitating the provision of resources including advice, expertise, networks and policy support.

The Leadership Statement also sets out seven evidence-based strategies for preventing violence against women in a local government setting. These strategies are abridged versions of those developed by Maribyrnong City Council in their Guide for Local Government, and emphasise a whole-of-council approach, to embed the primary prevention of violence against women in the organisation's culture, practices and services.

The seven strategies are to:

- build relationships — across council and with others
- stimulate and nurture leadership — at all levels of the organisation
- raise the profile of primary prevention — internally and externally
- share the learning — at every opportunity, to reflect and refine what's being done
- develop the workforce — to have confidence in doing this work
- normalise workplace discussion about gender equity — it is something we can all aspire to achieve
- influence and adapt council business — by applying a gender lens.

The Leadership Statement is an important cornerstone to our work and formalises council leadership and engagement in this space. The Leadership Statement has been formally endorsed by a number of councils, including rural councils such as Yarriambiack Shire Council in the state's north-west and Strathbogie Shire Council in the state's north-east.

Resource development

The MAV continues to develop a suite of resources to assist Victorian councils to begin to engage, progress and strengthen their activities in the promotion of gender equity and prevention of violence against women. This has included development of:

- Ten preventing violence information sheets designed to support councils, particularly those just starting out, with their preventing violence against women strategies
- An information sheet highlighting the links between family violence and animal management issues for councils officers to be aware of
- An information sheet noting the gendered differences that need to be considered in emergency management planning and response
- Contributing to the development of a series of 10 gender equity fact sheets for local government to apply a gender lens to areas of council business.

The MAV recently won a prestigious international award for our Prevention of Violence Against Women - Leading Change in the Victorian Local Government Sector booklet (2013). The Avon Global Communications Awards recognise work that helps change communities, policies, institutions and behaviours to end violence against women. The booklet was selected from nearly 400 submissions by 146 organisations in 42 countries. We will use the $5,000 award grant to fund the creation of a prevention of violence against women infographic for local government, which will be developed in partnership with Our Watch, and be available for use by local government across Australia. The MAV is also keen to produce another edition of the

booklet in 2015, with new case studies that highlight the increasingly sophisticated nature of the work occurring in Victorian councils.

MAV Preventing Violence Against Women Network

Another part of the MAV initiative has been to convene a statewide network of local government prevention practitioners, along with key partners (such as women's health, community services and State Government departments). The MAV Preventing Violence Against Women Network has met quarterly since May 2010 and provides great value to council representatives as attested to below:

> *"I have seen firsthand the pivotal role that this network offers. Those working in local government are supported by peers, as this work is very challenging. Network members support each other in their practice, share ideas and resources, which is particularly beneficial to small rural councils who have limited resources."*
> *Chair of the MAV PVAW Network, Deputy Mayor, Strathbogie Shire Council*

> *"The MAV PVAW network is a fantastic resource for my work within our municipality. Any questions regarding family violence related issues are responded to with opportunities for support, what works and what doesn't, readily at hand and shared between members."*
> *Community Safety Officer, Greater Shepparton City Council*

> *"Participation in the MAV PVAW network provides opportunity to share information and approaches to this work; support each other to work through problems and the opportunity to work as a sector on progressing social change in promoting gender equity. We are greater than the sum of our parts."*
> *City Issues Officer, Melbourne City Council*

> *"The MAV PVAW is a valuable network for Mitchell Shire Council to tap into to share information, educational resources and ideas with other councils, especially other regional/rural councils that face similar issues of locality and resourcing."*
> *Community Engagement Officer, Mitchell Shire Council.*

MAV Gender Equity Preventing Violence Against Women Leadership Group

In 2012, the MAV established a Gender Equity Preventing Violence Against Women Leadership Group, consisting of councillors and executive managers from every region across Victoria. The Leadership Group is a sub-committee of the MAV Human Services Committee, a formal committee of the MAV. The Leadership Group are champions within the local government sector for gender equity and the prevention of violence against women, and advocates for opportunities to grow primary prevention efforts across councils. The MAV President is also a prominent White Ribbon Ambassador and champions the potential of councils to lead community engagement and action in the prevention of violence against women.

In 2014, the MAV delivered Strategic Leadership Engagement Sessions (SLES) to councillors and executive managers from the nine Victorian councils that were involved in the Preventing Violence against Women in Our Community project, funded by the former DHS Office of Women's Affairs 2011-2014. The MAV is keen to review the Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) evaluation of this three-year pilot project, as there is an opportunity to build on the learnings, as well as those from our experiences delivering the SLES sessions to inform future work.

Our evidence-based approach through the activities outlined above has contributed to the energy and interest being demonstrated by councils across the state. There are mayors and councillors, including many men from rural areas, prioritising the issue of violence against women in their municipalities for the first time. The time is now to harness this energy and engage with local communities to create attitudinal and structural change.

Recommendation:
Support local government's role and capability to progress gender equity and influence attitudinal change through resourcing the MAV in an advisory capacity to coordinate and inform sector efforts and partner with the state government and other key stakeholders.

3.4 Council leadership in the prevention of violence against women

Local government is a large employer, with many employees being local residents. Rural and regional councils are often the largest employer in their entire local government area.

There are 79 councils across Victoria, and councillors and council officers consistently cross paths with their communities. This provides enormous opportunity to ensure women feel safe, connected and valued in their communities.

A snapshot of the Victorian local government role and function is provided below:

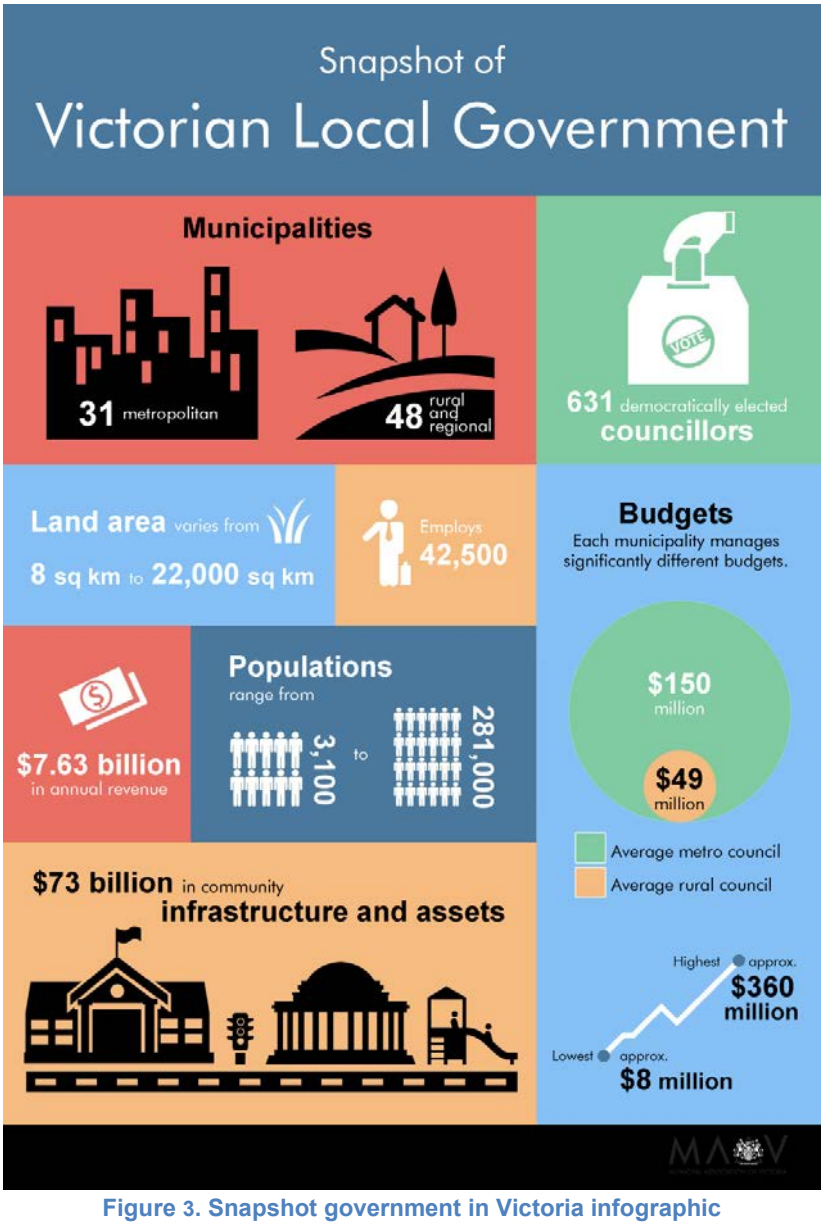

Figure 3. Snapshot government in Victoria infographic

As civic leaders, councils enjoy unrivalled reach and access across their local communities, with more than 140 council services touching some aspects of people's lives. Councils are on the frontline of whole-of-life service delivery: from Maternal and Child Health, to early years, youth and family services, right through to aged care.

A snapshot of this reach is demonstrated in the infographic below:

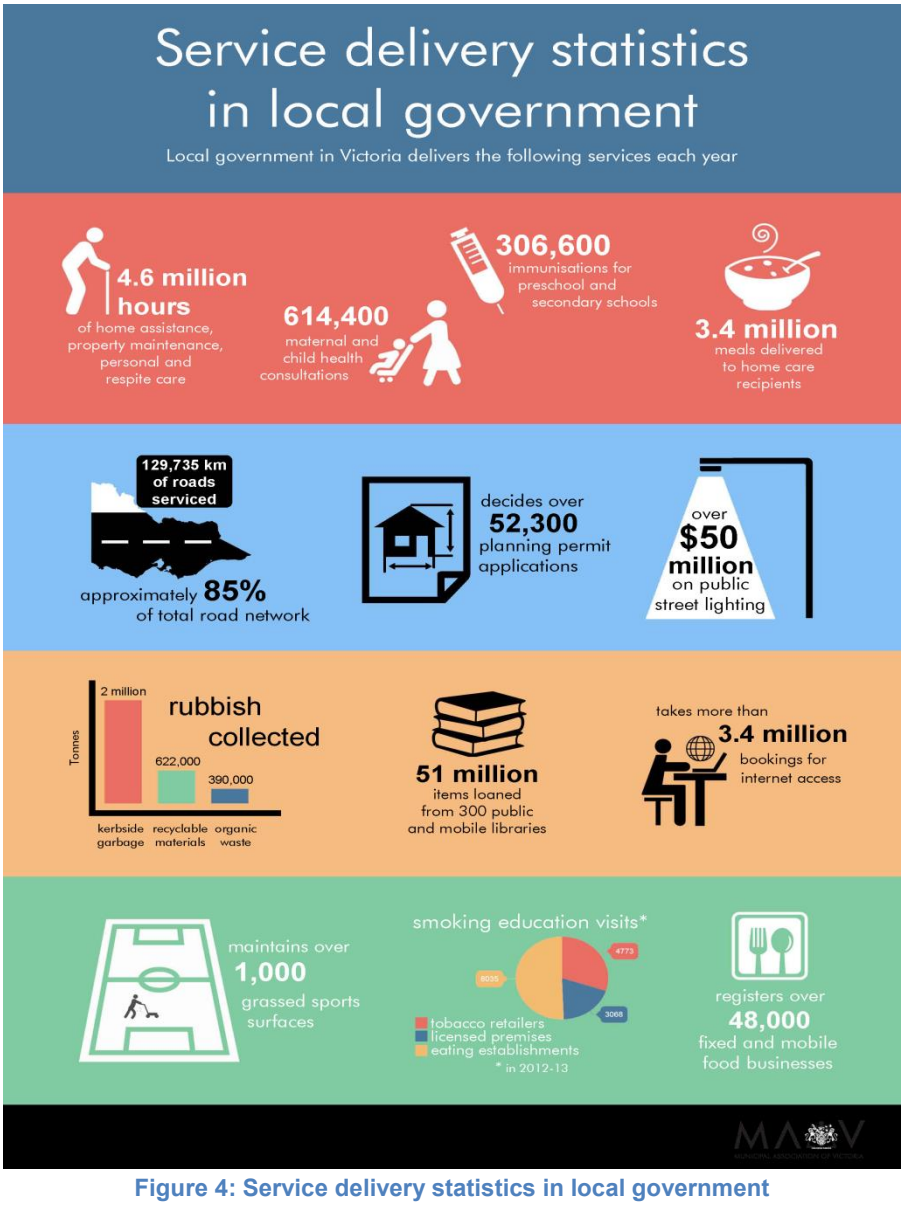

Figure 4: Service delivery statistics in local government

In Victoria, councils are leading the way with programs, activities, policies and initiatives that aim to prevent violence against women and promote gender equality starting at a very local level. Given councils work closely with individuals, families and community organisations, councils are ideally situated to promote whole-of-community efforts to address gender inequality.

The breadth of local government and the opportunities to apply a gender lens to a wide range of areas within councils is represented below.

Reach of councils: where people live, work, play and learn

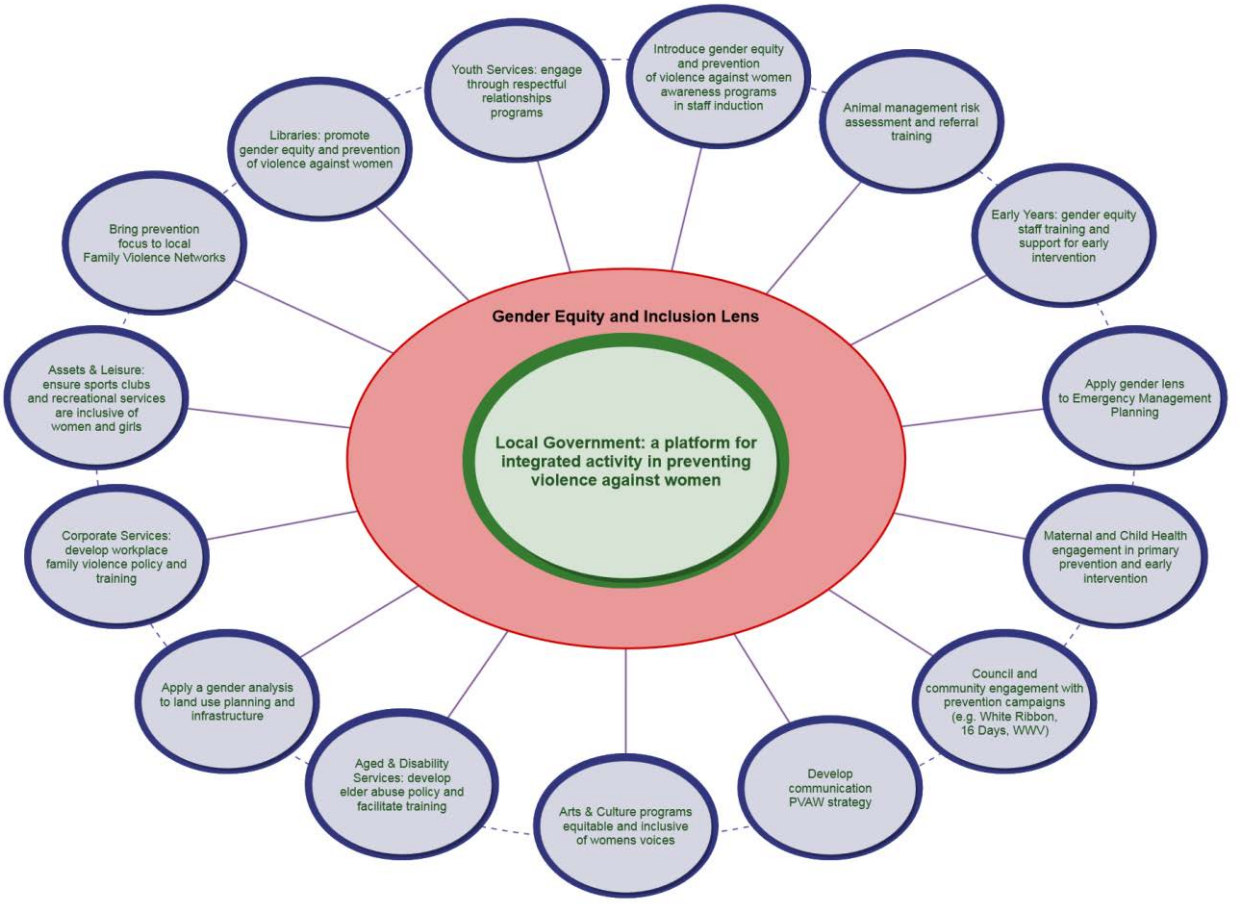

Figure 5: Local government: a platform for integrated activity in preventing violence against women

To harness the potential of local government as a universal platform for integrated primary prevention, will require resourcing in each municipality to drive and embed change across the settings and services that connect with local communities on a day-to-day basis. Many councils see themselves as having a role in preventing violence against women, but lack funding and support, to resource the work both internally and externally. This is particularly true for rural shires with severely limited resources but vastly great geography.

We know a short-term, project-by-project approach does not work when it comes to primary prevention. This is long-term work, that requires a whole-of-government, whole-of-community bipartisan plan. Local government offers a unique and valuable capacity to partner in this shared effort, working in a consistent evidence-based and evidence-building framework.

As noted in the principles contained in the *Getting serious about change: the building blocks for effective primary prevention of men's violence against women in Victoria* joint statement*, 'broad, deep and sustainable change requires both a comprehensive, society-wide approach to prevention, and an 'architecture' or set of supports that only government can provide'*. Local government can play a significant role in leading and partnering in this work to support the necessary *'move from the current project-focused level, and start the hard work of achieving deep, sustained and measurable whole-of-population change'*.

Recommendation:
Support councils' role and capacity to progress gender equity and influence attitudinal change through resourcing all councils as civic leaders to promote attitudinal change and facilitate community based local responses through allocation of development officers — similar to the DHHS Building Inclusive Communities program (Metro and Rural Access).

Recommendation:
Consider the findings and recommendations made by the Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) of the local government cluster project in the Preventing Violence Against Women in our Community program evaluation.

Recommendation:
Build councils' workforce capacity through systemised and evaluated training opportunities, including early intervention and risk assessment training, tailored to particular professions and work environments (for example libraries, local laws, MCH, kinder/child care, youth workers, HACC staff), incorporating a diversity and inclusion (intersectional) lens.

4 Population and program focus areas of councils

In this section we outline some of the challenges faced by councils as well as some of the opportunities this Royal Commission affords.

4.1 Early years

Local government has a key legislated role in improving the coordination and strategic planning of early childhood services at a local level. It does so through its Municipal Health and Wellbeing Plans and its non-statutory Municipal Early Years Plans. These plans provide the strategic direction for the coordination of educational, care and health programs and activities; and other local developments that impact on children from birth to school entry in a municipality.

The early years platform in Victoria is underpinned by two universal services: MCH and kindergarten. Local government is the primary provider of MCH services and it is also a significant provider and planner for early years services including kindergarten. Eighty-eight percent of Victoria's kindergartens operate from council-owned buildings at a cost to ratepayers. Councils also support, directly operate and provide buildings for long day care, family day care and occasional care, to ensure families have a range of flexible options that suit their care and work needs.

Councils play a key leadership, coordination and capacity building role across their early years communities, and they work closely with a range of partners and services in their municipalities to plan for and deliver services to children and families.

There is an opportunity to enhance our early years services by reviewing the National Quality Framework (NQF) to reflect a gender lens across programs and practice, to ensure young girls and boys are enjoying equal access and opportunity, that are not limited by unintended bias and gender stereotyping (such as pink and blue; types of toys on offer to girls and boys etc.). By embedding principles of equality and respect throughout early years services, Early Years Learning Framework and the NQF, we can lay the foundations for building confident children and young people who view their male and female peers as equals.

Councils also play a key role in supporting the State Government to implement a range of policies and strategies aimed at better identifying and supporting vulnerable children and their families. This could not be achieved without the support of local government; however, further investment is required to ensure that vulnerable children and their families are truly a shared responsibility of all levels of government.

Councils undertake a range of direct and indirect prevention activities that are aimed to assist vulnerable children to receive timely and optimal support to meet their development and wellbeing needs. Some strategies and activities are simple, yet extremely effective in ensuring children are accessing the universal services. For example, councils invest in their MCH databases and also provide a Central Enrolment Scheme for Kindergarten. The cross-checking

of these two databases can assist in the identification of children who come from vulnerable circumstances, which are often reflective of the family being at risk including family violence and poverty.

With 54,000 families known to be vulnerable and up to 195,000 families potentially becoming vulnerable[xi], the connections between vulnerability and family violence are strong. Ongoing targeted investment to councils is needed to implement prevention strategies that focus on children being connected to the universal platforms. This provides an opportunity for cost-effective early intervention to be implemented, with a focus on family circumstances and parental capacity and behaviour through the child.

Increased risk of family violence

A significant number of women report that their first experience of violence from their partner occurred when they were pregnant[xii], and existing family violence is often exacerbated during pregnancy and the transition to early parenting. In this context, it is vital for professionals working with expectant and new mothers to be trained in how to confidently identify and respond to family violence. While this training is available, there are a number of MCH nurses reporting they are still not confident in undertaking this work.[xiii]

One model for supporting new mothers who may be at risk or experiencing family violence is to increase the capacity for MCH nurses to be able to refer to specialist family violence services. Strengthening capacity of existing networks, such as Child FIRST Alliances, to work with local government is needed to ensure timely referral of women at risk of family violence. In addition, significantly greater investment is needed to improve availability of specialist family violence services outreach to local Hubs and MCH centres.

MCH Key and Stage Framework

All councils are required to follow up on each birth notification and provide/coordinate MCH services for local parents, with targeted support for vulnerable families. MCH nurses have a unique opportunity to build relationships with families in a non-judgmental and non-threatening environment. Participation rates for MCH are at 90 per cent for the first four months and at 80 per cent for the first 12 months, providing access to a large proportion of families at a vulnerable time in their developing family dynamics. MCH nurses provide a safe place for families to discuss issues and support the disclosure of family violence. Identification of family violence is a key component of the MCH Key and Stage Framework.

The local communities are becoming more aware that MCH nurses are a source of information and support, who provide opportunities for women in particular, to disclose issues of family violence. This creates challenges for the MCH service with lack of referral options available; for women and men, in particular in relation to, insufficient training and information sharing across

disciplines to better assist families to access support, particularly when children are separated from their families.

The challenge for councils is the implementation of policies to ensure the safety of MCH workers, particularly when working in isolation. Addressing this occupational health and safety issue has the additional burden of resourcing for local government in providing adequate infrastructure, additional staffing to ensure workers are not working in isolation, development of innovative responses through the Enhanced MCH Service and the provision of adequate training for staff.

During an MCH universal consult the disclosure of family violence can result in added time pressure on the service and the MCH nurse, as there is an imperative to meet the safety needs of the family and children. Flexibility in diary management and support for the nurse is not always readily available to facilitate the additional time that a response requires. This again adds pressure on local government to adequately resource the service response within a tight fiscal budget.

Service coordination

Local government is key to coordinating services for their local communities and assisting with continuity of access to universal services as has been identified within the Out of Home Care agreement.

Local government has a key role to play in planning, developing and supporting local hubs and in bringing universal services including MCH, playgroups, pre-schools and primary schools together in local areas. Important messages about the impact of violence upon the mental health of infants and very young children can be safely imparted in the context of universal services such as key age and stage visits, facilitated playgroups, and resources available through local libraries. Universal access to services allows women to feel connected to a support system that is safe and gives her space to make decisions about her own and her children's safety.

Facilitated playgroups

Communities of high vulnerability include newly arrived families who are often reluctant to access universal services, and Aboriginal families who have experienced generations of disadvantage and overbearing scrutiny by statutory services. Long-standing fear and suspicion of statutory services contribute to an avoidance of services. Services that are culturally respectful and relevant and use culturally appropriate equipment, and books in first language, can be used within the home to discuss matters of importance and concern to women. This requires forethought, planning and resourcing to provide universal services with appropriate materials.

Facilitated playgroups that employ women from targeted vulnerable communities successfully assist these communities in the context of universal service delivery, facilitating access to universal local government services. These facilitated playgroups are all too often funded on an annual 'pilot' basis and are not sustained because there is a perception that they need to be self-sustaining after 12 months. Projects of this kind need to be maintained and supported through recurrent funding. Secure recurrent funding to facilitated playgroups in vulnerable communities is essential to enable employment and empower local women. For example, Early Learning is Fun [ELF] run by Berry Street and the MAV Aboriginal Early Childhood Employment.

Partnerships

Local government is the most trusted tier of the three levels of government. Families share information directly with universal service providers because they are voluntarily seeking assistance with particular aspects of their family life, which is of concern to them. Women's agency is important at this level of seeking assistance. Local relationships and networks work well in sharing information despite an absence of formal mechanisms. However, when personnel change so does the level of information exchange.

A system that has proven to assist in maintaining professional connections with families despite personnel change or the transitory nature of some families is Patchwork. Patchwork is an example of a limited information exchange where confidentiality is not compromised and where workers are able to identify who is already working with a given family. The support of the extension of the roll-out of Patchwork across the community service sector can only enhance the relationship and networking of professionals working at an early intervention and response to better support vulnerable families. Facilitation and clarification from the highest levels of government in the implementation and roll-out of Patchwork is critical to the protection of vulnerable women and children.

Across the community services sector there are multiple internal and agency specific data bases and case management systems, but there is no single platform to share basic information and data with which to enhance communication across sectors, across agencies and across programs, or within agencies to support women and children where concerns have been identified.

The introduction of the Risk Assessment and Management Panels (RAMPS) in Geelong and Hume local government areas are an example of where collaboration and cross communication works well. Each agency in these areas sign an agreement to share information under strict conditions of confidentiality. Centrelink is a critical partner, as are Victoria Police, Department of Human Services, the Department of Housing, the Department of Justice, Office of Corrections, Family Violence services and a number of local family support agencies.

Local government MCH nurses, in particular staff working within the Enhanced MCH program, are able to offer important information about the children's development in families of concern, as well as other information about family histories. This level of collaboration across agencies and sectors secures sound risk management and planning for the better protection of women and children. In this submission we seek to improve prevention and early intervention to councils' MCH services, youth and family services through increasing the Enhanced MCH Services' capacity to provide continuity in meeting the needs of vulnerable families and children, by extending the program from antenatal to two years of age (it is currently birth to one year).

Recommendation:
Increase capacity of existing networks, such as Child FIRST Alliances, to work with local government to enhance the level of collaboration between universal, secondary and specialty services.

Recommendation:
Increase capacity of specialist family violence services to provide outreach through universal services such as local hubs and MCH centres.

Recommendation:
Support and improve prevention and early intervention to councils' MCH services, youth and family services through increasing the Enhanced MCH Services' capacity to provide continuity in meeting the needs of vulnerable families and children, by extending the program from antenatal to two years of age (it is currently birth to one year).

Recommendation:
Building on the evidence base and evaluation findings of new parent programs that engage new mothers and fathers, adapt and target through Enhanced MCH Services across the state to reach more vulnerable families.

Recommendation:
Support and improve prevention and early intervention to councils' MCH services, youth and family services through the roll-out of the 'Patchwork' tool statewide with the MAV to better link agencies in supporting families, children and young people, across universal, secondary and tertiary services

Recommendation:
Improve data collection through the new statewide Child Development Information System (CDIS), enabling improved follow-up of families falling through the gaps (CDIS currently being developed by MAV for the MCH service).

MUNICIPAL ASSOCIATION OF VICTORIA

Case Study: Darebin City Council

Promoting Positive Gender Norms in Early years to Prevent Violence Against Women

As part of Darebin City Council's work to strengthen prevention of violence against women in the early years setting, they have worked in partnership with Women's Health in the North (WHIN), to deliver training to internal staff and early years educators, to increase their understanding of the role of gender norms in preventing violence against women and children.

The early years are a time when rigid gender roles and ideas of gender can start to be shaped, but also a time when we can have a positive influence of children's and families understanding of gender norms. There are many opportunities for early years educators, policy makers and children's program developers to have a positive influence of gender, through children's play, language, toys and storytelling, to name a few.

The training utilised a continuum of violence against women as the basis of the sessions to highlight the impact of traditional gender roles, sexism and objectification, on family violence and violence against women. This model focused on the practical application of this knowledge in the early years setting.

Participant comments include:

"I have learnt about the statistics of violence against women and the connection with perpetuating traditional gender norms in our society, and with children specifically."

"I will definitely be more aware of the messages I send when communicating to children and parents about gender. The discussion about toys is particularly relevant."

"I will introduce these concepts with new parents groups, talking about choice of toys and play for children."

The training was delivered as part of their approach to embed prevention approaches into everyday practice. Following the success of this training, Darebin Council will continue to work with early years educators to provide professional development opportunities and to strengthen their council programs and services that are delivered to children and families to consider, gender, shared parenting practices and prevention of violence against women.

For more information contact:
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Darebin City Council
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MUNICIPAL ASSOCIATION OF VICTORIA

Case study: Great South Coast region of Victoria

Baby Makes 3

Initially funded through VicHealth in 2007, Whitehorse Community Health (now Carrington Health) developed the Baby Makes 3 (BM3) program. Thanks to funding through the Department of Justice Community Crime Prevention Unit, the program is currently being offered in seven council areas in the Eastern Metro Region and five council areas in the Great South Coast region of Victoria.

The program is aimed at parents who have had their first child and focuses on gender equity and building respectful relationships, delivered as part of the MCH new parent groups. Both parents attend with their baby and topics covered include transition to parenthood; expectations of mums and dads; who does what/gender roles; sex and intimacy; dealing with conflict, and communication.

Since 2013 in the Great South Coast region 147 parents have completed the program. The project is being evaluated by Deakin University and their report is to be presented to State Government in November 2015. Data to date indicates the program is well regarded by the parents who have attended with the majority rating the sessions as "*very good* or *excellent.*"

Participant comments include:

"It is good for fathers to express their feelings."

"It is important to invest in this relationship with my partner."

"It's important to connect with other families and see we are not alone."

"It's been very beneficial as a new dad and to see how others are going."

Anecdotal comments relayed back to MCH nurses confirm the value the parents see in the program. Given the lack of programs for new dads, one of the strengths of BM3 has been the connection developed for dads.

A trial antenatal "pre Baby Makes 3" is being delivered as part of the antenatal classes at one of the regional maternity hospitals. This will also be evaluated by Deakin University and has been an important initiative to engage with dads as there are few opportunities for dads to meet as a group.

For more information contact:
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Warrnambool City Council
T: [redacted] M: [redacted]
E: [redacted]

4.2 Young people

Local government across Victoria delivers a broad range of services and programs aimed at supporting the personal and social development of young people and their social inclusion. These services and programs range from primary prevention activities aimed at connecting all young people with their communities, through to early — and sometimes, secondary intervention programs.

Some councils regularly provide services which may be described as tertiary interventions, while others will sometimes deliver in the secondary or tertiary 'space' for a defined period to respond to emerging issues which would otherwise not be addressed.

All councils respond to emerging needs within their communities within available resources and this includes the strong coordination and partnership development role played by local government. The role local government in Victoria undertakes in youth services is not fully acknowledged or recognised by other levels of government and this is evidenced in the lack of a system response or investment over many years.

Many metropolitan councils employ over 10 EFT staff and the local government sector expends over $40 million annually on youth services. There is significant opportunity to invest in council youth services to further harness the linkages between schools and civic leadership and engagement, and to promote respectful relationships in a sustained, coordinated statewide effort.

Recommendation:
Acknowledge and invest in councils' youth services in working to build civic engagement, leadership and respectful relationships programs in schools and community settings.

MUNICIPAL ASSOCIATION OF VICTORIA

4.3 Elder abuse

Local government has a critical role in creating safe and connected communities that are inclusive of older people. New approaches to ageing focus on capacity and aim to encourage active, healthy, engaged, independent and connected older people empowered to participate in community life. Rights and respect are the basis of these positive ageing directions and councils have been active in encouraging more respectful attitudes toward older people in their communities. However some older people find themselves in vulnerable situations where their rights are abused and they are subject to financial, sexual or emotional abuse from family members or trusted others.

Forms of elder abuse can easily be overlooked as a type of family violence and vulnerable older people can be at risk of family violence. Often it is a gender power imbalance within families that culminates in abusive relationships in later years. It is estimated that between one to five per cent of older people are subject to abuse but comprehensive national data is not available.

The Victorian government's Elder Abuse Prevention and Response Guidelines (2012-2014) acknowledges the role of local government in increasing community awareness around the issue of elder abuse and the potential for prevention and early intervention strategies. Councils have made use of elder abuse training packages, with many council staff in front line services and in other roles working with older people having undertaken the training.

Seniors Rights Victoria (SRV) funded by the State is the referral service used. SRV also provides a range of education services and tools which are used by councils. Elder abuse is firmly on the government's agenda with support services provided by SRV the key statewide referral and support service for older people experiencing elder abuse. Many councils have adopted Elder Abuse Protocols to guide the response of council staff where there is a suspected case of elder abuse. Working with community agencies, these protocols outline the reporting and responses to suspected incidents of elder abuse.

The MAV has actively encouraged local government commitment to elder abuse prevention through a range of actions and through representation on the state Elder Abuse Prevention and Response Advisory Group. The MAV also sits on the reference group for the Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria's elder abuse project. The MAV works with SRV and has actively encouraged councils to raise awareness of elder abuse in their communities and for staff to undertake elder abuse training. Local government has been active in promoting World Elder Abuse Awareness Day within their communities contributing to wider community knowledge.

Local government's role as a key provider of HACC services to older people is critical to the identification of and response to elder abuse. HACC services assist people who need support to live independently at home with meals, personal and respite care, allied health, social support, property maintenance and basic cleaning among the services provided. In 2012/13 Victorian councils provided more than 300,000 HACC services to older Victorians. HACC staff hold a

unique position having access to older people in their homes, where a critical opportunity exists for identifying when things do not seem right and there is suspected abuse of a vulnerable older person. Councils have trained their HACC assessment and support staff and other staff through the State Government elder abuse prevention training and continue to use the online training now available.

Opportunities:

Into the future the MAV acknowledges the need:

- To develop a 'Gender and Ageism' lens to support councils in their decision making processes that are inclusive of older residents
- For national data to be collected around elder abuse incidents as there is currently no central information
- For safe accommodation options for older women to seek refuge from abusive relationships
- for continued development of training, policies and procedures around elder abuse to build community awareness
- Resourcing of a Preventing Violence Against Women / Gender Equity development role in councils could enhance opportunities and support partnership development in this area.

Recommendation:

Collection of data and information to inform evidence-building practice and interventions at a local level by developing a state elder abuse database and advocate for development of a national elder abuse database.

4.4 Cultural diversity

Due to local differences in cultural diversity, councils are in a unique position and not only play a crucial role, but have a legal responsibility to promote the wellbeing of *all* residents. Especially in Victoria where almost 50 per cent of people have at least one overseas born parent, councils take a keen interest in how a person's culture impacts their wellbeing. Beyond this, councils have a role to foster social cohesion, which is jeopordised by both racism and violence against women.

Most Victorian councils understand the balance of treating everyone the same, whilst offering approaches recognising that everyone is different. Whilst violence against women crosses all cultures, culture does contribute to violence against women, so it's important to develop tailored strategies. This person-based approach considers difference within and between cultures, any additional risk due to intersectional factors (such as also having a disability), and translates into best practice.

Cultural norms that support violence against women exist in all groups, including Anglo culture. However, Aboriginal* women tend to experience higher rates of violence due to the impacts of colonisation, lack of access to support and other factors. Having a multicultural background can create additional vulnerabilities such as social isolation, insufficient English skills to use mainstream services (or even know that they exist), and perhaps being dependent on a partner to remain in Australia (and with their children); a powerful disincentive for seeking support or reporting violence.

The VicHealth funded Localities Embracing and Accepting Diversity (LEAD) program in the cities of Greater Shepparton and Whittlesea demonstrated the value of place-based initiatives to support cultural diversity and concluded that working with councils was critical to their success. Council's role in addressing violence against culturally diverse women** has been recognised by several Victorian councils:

- Darebin City Council host 'Opening Doors: Supporting CALD (culturally and linguistically diverse) women experiencing Family Violence', a forum series on refugees and asylum seekers, local domestic violence services and local responses for CALD women and children.
- Whittlesea City Council made culturally diverse women (and men) a priority population in their 2014-18 'Safe in our Homes, Safe in our Communities, Family Violence Strategy'.
- Brimbank City Council's Plan to Prevent Men's Violence Against Women: Towards Gender Equity (2015-19) includes partnering with the Australian Multicultural Foundation on women's leadership programs. Their definition of gender analysis considers cultural and linguistic background and that a person's cultural and religious beliefs may influence whether they report violence to police.
- The cities of Casey, Greater Dandenong and Cardinia have partnered on a 'Challenge Family Violence Project' (funded by the Department of Justice) to work with faith leaders on a kit enabling faith communities to respond to and prevent family violence in their own settings (see case study below)

- The Victorian Local Government Multicultural Issues Network (VLGMIN) is focusing its 2015 annual forum on preventing violence against women with multicultural backgrounds.

Other council approaches to prevent violence against culturally diverse women include:

- Officer's move from relying on translation provided by children and other family to better utilising translating and interpreting services (though more funding is needed)
- Availability of response service information (e.g. pamphlets and cards) at MCH centres, libraries and community centres
- Acknowledgement of needing to involve males of all ages
- Increased use of phone apps/YouTube (proven successful with diverse communities)
- Acknowledgement of a need for initiatives recognising that, in terms of cultural change, many non-English speaking communities are not at the same stage as the 'mainstream'
- Increased involvement of agencies in applying cross-cultural feminism
- Research into an appropriate time during settlement to raise preventing violence against women and gender equity (based on research being done by the Office of Multicultural Affairs and Citizenship and CQ Cultural Consulting due mid 2015).

Opportunities:

Increased workplace diversity: Reviewing recruitment processes can enhance council's ability to prevent violence against culturally diverse women. VLGMIN's 2013 forum focused on improved outcomes when workplaces better reflect the diversity of its community. The MAV developed a Victorian local government Aboriginal employment framework and the City of Greater Geelong included community leaders in selection panels to recruit a worker to research responses to violence against Kareni women.

Council frontline service staff and integrated services: MCH, HACC and other services are key entry points for identifying at risk women, service referral and creating a safe space. For example, due to mistrust in government but simultaneous valuing of immunisation, many refugees and asylum seekers only engage council at child immunisations. This is somewhat unique to Victoria as in other states most immunisations are done outside of council. There is opportunity to survey the capacity of such staff to identify and appropriately respond to family violence, and to adopt a platform for integrated and inclusive services.

Utilisation of existing council relationships: Council staff have strong and long-held relationships with culturally diverse communities and those who support them. Many are well-connected, skilled brokers who can facilitate appropriate connections and offer place-based advice on addressing violence against culturally diverse women.

Increased project sustainability: The LEAD program identified that staff changes delayed program implementation and reduced its effectiveness, recommended that cultural diversity programs consider the time it takes to develop partnerships and implement actions, and highlighted the importance of *ongoing engagement* when working across different council departments. This is the case with integrated approaches to violence against culturally diverse

women. Councils advocate for sustainable funding to achieve outcomes with culturally diverse communities and are experienced in delivering projects with realistic time-frames. Project sustainability avoids 'false hope', builds community trust and staff capacity, ensures the staff consistency required to maintain community relationships and best creates cultural change.

Partnering with and learning from non-council organisations:
Councils can improve approaches by understanding the experiences of other organisations. For example:

- Learnings of practitioners who attended VicHealth's 2014 Community of Practice Forum on Working with culturally and linguistically diverse communities
- Our Watch's partnerships with Whittlesea Community Connections and CoHealth on projects with, respectively, Iranian and Indian communities which highlight the need for consumer directed primary prevention
- An intersectional service offered by inTouch's Family Violence Health Justice Partnership Model that offers patients culturally sensitive social workers, health providers and lawyers at the same time and place.

Applying a diversity-inclusive lens over existing initiatives:

- Advocating for, and where possible assisting, culturally appropriate and affordable counselling and refuge accommodation for families less likely to have support networks
- Increased culturally appropriate community education on legal rights
- Advocating for increased translating and interpreting services
- Separate initiatives targeted at Aboriginal and multicultural boys, men, girls and women
- Increased relationships between staff (MCH, HACC etc.) and settlement service providers
- Focus on financial abuse and social isolation
- Research and consultation into different needs and experiences between non-English speaking communities, between refugee vs migrant families (e.g. visa triggers), and between different municipalities (thereby capturing differences between Aboriginal communities)
- Messaging and imagery that's inclusive, in plain English and appropriate for the target audience's cultural and settlement stage
- A focus on non-family violence, e.g. against Muslim women by non-Muslims on public transport.

Opportunity:
Resourcing of a Preventing Violence Against Women/Gender Equity development role in councils could enhance opportunities and support partnership development in this area.

*Aboriginal refers to people who identify as Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, or both.
** Culturally diverse women refers to Aboriginal women and those with multicultural backgrounds, or both.

Case study: City of Greater Dandenong

Engaging faith communities to prevent family violence

Faith communities are an important setting to engage for the prevention of violence against women[xiv]. As role models who provide moral guidance and ethics in the community, faith leaders can play a significant role in fostering social norms, beliefs and practices that reduce and prevent violence against women[xv]. Faith leaders can also lead the way in advocating to change gender inequitable structures and practices within their own settings and in broader society (such as advocating for greater inclusion and participation of women in leadership and decision-making positions). Furthermore, faith communities are important contexts in which CALD communities can be reached[xvi].

The importance of reaching CALD communities in preventing family violence is evident when one considers that CALD women are identified as a group at risk, and often experience significant impacts of domestic violence due to low levels of language proficiency, different understandings of domestic violence, lack of familial and social support, lack of knowledge about the legal system and dependence on an Australian sponsor[xvii].

CHALLENGE Family Violence project

The CHALLENGE Family Violence project is funded by the Victorian Department of Justice and Regulation in partnership between City of Greater Dandenong, City of Casey, Cardinia Shire Council and Monash Health. The City of Greater Dandenong has been working with faith and spiritual leaders from the community to develop a faith-based resource kit to prevent and reduce family violence. The faith and spiritual leaders were recruited from the Dandenong Interfaith Network and represent a diverse range of traditions including: Baha'i, Brahma Kumaris, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Sathya Sai and Sikhism.

The resource is under development and stems from a close partnership between council and a working group of faith and spiritual leaders. The working group has been meeting regularly with City of Greater Dandenong to produce an interfaith resource that will:

- Enable faith leaders to have discussions about family violence prevention within their faith communities
- Support faith leaders to effectively identify and challenge systems, structures, attitudes and beliefs that can contribute to family violence within their settings
- Support faith leaders to implement actions to prevent family violence within their own settings.

The resource includes definitions and fact sheets on the causes and impacts of family violence. The resource also provides faith leaders with resources on how to promote gender equity and thereby reduce family violence. In addition the resource includes faith toolkits with excerpts from a diverse range of religious texts, scriptures and practices.

cont..

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The Resource and its development is being evaluated to assess the following areas:

- Capacity to increase knowledge and skills of faith leaders to prevent violence against women
- Usefulness, relevance and sustainability of the resource in faith communities
- Value of engaging with faith communities to prevent violence against women
- Value of an interfaith collaboration in preventing family violence.

A significant component of this evaluation process is the piloting of the draft resource in a number of faith and spiritual communities. The draft resource is currently being piloted with faith and spiritual leaders who were engaged from the working group, Dandenong Interfaith Network, Casey Multifaith Network and Cardinia Interfaith Network.

Engaging faith communities – opportunities moving forward:

Key opportunities to engage with faith communities to prevent and reduce family violence include:

- Involvement of faith communities in broader awareness campaigns such as White Ribbon Day
- Supporting faith leaders to champion family violence prevention among local congregations and the leadership of the faith and spiritual organisation
- Consideration of the particular cultural and linguistic needs of CALD communities in the development of resources to guide the prevention of family violence
- Building partnerships with peak faith and interfaith bodies to encourage primary prevention strategies in faith communities.

For more information

Rachael Duncombe
Coordinator Health and Wellbeing
City of Greater Dandenong
[redacted]

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4.5 Disability

Women with disabilities are a large and diverse population group in Victoria. For example:

- Nearly one in five women and girls have a disability
- The rate of disability for Victoria's culturally and linguistically diverse population is 22 per cent, slightly higher than in the general population
- The proportion of Victorians with a disability is higher in rural and regional Victoria than in cities: 22 per cent compared to 17 per cent
- Nationally, 51 per cent of Indigenous women and girls have a disability
- Women with disabilities face additional inequalities to men with disabilities; for example women are more likely to be unemployed, have primary caring responsibilities, and be affected by poverty[xviii].

All 79 Victorian councils have a disability action plan, identifying actions to remove physical barriers for people with a disability, but are also designed to increase employment and change attitudes.

Women with Disabilities Victoria has developed a position paper on ways to prevent and respond to violence against women with disabilities. There is a need and opportunity to apply a gendered lens across existing council disability action plans, as well as the Victorian state disability plan 2013-16, to ensure there is an appropriate focus on preventing violence against women and mitigating the increased risk of violence that women with disabilities experience. There is also the opportunity to ensure disability action plans are integrated with other key documents, such as council plans and municipal public health and wellbeing plans.

Victorian councils are pleased the State Government has confirmed the Building Inclusive Communities Program, including the employment of crucial Metro and Rural Access workers in councils across the state, will be rolled over for a further three-years when the current agreement concludes in 30 June 2015. These positions have existed since the early 2000s, first in rural areas and then metropolitan, and have grown in the sophistication of the role over time.

Opportunity:
Resourcing of a Preventing Violence Against Women/Gender Equity development role in councils could enhance opportunities and support partnership development in this area.

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4.6 Libraries

Victoria's 263 public library branches, and 27 mobile libraries accessing remote locations, make an invaluable contribution to lifelong learning and literacy. They keep communities socially connected, offer equitable access to technology, and promote workforce participation. Libraries are trusted as safe spaces by the community, and can provide an important space of quiet refuge for women and children living in violent situations. Staff are aware of some women who come to use technology and explore their options for leaving a violent partner.

In addition to the books on shelves, libraries facilitate access to a diverse range of community information and have enormous opportunity to reflect and reinforce messages of gender equality and respect. Libraries also act as an information referral service and a connector with relevant council services.

Existing examples of council activity in this area include:

- Monash City Council has saturated their library with primary prevention messages developed through their Generating Equality and Respect (GEAR) Project. Library computers have 'Say no to violence. Say yes to equality and respect' as the screen-saver messages. In addition, the library manager participated in the development of a communications campaign with council staff, and his photo appears on posters throughout the library with the message of 'Stop violence against women. Violence against women is never acceptable. My oath, I swear'. Monash City Council has also developed a list of recommended children's picture books that challenge harmful and limiting gender stereotypes
- Yarriambiack Shire Council participating in the 1800 RESPECT 'Dunny Door' campaign, where they have displayed stickers on the back of bathroom doors
- Bookmarks being distributed with all library books for the 16 days of action against gender based violence, developed in-house by a number of councils, and include local family violence service information
- Annual 'Clothes Line Project' display during the 'Week without Violence' at Moreland City Council library
- Women's homelessness prevention program, run by Justice Connect and supported probono by Freehills lawyers and the City of Melbourne in one of the City libraries; women are able to access free legal advice whilst their children participate in the Story Time program
- Some libraries offer after-school homework programs, providing vulnerable young people who may be living in violent homes with an important community connection and opportunity to remain engaged to achieve their educational potential in a safe and welcoming place.

Opportunities:

- Development of gender equity and prevention of family violence resources appropriate for use in libraries (as well as other settings such as neighbourhood houses and community centres)

- Provision of tailored Common Risk Assessment Framework (CRAF) training to front-line library staff
- Provision of tailored Primary Prevention and Gender Equity training for front-line library staff
- Currently public libraries cannot accommodate younger children (between 8/9 and 10/11 years) in this cohort due to the requirement that they be accompanied by a parent or a nominated adult. With funding, in areas with a known potential demand, public libraries may be able to provide a program (either in the library or another appropriate location), with a suitable partner agency to provide support to these children. Such an arrangement could be an invaluable resource for affected parents where the arrangements suit all parties. Other solutions or alternatives may be developed through a consultative process at the local level
- Resourcing of a Preventing Violence Against Women/Gender Equity development role in councils could enhance opportunities and support partnership development in this area.

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4.7 Communications

One of the roles of the MAV's media and communications team is to help keep the sector informed of any issues or topics that may be of interest and provide communication advice regarding matters that impact the whole local government sector.

This means the MAV is well placed to help build and strengthen the consistent communication of gender equality and family violence issues at a very local level.

Local government staff, including councillors, work very closely with their communities and are often called on to the help educate and inform, or be a communities 'voice' on matters of importance or concern.

The MAV believes a guideline booklet prepared by MAV media and communication team, with input from appropriate stakeholders, could be a worthwhile and useful tool for local government communications teams across the state.

It's anticipated such a booklet could provide advice and examples regarding common issues that arise when communicating on these topics, as well as help further develop the public conversation around the issues and important link between gender inequality and family violence.

Providing such advice has the potential to ensure clear and consistent messaging around these topics are provided to local communities and local media, removing ambiguity and promoting better understanding.

Another valuable addition for councils would be the development of a consistent resource for distributing family violence service information that could be made available through customer service centres, libraries, youth services and sport and leisure facilities. There are current examples available that could be built upon and adapted for each region. For example, in 2007, the seven northern metropolitan region councils partnered with the Northern Region Integrated Family Violence Services to produce a women's family violence help card and a men's family violence help card. The cards were developed to provide an information and referral resource for women who have experienced, or who are at the risk of experiencing, family violence, and for men who use or are at risk of using family violence. They provide relevant referral information from each local government area in Melbourne's northern region about where help and support can be obtained.

These help cards have since been reviewed, evaluated and re-published numerous times, as well as translated into relevant languages for the northern metropolitan region (NMR). An Aboriginal card for women and for men were also developed. These cards are distributed by Victoria Police when attending a family violence incident in the NMR, and are also available on display at stations. However, funding for reprinting and distribution across the NMR relies on donations.

The help cards are a tried and tested resource that would benefit for a systematic statewide roll out, region by region, with relevant service information displayed by local government area.
Another area of concern is the sexual objectification of women in advertising. The MAV believes the depiction of women in the media and advertising can also contribute to the objectification and demoralisation of women.

Like some Victorian councils, the MAV recommends the introduction of legislation restricting the publication and broadcasting of sexist and discriminatory advertising as a way of promoting gender equity and reducing the risk of violence against women. This recommendation is supported by a recent article in The Australian Financial Review about the Advertising Standards Bureau which showed while the percentage of ads found to have breached the Australian Association of National Advertisers code of ethics has declined slightly in recent years, those who breached the code faced no legal of financial consequences. If a breach was determined the advertising company must change or remove the advert however by this stage the advert has already been seen or heard by potentially millions of people.

The MAV believes this recommendation would ensure advertising companies are held more accountable with substantial legal and financial consequences to dissuade them from breaking the code in the first place.

Recommendation:
Support councils' role and capacity to progress gender equity and influence attitudinal change through developing a local government communications/key messaging guide for working with the community and the local media.

Recommendation:
Support the development of statewide family violence resources for women and men, for each region, with relevant information displayed at a local government level, available from accessible locations including customer service centres, MCH, libraries, community health services and police stations.

Recommendation:
Introduce legislation restricting the publication and broadcasting of sexist and discriminatory advertising as a way of promoting gender equity and reducing the risk of violence against women.

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4.8 Arts

Councils are increasingly finding innovative ways to communicate with their communities and achieve greater profile to the issue of men's violence against women.

Examples include:

- **The Locker Room:** a project which uses an artistic platform to provoke thought and stimulate conversation about violence against women in the community. A survivor's story sheds light on covert gender labels and buried attitudes, inviting the audience to re-examine what they see, hear and believe. The Locker Room (an art installation made out of an old shipping container) and accompanying play has been viewed by a significant number of council staff and community members in the outer east of Melbourne. The Locker Room was included in the Knox Festival 2014, and Maroondah Festival 2015, and provided a powerful opportunity to reach and promote community conversation on violence against women.

- **See Past the Stereotype:** is a campaign aimed at raising awareness about gender stereotyping. This campaign was developed by Knox, Yarra Ranges and Maroondah councils, involving the creation of three short films that present three common scenarios where assumptions are made about an individual based on their sex — with unfair results.

- **White Ribbon animation:** this short animation was created by Beeworld Pty Ltd in 2010, funded by Darebin City Council, Women's Domestic Violence Crisis Service (now Safe Steps), and the Northern Integrated Family Violence Services. It has been screened at Federation Square as part of the Not1More events and is also projected on the outside of Northcote Town Hall as part of the 16 days of activism against gender violence (25 November – 10 December).

Opportunity:
Provision of a Preventing Violence Against Women/Gender Equity development role in councils could enhance opportunities and support partnership development in this area, particularly through the MAV Arts and Culture Committee, to increase the representation of women and women's voices in the arts at a community level.

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4.9 Workforce

Victorian councils are one of the most significant place based employers, especially in rural and regional communities. Employing over 45,000 Victorian, of which more than half are women, councils have a responsibility to provide employees with a safe and healthy workplace and can act as a positive model to other workplaces in their community.

It's estimated that two-thirds of women who experience family violence are in the paid workforce, therefore it is a vital for organisations to make available workplace support to those experiencing violence through a dedicated staff family violence policy and safety planning.

In 2010, Surf Coast Shire Council was the first organisation in the world to introduce a family violence clause into their Enterprise Bargaining Agreement (EBA). As of September 2014, at least 60 of Victoria's 79 councils have now introduced the clause. Many of these councils are listed on the Safe at Home, Safe at Work website.

As this leading example from Whittlesea City Council demonstrates, a council's HR or organisational development unit can shape positive workplace cultures that prevent violence against women through gender equitable policies and practices, training and awareness.

Case Study: Whittlesea City Council

Family Violence Workplace Support Policy

One way in which the council is directly providing support to women experiencing family violence is through the City of Whittlesea Family Violence Workplace Support Policy.

Whittlesea was one of the first councils to introduce a family violence clause into the Enterprise Agreement in 2011. This clause is now rated as best practice for its support for employees and because it contains all seven of the principles endorsed by the ACTU Congress 2012 in the Work, Life Policy.[i]

Promising Practice and Policy Initiative Three – Workplace support

The family violence clause, supported by the workplace policy, provides for up to 20 days of paid leave for staff who are experiencing family violence or supporting a family member who is. It also provides family violence service and referral pathways information.

The policy and entitlements seek to increase the safety of women experiencing violence and support them in the workplace. It aims to create a safe environment where disclosures are encouraged and support delivered in a consistent way.

Training has been provided to people managers (those with staff reporting to them) and 16 family violence contact officers are in place as the first point of contact for staff. The training equips staff with information about external services and how to facilitate access to the policy entitlements.

The workplace may be the only place a family violence victim can spend a significant proportion of time away from the perpetrator. The workplace is a place in which those experiencing family violence can seek support and find out about family violence support services.

The City recognises the impacts that workplace policy has on increasing access to support services for women experiencing violence and how to could engage in the prevention of escalating violence by intervening early through support and paid leave entitlements for staff.

The policy helps to develop an environment that promotes gender equity and models non-violent and respectful relationships to prevent family violence occurring, while creating a supportive environment to encourage victims of family violence to seek support.

Another great example of a council workplace program to prevent violence against women is through Darebin City Council's development of a YouTube clip that supports their family violence policy.

Case study: ***Darebin Says No to Family Violence.***

Family Violence Policy Video

The video has been created as part of their workplace program to prevent violence against women — *Darebin Says No to Family Violence.*

The program aims to strengthen our organisational processes that prevent violence against women and support staff experiencing family violence. This includes strengthening our staff induction process, up-skilling staff in procedures in referral and safety planning, and up-skilling staff to recognise and respond to family violence, for example the work that Women's Health in the North (WHIN) supports through targeted training across the organisation.

In order to build the capacity of staff to prevent violence against women, Darebin has also developed a partnership with No to Violence. This partnership builds on the work and support provided by WHIN to further develop the skills of the organisation. It is envisaged that this will transpire into a range of exciting conversations that challenge current understanding and support staff to develop skills that can be practically applied across all areas of council business.

Opportunity:
Build on the learnings from the Safe at Home, Safe at Work program, and resource the MAV to work with relevant people in councils to develop a family violence policy framework to roll-out statewide, for councils to model in their own organisations and advocate for replication in other organisations and sectors.

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4.10 Problem gambling

There is an established link between problem gambling and family violence. Recent Australian research indicates people who have significant problems with their gambling are more likely than people without gambling problems to be victims and perpetrators of family violence. Men are just over twice as likely to be problem gamblers as women (0.47 per cent and 0.95 per cent respectively of the total population)[xix].

Problem gambling is characterised by difficulties in limiting money and/or time spent on gambling which leads to adverse consequences for the gambler, others, or for the community. It is estimated that for every person with problem gambling issues, around 7.3 'significant others' are adversely affected. Aside from the harm caused through intimate partner violence, children, parents and grandparents are also the victims of violence perpetrated by problem gamblers.

Electronic Gaming Machine (EGM) use accounts for about 75 to 80 per cent of problem gambling in Victoria, with the highest concentration of EGMs and the highest losses per head occurring in the most socially and economically disadvantaged communities. For example, in 2013/14 gambling losses among EGMs situated in the City of Greater Dandenong — the least affluent LGA in metropolitan Melbourne — stood at $940 per adult, over six times higher than the corresponding rate of $142 in Boroondara — one of the most advantaged municipalities in the state. Thus the residents of the community with the highest gambling losses in Victoria are the least able to bear the financial burden.

Research into women experiencing problem gambling and isolation suggests that some women who are experiencing family violence use EGM venues as a safe space away from home[xx].

Whilst there are certainly gaps in data and research on the co-occurrence of family violence and problem gambling, and EGM in low socio-economic communities in particular, we are beginning to build an understanding and can take small steps to ensure problem gambling information is promoted and readily available across council and community.

However, councils do not currently have sufficient levers to manage the proliferation of poker machines in their municipalities. Councils rallied together in the last quarter of 2014 campaigning for changes to the *Gambling Regulation Act*, which would help councils protect vulnerable communities from inappropriate placement of pokies. Councils sought changes including legislative reform that will allow the regulator and councils enough time to properly consider and respond to gambling applications, as well as requiring the applicant to meet social and economic impact tests.

More information on gambling is available on the MAV website.

Recommendation:
Support legislative reform to enable state and local government to meet their legislative responsibility for harm minimisation in gambling licensing decisions.

4.11 Alcohol

Growing evidence demonstrates the correlation between the misuse of alcohol and increased incidence of family violence reports.

New research, released 27 May 2015 by Monash University, FARE and Ambulance Victoria, is a significant study which examines the associations between off-premise alcohol outlets and the incidence of traumatic injury in surrounding areas.

The main findings of the research include:

- Every new take away liquor chain that opens in a neighbourhood is associated with a 35.3 per cent increase in intentional injuries like assaults, shootings and stabbings
- There will also be a 22 per cent rise in unintentional injuries such as crush injuries or where the patient is struck by an object
- Stores in disadvantaged areas have cheaper alcohol, so any harms related to cheap alcohol disproportionately affect disadvantaged people. These findings suggest that limiting the exposure of local populations to off-premise alcohol outlets, particularly chain outlets, may reduce the incidence of trauma in neighbourhoods[xxi].

This research provides a significant step forward towards better understanding the correlations between packaged liquor outlets, density and likely harms that may result from them being established in lower socioeconomic communities. More information is available online.

This research is also correlated by earlier findings from VicHealth that found packaged liquor outlets in neighbourhoods may contribute to increased assaults and family violence in the home[ii] and international experience from Finland that also shows when grocery stores began selling alcohol, there was a sharp increase in alcohol-related harm[xxii].

In 2012-13, alcohol was identified as a possible or confirmed factor in 43 per cent of all family violence incidents attended by Victoria Police. On a yearly basis, alcohol harm is estimated to cost the Victorian Government and community $4.3 billion[xxiii].

Between 1993 and 2008 the number of packaged liquor outlets (bottle-shops) in Victoria increased by more than 80 per cent[iv] , and nearly 80 per cent of all alcohol consumed in Australia is now sold at packaged liquor outlets - this proportion has been steadily increasing[iii] .

In response to these alarming statistics, and the increasing evidence of family violence harm exacerbated by alcohol misuse, an innovative collaboration has formed in the Southern Metro Region (SMR) between Victoria Police, Ambulance Victoria, SMR councils, Turning Point Drug and Alcohol Service and Swinburne University. Through this unique partnership model, they are looking to reduce family violence and alcohol related harm by taking the opportunity to test the existing legal system's approach to alcohol regulation and the potential to make the alcohol industry more accountable for alcohol harm in the community.

Opportunity:
The unique model of partnership could be replicated in other regions, however without legislative reform to allow for greater influence in alcohol licensing decisions, it will not be possible to meet legislative responsibility for harm minimisation policies and principles to be realised.

For more information on the SMR Partnership Project contact:
Gavin Wilson | Project Manager | SEM Council Alliance on Alcohol Density Research
C/-City of Casey | Civic Centre | P. O. Box 1000 Narre Warren 3805
T: [redacted] | M: [redacted] E: [redacted]

Recommendation:
Support legislative reform to enable state and local government to meet their legislative responsibility for harm minimisation in alcohol licensing decisions.

4.12 Growth area councils

Interface councils of Melbourne are comprised of the 10 municipalities that form an arc around metropolitan Melbourne and incorporate both green wedge and urban growth boundary. They bridge the gap between metropolitan Melbourne and rural Victoria, sharing characteristics of both urban and rural communities[i].

The Victoria Police reported incidents of family violence in 2013-14 reveals that growth council LGAs have higher numbers of family violence incidents compared to the Victorian rate (1,129 incidents per 100,000 people), non-growth Interface councils and other Metro Melbourne LGAs.

Number of Family Violence Incidents Reported to Victoria Police, including with Children Present: Metropolitan Melbourne 2013-14[xxiv] (*growth council LGAs)

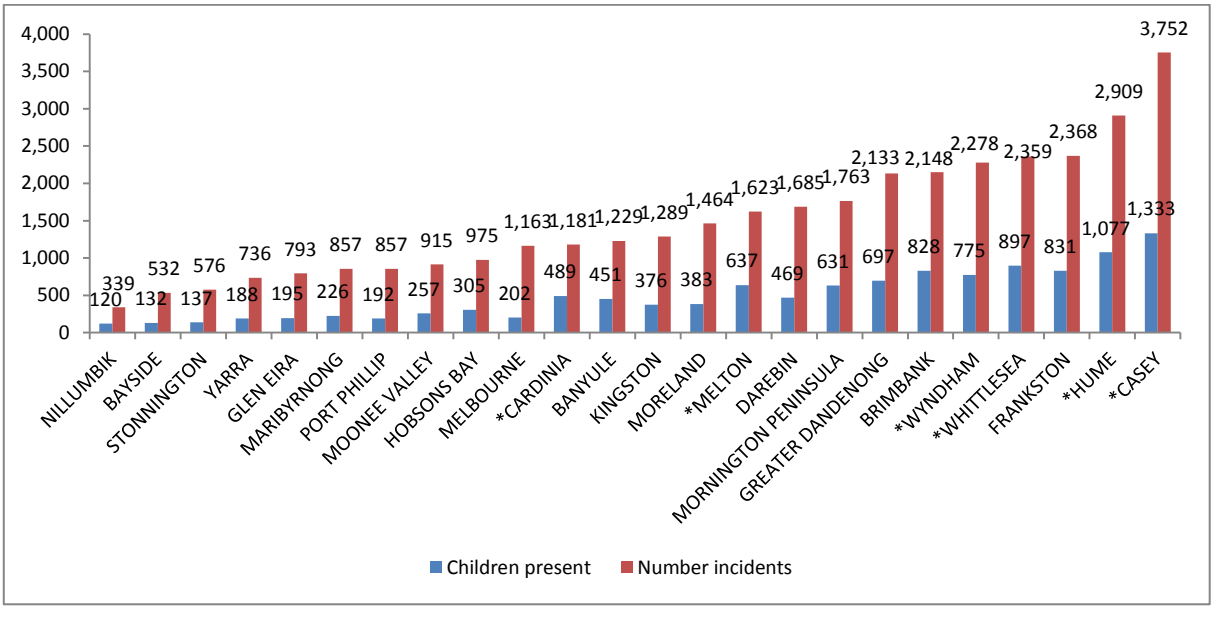

Figure 6: Number of family violence incidents reported to Victoria Police, Metropolitan Melbourne 2013-14

Residents in growth council LGAs experience specific and complex contextual factors that contribute to experiences of family violence and significant barriers to accessing specialist family violence services, despite having some of the highest levels of family violence in Victoria.

Key data facts for Growth Council LGAs

Family Violence Incidents reported to police:

- The total number of reported family violence incidents in growth council LGAs makes up almost 40 per cent of the total number of family violence incidents for Metropolitan Melbourne LGAs, despite only being six LGAs out of 24
- Four growth council LGAs, Casey (3,752), Hume (2,909), Whittlesea (2,359), and Wyndham (2,278), are included in the top five LGAs for highest family violence incidents in Metropolitan Melbourne.

Family Violence Incidents reported to police where Children were present:

- Growth council LGAs make up 44.03 per cent of the total family violence incidents with children present reported to police for the Melbourne Metropolitan Region; despite being six LGAs out of 24.
- Growth council LGAs of Casey (1,333), Hume (1,077) and Whittlesea (897) have the highest number of incidents of family violence with children present.

Highest Number of Family Violence Incidents Reported to Victoria Police: by LGA 2013-14[xxv] (*growth council LGAs)

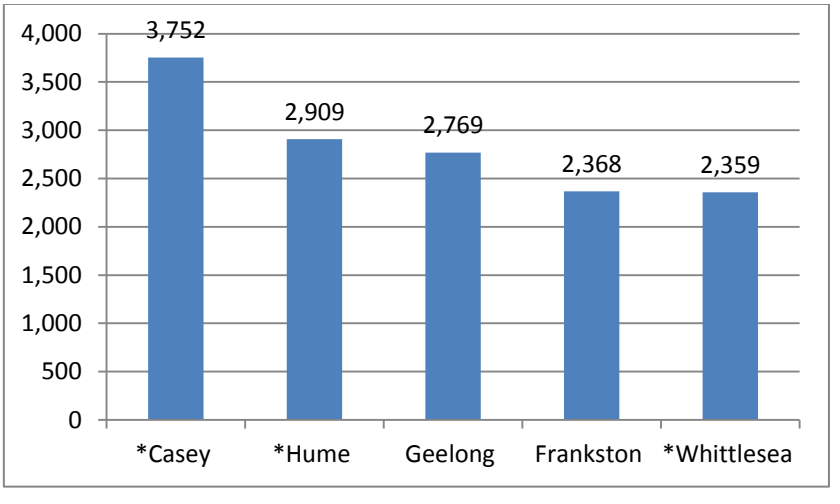

Figure 7: Highest number of family violence incidents reported to Victoria Police 2013-14

Some of the well-known contributing factors for family violence, such as drug and alcohol misuse, weak social connections and social cohesion, limited access to systems of support, and financial stress, are more prevalent in growth areas than in the remainder of metropolitan Melbourne.

Below is an excerpt from the City of Whittlesea Family Violence Prevention Strategy (p.16)[xxvi] which articulates the relationship between the determinants and contributing factors of violence against women in growth councils based on a breadth of recognised evidence[xxvii].

The National Growth Area Alliance (NGAA) reports that growth areas are characterised by levels of disadvantage and unemployment higher than those of metropolitan Australia. There are lower levels of education, and higher incidences of risk behaviors. The combination of these risk factors (contributors) together with the lack of appropriate and accessible services means that families and children in growth areas are more likely to experience negative outcomes. Compounding this, outer metropolitan growth areas have significantly less community services than the metropolitan average. This means families do not have the same levels of support as do families in inner metropolitan areas, making them more vulnerable and less resilient than their inner metropolitan counterparts[xxviii].

Growth councils experience unique challenges that are emphasised by the significant lack of public investment which has seriously undermined the liveability of these areas and the health and wellbeing of the residents[xxix]. The NGAA recommends establishing a Suburban Community Infrastructure Program and to extend the Regional Development Australia Fund to prioritise outer metropolitan growth areas to ensure this growth is adequately catered for.[xxx]

One of the attractors of living in growth areas is lower house prices, however, families living in growth areas are faced with high living costs, such as mortgages and petrol due largely to the lack of public transport services as well as fewer opportunities to access local jobs and community amenities. Economic influences include financial hardship, problem gambling, unemployment and women's financial dependence have also been identified as contributing factors to experiences of family violence.

As noted earlier, councils can also play a role in making accommodation available to family violence related services such as community legal services, in safe, and non-identifiable environments such as customer service centres, libraries and community hubs.

Recommendation:
Acknowledge the specific contextual factors that exacerbate experiences of family violence in growth council areas by investing in long-term primary prevention, early intervention and family violence prevention, delivered with the support of local government to end family violence against women and their children.

Recommendation:
Provide equitable and proportionate funding increases to regional specialist family violence services and men's behaviour change programs specifically to reduce the differential access to specialist family violence support experienced by residents in growth council communities.

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4.13 Regional and rural councils

Many of the issues of structural and social disadvantage faced by growth area councils and their communities can also be seen to disproportionately impact on regional and rural communities. Family violence incident reports to Victoria Police per 100,000 people in 2013-2014 shows 1,526 in regional Victoria, compared to 1,007 in metro Melbourne[xxxi].

The recent report from Deakin University provides a detailed account of the specific effects of geography in women's experience of family violence[xxxii]. Regional and rural councils have concurred with this executive summary:

> "Women who experience family violence face many barriers to obtaining assistance and access to justice. Those in regional and, even more so, rural locations encounter further challenges, including but not limited to geographic and social isolation, limited private finances, greater opportunities for the surveillance of survivors, challenges with maintaining anonymity and privacy, expensive private and limited public transport networks, limited crisis accommodation, less access to support and health services than is available in metropolitan areas, and limited access to legal services. They also face a greater likelihood of encountering conflict of interest issues when seeking legal assistance, the 'digital divide' when accessing information and assistance and perpetrator gun ownership. Services and support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors, culturally and linguistically diverse survivors, and survivors with disabilities are also more limited than those in metropolitan area."

The exacerbating factors in regional and rural areas need to be reflected in any policy framework for addressing family violence, with flexibility to adapt strategies to the local community context. This is because regional and rural communities — like metropolitan communities — are not homogenous and prevention and response strategies need to be adaptive and responsive to specific local conditions.

Regional and rural communities may present very different opportunities and barriers in the prevention of and response to family violence. These communities have great potential for whole-of-community approaches in prevention, early intervention and response because of their high levels of inter-connectivity. Conversely, this factor can also create a barrier to prevention/response approaches (and reporting), because of 'privacy' and perceived 'interference' concerns.

Another limiting factor for local government authorities in regional and rural areas are the many competing resource demands, often combined with a small population rate base. Legislation that influences future planning processes, policies and systems may be one way to promulgate awareness of and commitment to the underlying determinants of family violence.

Recommendation:
Acknowledge the specific contextual factors that exacerbate experiences of family violence in regional/rural council areas by investing in long-term primary prevention, early intervention and family violence prevention, delivered with the support of local government to end family violence against women and their children.

Recommendation:
Provide equitable and proportionate funding increases to regional specialist family violence services and men's behaviour change programs specifically to reduce the differential access to specialist family violence support experienced by residents in regional/rural communities.

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4.14 Emergency management

Local government plays an important role in emergency management, both in partnership with others, and through its own legislated emergency management obligations. Councils are not emergency response agencies, however they currently have the following roles:

- Developing emergency management plans
- Undertaking mitigation activities
- Communicating with, and providing information to, communities
- Providing support to response agencies
- Coordinating relief and recovery for local communities.

Australia specific research into the effect gender differences and roles have on how individuals and communities prepare for, responds to and recover from disaster is sparse. However, from what research exists in Australia and internationally, a few general conclusions can be drawn:

- Rigid gender norms and gender inequality can contribute to family violence, both of which are prevalent in the emergency management sector.
- Relationship violence, child abuse and divorce have increased in the wake of overseas disasters[xxxiii]
- Men strongly influence family decisions to stay and defend homes during bushfires, sometimes with tragic results[xxxiv]
- Men in a given household often have greater knowledge of formal emergency procedures than women[xxxv]
- If women receive and understand disaster warnings, they play an important role in spreading the message through informal social networks[xxxvi]
- There is generally an increased burden of care-giving in the recovery and reconstruction phases and this is disproportionately shouldered by women
- There is a tendency for family violence to become more acceptable in a community post-disaster because many people put it down to 'stress' or 'frustration' or 'trauma'[xxxvii].

Standout Examples:

MAV Gender and Emergency Management Strategy

The MAV developed a gender and emergency management (GEM) strategy which aims to reduce the negative consequences of gender-blind practices. The MAV GEM strategy will help councils and their partners improve their understanding of gender differences and incorporate gender considerations into their emergency management policy, planning, decision-making and service delivery.

MAV Gender and Emergency Management fact sheet

The MAV has developed a gender and emergency management fact sheet to raise awareness of how gender and emergency management interact, and to provide practical advice to help councils make a positive difference.

Macedon Ranges Shire Council Prevention of Violence Against Women in Emergencies - Draft Action Plan 2015-16

Macedon Ranges Shire Council is a leader in developing local approaches to prevention of violence against women in emergency management. No other municipal plan for the Prevention of Violence Against Women in Emergencies exists in Victoria. This means that little evidence exists about successful strategies for local action.

The Macedon Ranges Action Plan to Prevent Violence Against Women in Emergencies will identify trial and assess a range of strategies and activities in partnership with other agencies and networks over a 12 month period to build a culture of preventing violence before it occurs. The focus is on activities that will be achievable and measurable, and appropriate for the level of maturity and capacity of the developing partnerships in what is a largely unchartered arena where violence prevention and emergency management intersect.

Women's Health Goulburn North East - Family violence after natural disasters training

This workshop is designed to provide emergency services and recovery workers with an understanding of family violence after natural disaster. It provides participants with the knowledge and skills to identify family violence after natural disasters and to provide referrals where appropriate.

Gender and Disaster Taskforce

Co-Chaired by the Emergency Management Commissioner, Craig Lapsley, and the Executive Officer of WHGNE, Susie Reid, representatives from the MAV, WHIN, all major Victorian ESOs, the community, government and academic sectors, the taskforce has the purpose of 'providing statewide strategic direction and leadership to reduce the compounding effects of gender on disaster impacts' and has seven specific objectives. Detailed actions of the Gender and Disaster Taskforce is available online.

Opportunities:

- Increased promotion and training relating to the influence of gender roles and differences on emergency management outcomes, with the goal of helping councils improve their understanding of gender differences, and incorporate gender considerations into their emergency management policy, planning, decision making and service delivery
- Culture change in emergency related organisations and increased participation of women in both on-the-ground and leadership positions
- Engagement and recognition of women in volunteer emergency services organisations
- Further funded research into the effect gender differences and roles have on how individuals and communities prepare for, responds to and recover from disaster
- Building resilience and capacity of communities
- Improve the gender-specific support that men and women in ESOs and other emergency management organisations receive after disasters
- Improve the gender-specific support that men and women, along with boys and girls, throughout the community receive after disasters

- Embed a gender lens across culture and systems relating to disasters to improve community outcomes following future disasters
- Resourcing of a Preventing Violence Against Women/Gender Equity development role in councils could enhance opportunities and support partnership development in this area.

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4.15 Animal management

Local laws officers attend numerous households for animal management. They are one of few services, along with MCH services, that visit people in their homes. Often, local laws officers respond to domestic animal abuse.

There is a clear relationship between animal abuse and family violence. Threatening to harm or kill pets is a method used by some men as a means to control their partners[xxxviii]. According to a recent study, one in three women who experienced violence from a partner reported they had delayed leaving their partner because of fear for a pet's safety[xxxix]. Animal abuse is also a known family violence risk indicator. A woman whose partner has threatened to abuse pets is five times more likely to experience family violence[xl]. The Victoria Police Code of Practice for Investigating Family Violence and the Common Risk Assessment Framework (CRAF) both recognise pet abuse as increasing a woman's risk of being seriously harmed or killed.

Because of this link, local laws officers are likely to encounter signs of family violence in the course of their work. An outer metropolitan council first became aware of the need to act in 2012, following the removal of a resident's dogs. Finding his dogs gone, the resident assaulted his wife, causing her to lose her pregnancy. Council animal management therefore has a role to play in responding to family violence.

Current examples:
Since 2012, an increasing number of councils have:

- Trained local laws officers to identify signs of violence towards pets
- Trained officers to identify family violence, with over 200 hundred officers from across the state participating in level 1 CRAF
- Equipped officers to refer women to family violence services
- Offered victims of family violence free practical assistance in the removal, care, relocation and, if necessary, alternative placement of animals
- Included family violence provisions in their animal management plans.

Opportunities:

- Provide tailored CRAF training to all local laws officers
- Extend CRAF training to other animal welfare professionals, including veterinarians. Vets are well-placed to identify when harm has been intentionally inflicted upon animals and to provide family violence referral information
- Evaluate the effectiveness of training in changing practices
- Develop relationships or protocols between council animal management, family violence services and animal welfare agencies
- Provide more animal shelter services for women escaping violence. Currently, the Pets in Peril program and Emergency Boarding Program are the only dedicated programs for sheltering pets belonging to women escaping violence in Victoria. Both are metropolitan programs—Pets in Peril is able to help 100 women a year and the Emergency Boarding Program can only assist for 28 days

- Develop refuge accommodation for women with companion pets would be developed in Victoria
- Resourcing of a Preventing Violence Against Women/Gender Equity development role in councils could enhance opportunities and support partnership development in this area.

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4.16 Urban planning, transport and facility design

Planning and design processes can unintentionally exclude or discriminate against groups in our community. Planning policy and infrastructure development can overlook the fact that women and men use public space and infrastructure differently by not using sex-disaggregated data and research to inform decision making processes.

For example, women experience transport infrastructure differently to men. Research suggests that this different use of transport is linked to women's employment patterns and family and household responsibilities. Women are less likely to have access to a car and are more likely to walk and/or use public transport. However, most public transport is designed for people who travel in and out of city and town centres, at peak hour and without children, prams and shopping.

A number of councils are employing a variety of tools to support their gender equity and access agenda in planning and design, however, at present efforts are adhoc and there is no readily available best-practice guide for councils in applying a 'gender equity and inclusion' lens to the planning and design of community infrastructure.

There is an opportunity to expand upon the Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles in all infrastructure design, but with an explicit inclusion of a gender lens and consideration of how ones gender may intersect. For example, when assessing checkpoints such as 'adequate lighting', it is considered from a gendered perspective (i.e. A 40 year old able bodied anglo, hetero male will feel differently about adequate night lighting compared to a woman, someone with a disability, CALD, GLBTQI).

We know that the best way to understand how women and girls experience and move about the city is to consult women and girls themselves, and make them an integral part of all urban design processes. Working in this way does not necessarily make extra cost for the municipality but it will make the allocation of resources more gender equitable and the city more accessible for everyone.

Local government is well placed to design and maintain community infrastructure and public spaces that are inclusive, safe, and responsive to the needs of women. With the support of a best-practice guide designed to deliver gender equitable outcomes, the entire community will benefit.

Recommendation:
Develop a gendered urban planning and infrastructure design toolkit for local government to use that can be tailored for particular settings and disciplines.

4.17 Sport and leisure

Councils intersect with many of the other important settings in which prevention work should occur, as identified in the VicHealth Framework[xli] and A Right to Respect, Victoria's Plan to Prevent Violence against Women 2010–2020 [xlii]. This is particularly so in the realm of sport and recreation.

In addition to efforts to build community infrastructure and facilities that are inclusive of women and girls, councils are also investing in policies and processes through their sport and leisure services to better engage of women and girls.

Stand out examples:

Active Women and Girls Policy introduced by Moreland City Council in 2009, requires sports clubs to demonstrate active participation of women and girls. The policy is directly linked to sporting ground allocations, and any club wanting to access community-owned facilities for their sports teams must demonstrate the role girls and women have at their clubs. The driving force behind introducing this policy was council's recognition that males dominated many clubs and the need to open facilities up to be more inclusive. Council has seen a substantial increase in participation levels by females since the implementation of the policy, in addition to other positive spin-off effects that are driving the prevention of violence message further.

Gender Lens for Leisure Project by Knox City Council, produced a suite of recommendations for the three outer east council's Leisure Services teams (Knox, Maroondah and Yarra Ranges) to identify the ways in which they could support the equal participation, inclusion and respect of women and girls in sport and recreation activities.

Opportunity:
Resourcing of a Preventing Violence Against Women/Gender Equity development role in councils could enhance opportunities and support partnership development in this area.

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5 Conclusion

Through its leadership role the MAV is committed to working with the State and across all settings to assist in developing place based responses to family violence.

Local government is particularly well placed to make a contribution upstream in influencing community attitudes to gender equity and in early intervention as one of the first points of contact for all families across the state.

Working with other key stakeholders is critical to achieving improved outcomes, and while this submission focuses on the particular role of local government, councils are committed to developing partnerships to generate a comprehensive community response to family violence and violence against women generally, at all levels of intervention.

6 Recommendations

The increasing engagement and leadership shown by the MAV and Victorian councils in the primary prevention of violence against women, as well as through early intervention and tertiary responses, demonstrates an understanding of the opportunities and responsibilities we all share to ultimately achieve healthy, safe and connected communities.

The MAV acknowledges the goal of the Royal Commission to 'fostering a violence-free society' and believes this will only occur through 'fostering a violence-free *and gender equitable* society'.

The MAV seeks the Royal Commission consideration for making the following recommendations to the Victorian Government.

IN THE PRIMARY PREVENTION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Recommendation 1:
Support councils' role and capacity to progress gender equity and influence attitudinal change through resourcing all councils as civic leaders to promote attitudinal change, and facilitate community based local responses through allocation of development officers — similar to the DHHS Building Inclusive Communities program (Metro and Rural Access).

Recommendation 2:
Support local government's role and capability to progress gender equity and influence attitudinal change through resourcing the MAV in an advisory capacity to coordinate and inform sector efforts, and partner with the State Government and other key stakeholders.

Recommendation 3:
The next State Health Plan includes preventing family violence and the primary prevention of violence against women as distinct priority areas necessary to increase the safety, wellbeing and gender equality experienced by Victorian women.

Recommendation 4:
Collection of data and information to inform evidence-building practice and interventions at a local level through the National Community Attitudes Survey (NCAS) being conducted at the local municipal level over time periods.

Recommendation 5:
Collection of data and information to inform evidence-building practice and interventions at a local level through development of a gender equity index for major state and local government strategic plans which can inform reporting over time.

Recommendation 6:
Consider the findings and recommendations made by the Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) of the local government cluster project in the Preventing Violence Against Women in our Community program evaluation.

Recommendation 7:
Build local government elected member commitment to gender equity and councils' workforce capacity through systemised and evaluated training opportunities, including primary prevention of violence against women, gender analysis, challenging sexism bystander approaches, incorporating a diversity and inclusion (intersectional) lens.

Recommendation 8:
Support local government's role and capacity to progress gender equity and influence attitudinal change through developing a local government communications/key messaging guide for working with the community and the local media.

Recommendation 9:
Build capacity of the early years sector by advocating for review of the National Quality Framework and Early Years Learning Framework to apply a gender lens with the view to ensuring programs and services support young girls and boys to enjoy equal access and opportunity, not limited by unintended bias and gender stereotyping.

Recommendation 10:
Acknowledge and invest in councils' youth services in working to build civic engagement, leadership and respectful relationships programs in schools and community settings.

Recommendation 11:
Introduce legislation restricting the publication and broadcasting of sexist and discriminatory advertising as a way of promoting gender equity and reducing the risk of violence against women.

Recommendation 12:
Develop a gendered urban planning and infrastructure design toolkit for local government to use that can be tailored for particular settings and disciplines.

THROUGH EARLY INTERVENTION STRATEGIES

Recommendation 13:
Support and improve prevention and early intervention to councils' MCH services, youth and family services through increasing the Enhanced MCH Services' capacity to provide continuity in meeting the needs of vulnerable families and children, by extending the program from antenatal to two years of age (it is currently birth to one year).

Recommendation 14:
Building on the evidence base and evaluation findings of new parent programs that engage new mothers and fathers; adapt and target through Enhanced MCH Services across the state to reach more vulnerable families.

Recommendation 15:
Support and improve prevention and early intervention by councils' MCH services, youth and family services through the roll-out of the 'Patchwork' tool statewide with the MAV to better link agencies in supporting families, children and young people across universal, secondary and tertiary services.

Recommendation 16:
Improve data collection through the new statewide Child Development Information System (CDIS), enabling improved follow-up of families falling through the gaps (CDIS currently being developed by MAV for the MCH service).

Recommendation 17:
Support legislative reform to enable state and local government to meet their legislative responsibility for harm minimisation in gambling and alcohol licensing decisions.

Recommendation 18:
Build councils' workforce capacity through systemised and evaluated training opportunities, including early intervention and risk assessment training, tailored to particular professions and work environments (for example libraries, local laws, MCH, kinder/childcare, youth workers, Home and Community Care staff), incorporating a diversity and inclusion (intersectional) lens.

Recommendation 19:
Acknowledge the specific contextual factors that exacerbate experiences of family violence in both growth council areas and regional/rural communities by investing in long-term primary prevention, early intervention and family violence prevention, delivered with the support of local government to end family violence against women and their children.

RESPONDING TO FAMILY VIOLENCE

Recommendation 20:
Develop a Victorian affordable housing strategy that addresses the link between family violence, housing and homelessness.

Recommendation 21:
Increase capacity of existing networks, such as Child FIRST Alliances, to work with local government to enhance the level of collaboration between universal, secondary and specialist services.

Recommendation 22:
Increase capacity of specialist family violence services to provide outreach through universal services such as local hubs and MCH centres.

Recommendation 23:
Support infrastructure funding applications from councils building community hubs to enable family-violence related services (for example, community legal service and counselling support) to be co-located/accommodated in universal, accessible, safe and confidential environments.

Recommendation 24:
Support the development of statewide family violence resources for women and men, for each region, with relevant information displayed at a local government level, available from accessible locations including customer service centres, MCH, libraries, community health services and police stations.

Recommendation 25:
Collection of data and information to inform evidence-building practice and interventions at a local level through development of a state elder abuse database and advocacy for development of a national elder abuse database.

Recommendation 26:
Provide equitable and proportionate funding increases to regional specialist family violence services and men's behaviour change programs, specifically to reduce the differential access to specialist family violence support experienced by residents in growth council and regional/rural communities.

7 Glossary and definitions

Primary prevention refers to strategies aimed at preventing violence before it occurs. This includes changing behaviours and attitudes and building the awareness and skills of individuals. The central focus of work in primary prevention is on strategies that address the underlying structural and cultural drivers of violence against women, such as gender inequality and beliefs in rigid gender roles and stereotypes.[xliii]

Early intervention: Action targeting individuals or population sub-groups who are showing early signs of violent behaviour.[xliv]

Tertiary/response services aim to reduce the effects of violence once it has occurred and prevent its reoccurrence, through provision of support and redress to victims/survivors of violence and deal with the consequences of violence. Social support services, health care providers, the criminal justice system and crisis accommodation are all examples of settings through which tertiary services and programs are delivered.[xlv]

Violence against women is defined as any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or mental harm, or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.[xlvi]

Family violence: Physical, emotional, sexual, social, spiritual, cultural, psychological, and economic abuses that occur within families, intimate relationships, extended families, kinship networks and communities.[xlvii]

Social determinants of violence against women are the social and cultural conditions under which violence against women is more likely to occur. VicHealth identifies the absence of equal and respectful relationships between men and women at the individual, community and societal levels, as the most significant determinants leading to violence against women.

Gender refers to female and male identity that goes beyond the biological differences between men and women (known as sex). Gender expectations are shaped by social, political and economic influences and can differ from culture to culture, depending on what is considered socially acceptable behaviour for men and women.

Gender equality refers to the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men and girls and boys. Equality does not mean that women and men will become the same but that women's and men's rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female.

Gender equity takes into consideration the differences in women's and men's lives and recognises that different approaches may be needed to produce outcomes that are fair.

Gender stereotypes refer to expectations of how a person should behave or present because of their gender. This can result in women and men being expected to take on certain roles and a lack of tolerance when these stereotypes are challenged. Gender stereotyping can be harmful as it can promote the idea that women are less valuable than men.

Sexism is discrimination against a person on the basis of their gender or sex. Sexist attitudes and beliefs can encourage the idea that women are not equal to men and don't deserve the same rights. Sexism can be in the form of 'jokes' that minimise the impact and seriousness of violence against women, and other attitudes supporting the continuation and acceptance of violence against women.

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