



Local Government & Community Health – creating non-violent & gender equitable communities

North East Primary Care Partnership

**Submission to the Royal Commission into Family Violence
May 2015**

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1. Overview

The North East Primary Care Partnership (NEPCP), funded by the Victorian Government to strengthen relationships across sectors to maximise health and well-being, is a voluntary alliance of service providers operating within the local government areas of Banyule, Darebin and Nillumbik. Since 2012, Preventing Violence Against Women has been the NEPCP's Integrated Health Promotion priority, with eight agencies making up the NEPCP Preventing Violence Against Women Collaborative: Nillumbik Shire Council; Banyule City Council; Darebin City Council; Nillumbik Health; Banyule Community Health; Darebin Community Health; Neami National; and, Women's Health In the North.

At various stages of progress in their work, Preventing Violence Against Women Collaborative partners are undertaking strategies underpinned by Women's Health In the North's *Building a respectful community – Preventing violence against women – A strategy for the Northern Metropolitan Region of Melbourne 2011-2016* and VicHealth's *Preventing violence before it occurs: A framework and background paper to guide the primary prevention of violence against women in Victoria* (VicHealth Framework).

Considerable investment to date has built the capacity of Local Government and Community Health to play an active role in the prevention of family violence/violence against women, through developing strong and collaborative partnerships involving Women's Health Services, the Municipal Association of Victoria and Primary Care Partnerships, and guided by VicHealth's leadership over many years.

Local Government and Community Health are both critical settings for preventing violence against women before it occurs. This is recognised by VicHealth research and highlighted as key for delivering whole-of-community approaches to prevention.

However, based on the strong evidence that Local Government and Community Health are uniquely placed to prevent family violence/violence against women, there remains significant potential for Local Government and Community Health to play a greater role in achieving non-violent and gender equitable communities.

NEPCP Preventing Violence Against Women Collaborative partners are making a difference within their current resources, but have aspirations to take a more comprehensive and multifaceted approach, in line with the evidence, and become stronger champions of change.

This submission includes two recommendations which focus on:

1. Better resourcing and funding of Local Government and Community Health to prevent family violence/violence against women.
2. Consolidating and strengthening the state, regional and local partnerships and support networks currently in place.

Prioritising these areas would enable Local Government and Community Health to better utilise their strengths and transform violence-supportive cultures and communities into ones of equity and respect. This would produce the greatest impact in the short and longer term.

2. Submission's alignment with Royal Commission into Family Violence

This NEPCP submission is focused on preventing family violence/violence against women and aligns with a number of goals of the Royal Commission into Family Violence, aspects of the Terms of Reference and two questions within the Issues Paper, as outlined below:

Prevention focused goals:

- Foster a violence-free *& gender equitable** society
- Reduce & aim to eliminate family violence
- Build respectful family relationships
- Increase awareness of the extent & effects of family violence
- Reinforce community rejection of the use of family violence

*The NEPCP would like to see gender equity incorporated into the goals of the Royal Commission into Family Violence, as a key determinant or underlying cause of family violence/violence against women.

Terms of Reference:

- The response to family violence is necessarily complex and requires coordinated and concerted effort across **government and the community**, including by government departments, courts, police, correctional services, legal services, housing, child protection and family services, schools, **health and community organisations**.
- Preventing and responding to family violence is a shared responsibility across governments, **local government**, business, media, **community organisations**, communities, families and individuals.
- 1. Establish best practice for: a) the prevention of family violence
- 5. The need to establish a culture of non-violence and gender equality, and to shape appropriate attitudes towards women and children
- 7. The need to identify and focus on practical short, medium and long term systemic improvements to Victoria's current response to family violence...

Issues Paper questions:

- *Question twenty:* Are there any other suggestions you would like to make to improve policies, programs and services which currently seek to carry out the goals set out above?
- *Question twenty-one:* The Royal Commission will be considering both short term and longer term responses to family violence. Tell us about the changes which you think could produce the greatest impact in the short and longer term.

3. About the NEPCP Preventing Violence Against Women Collaborative

The NEPCP is a voluntary alliance of service providers in north east Metropolitan Melbourne operating within the local government areas of Banyule, Darebin and Nillumbik. The Primary Care Partnership (PCP) strategy is a Victorian Government initiative that provides funding across the state for PCPs to strengthen relationships across sectors in order to maximise health and wellbeing outcomes, promote health equity and avoid unnecessary hospital presentations and admissions.

PCPs, as a flexible and robust platform for partnership work in Victoria, are well placed to foster local partnerships for a whole-of-community response to preventing violence against women.¹

In 2012, the NEPCP agencies adopted preventing violence against women as their Integrated Health Promotion priority for the 2013-2017 period. Eight member agencies make up the NEPCP Preventing Violence Against Women Collaborative: Nillumbik Shire Council; Banyule City Council; Darebin City Council; Nillumbik Health; Banyule Community Health; Darebin Community Health; Neami National; and, Women's Health In the North.

The Preventing Violence Against Women Collaborative's vision is to build communities in the NEPCP catchment in which violence against women is unacceptable and where communities, cultures and organisations are non-violent and gender equitable; a community in which all relationships are equal, respectful and non-discriminatory.

Taking a multi-component or 'jigsaw' approach, the Preventing Violence Against Women Collaborative has a shared vision with individual agencies implementing separate but complementary strategies guided by Women's Health In the North's *'Building a Respectful Community'* regional strategy and underpinned by the VicHealth Framework.

Specifically, the NEPCP supports its partners to plan, implement and evaluate their prevention strategies. This local approach, concentrating on a smaller number of partners at a catchment level, complements WHIN's regional approach and enables more intensive support to be provided. In this way, the NEPCP is supporting the regional strategy to be translated into local action. All NEPCP Preventing Violence Against Women Collaborative partners have formally endorsed the regional strategy.

¹ Women's Health In the North (2011). Building a respectful community - Preventing violence against women. A strategy for the Northern Metropolitan Region of Melbourne 2011-2016

4. The issue

Family violence is gendered in nature – this is well recognised as the victims of family violence are overwhelmingly women (84%) and the perpetrators are overwhelmingly men (83%).² Despite family violence being heavily under-reported to police³, Victoria Police statistics indicate there were 10,721 recorded family violence incidents in the Northern Metropolitan Region of Melbourne in 2013-2014, reflecting an increase of 8.7 per cent from the previous 12 months.⁴ Family violence is also the leading preventable contributor to death, disability and illness in Victorian women aged 15-44 years, responsible for more of the disease burden than blood pressure, smoking and obesity combined.⁵ Furthermore, the findings from the 2013 VicHealth National Community Attitudes Towards Violence Against Women Survey (NCAS Report) indicate that Australians' understanding of, and attitudes towards, violence against women have remained stable, with the report suggesting that *“sustained effort will be critical not only to achieving a reduction in violence against women, but to guard against the risk of an increase in its prevalence and associated health, social and economic consequences”*.⁶

5. The opportunity

There is strong evidence demonstrating the critical role that Local Government and Community Health can play in preventing family violence/violence against women. The VicHealth Framework which focuses on preventing violence before it occurs, identifies Local Government and Community Health as priority settings for action.

There has been considerable investment to date in capacity building and developing strong and collaborative partnerships to support Local Government and Community Health to take an active role in preventing family violence/violence against women. The NEPCP Preventing Violence Against Women Collaborative partners, including three Local Governments and three Community Health Services, for example, recognise the critical role of Women's Health In the North's regional strategy in supporting their work and building capacity across the region. The networking and sharing approach of the Municipal Association of Victoria, the on-the-ground support provided by the NEPCP and the leadership role of VicHealth over many years, are also recognised.

However, Local Government and Community Health sectors are still an untapped resource and there remains significant potential for them to play a greater role in achieving long-lasting cultural change and preventing family violence/violence against women.

² Women's Health In the North (2015). Submission to Royal Commission into Family Violence

³ Australian Government Australian Institute of Criminology (2009), Trends and issues in crime and criminal justice – Measuring Police Performance in domestic and family violence

⁴ Women's Health In the North (2015). Submission to Royal Commission into Family Violence

⁵ VicHealth (2014). Preventing violence against women short course participant guide. Addressing the social and economic determinants of mental and physical health

⁶ VicHealth (2014). Australians' attitudes to violence against women. Findings from the 2013 National Community Attitudes towards Violence Against Women Survey (NCAS)

6. Local Government and Community Health – uniquely placed to be part of the solution

The strengths which make Local Government and Community Health uniquely placed to prevent family violence/violence against women and build respectful, inclusive & gender equitable organisations, services, families and communities, are outlined below.

- *They can provide leadership and drive whole-of-community, place-based approaches*

In line with the complexity of the issue of family violence/violence against women, the evidence suggests the most effective approach to prevention involves a coordinated program of multiple and reinforcing strategies targeted to different levels of influence (individual/family, organisation/community, society) and across multiple settings.⁷ The evidence also indicates that this ecological, or place-based approach, is more suited to implementation at a local level, rather than a statewide or national level.⁸ The evidence suggests that the intensity, or ‘dose’, of the program increases the likelihood of positive change, and this may be more achievable within smaller local areas, rather than at a state or national level.⁹ Place-based or whole-of-community approaches have also been known to be more effective when there is a central coordinating organisation, such as a Local Government, which can drive a coordinated approach across a community, leading, engaging and influencing a range of partners and settings.¹⁰ Furthermore, the 2013 NCAS Report highlights the need for *“increased investment in whole-of-organisation or community-wide programs that use a range of strategies...”* The report says, *“While strategies aimed at individual attitudinal change (e.g. social marketing and community education) are important, they are more likely to be successful when implemented alongside other strategies aimed at strengthening social censure of violence and violence-supportive behaviour in organisations and communities.”*¹¹

- *They know and understand their communities, and can engage them*

Local Government and Community Health are in a unique position to develop primary prevention strategies tailored to their local communities. They are able to engage with individuals, families and organisations to develop tailored violence prevention strategies and initiatives, drawing on community knowledge and strengths.^{12 13} As the tier of government closest to communities, Local Government is recognised as being able to understand and respond to local issues as well as engage their communities in prevention strategies.¹⁴ The NEPCP believes this same argument can be made for Community Health.

⁷ VicHealth (2007). Preventing violence before it occurs: A framework and background paper to guide the primary prevention of violence against women in Victoria

⁸ VicHealth (2014). Localities Embracing and Accepting Diversity (LEAD) program: summary report

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ VicHealth (2014). Localities Embracing and Accepting Diversity (LEAD) program: summary report

¹¹ VicHealth (2014). Australians’ attitudes to violence against women. Findings from the 2013 National Community Attitudes towards Violence Against Women Survey (NCAS)

¹² VicHealth (2007). Preventing violence before it occurs: A framework and background paper to guide the primary prevention of violence against women in Victoria

¹³ Municipal Association of Victoria. Councils preventing violence against women Info Sheets

¹⁴ VicHealth (2014). Localities Embracing and Accepting Diversity (LEAD) program: summary report

- *They can address determinants and influence contributing factors*
Local Government and Community Health can work to eliminate the underlying causes (key determinants) of family violence/violence against women, through the promotion of gender equity and equal and respectful relationships, and at the same time work to strengthen known protective factors such as employment, neighbourhood characteristics, social connections and cohesion.¹⁵ This multifaceted approach is necessary as it is recognised that addressing contributing factors is most likely to be successful in reducing violence against women when underlying gender issues are also taken into account.¹⁶
- *They are large employers/workplaces*
A VicHealth commissioned literature review¹⁷ of workplace strategies found 55 - 70 percent of women previously or currently experiencing family violence are employed and suggested workplaces as critical sites for prevention of family violence/violence against women. On workplaces, the review said: “*They can potentially be influential in increasing awareness, changing attitudes and behaviour and modelling gender equality and respectful relationships.*” The role of Local Government as a large employer is particularly well recognised. VicHealth and the Municipal Association of Victoria both pinpoint Local Governments’ role as employers and the important opportunities this provides to influence workplace cultures and embed gender equity and prevention of family violence/violence against women actions into policy and practice^{18 19}
- *They provide important services to the local community*
With Local Government and Community Health offering an extensive range of services, it has been identified that there are many opportunities to incorporate violence prevention objectives and activities within, for example, Early Years, Maternal and Child Health, Home and Community Care, health and family support programs, Youth Services, community & sporting facilities, urban planning and design, economic development and social planning.^{20 21} Local Government alone is estimated to play a role in delivering over 140 services in the community, providing significant potential to incorporate violence prevention actions into core business.²²

¹⁵ VicHealth (2007). Preventing violence before it occurs: A framework and background paper to guide the primary prevention of violence against women in Victoria

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Chung D, Zufferey C & Powell A 2012. Preventing violence against women in the workplace (An evidence review: full report). Victorian Health Promotion Foundation

¹⁸ Municipal Association of Victoria. Councils preventing violence against women Info Sheets

¹⁹ VicHealth (2012). Preventing violence against women. Local government action guide no.6

²⁰ VicHealth (2007). Preventing violence before it occurs: A framework and background paper to guide the primary prevention of violence against women in Victoria

²¹ Women’s Health In the North (2011). Building a respectful community - Preventing violence against women. A strategy for the Northern Metropolitan Region of Melbourne 2011-2016

²² Municipal Association of Victoria. Councils preventing violence against women Info Sheets

- *They can reach groups known to be most vulnerable to experiencing family violence and its impacts*

While family violence/violence against women happens across all social, economic and cultural backgrounds, it is widely acknowledged that certain population groups are at higher risk of family violence and its impacts, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, women from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse backgrounds, young women, pregnant women/new mums, women with disabilities, and women in the period prior to and following relationship and marital separation.²³ Early intervention (or secondary prevention) targeted at high risk populations is an important aspect of Local Government and Community Health's opportunity to address family violence/violence against women. VicHealth identifies Community Health's work with socially isolated young women, as well as support programs during pregnancy and the early years, as providing potential to prevent family violence/violence against women.²⁴

- *They can work across the continuum – from prevention to response*

Local Government and Community Health can work across the continuum of strategies necessary to reduce family violence/violence against women – from responding after violence has occurred to preventing violence before it occurs.²⁵ It is suggested that best practice interventions should integrate primary, secondary and tertiary approaches.²⁶ There is significant potential for Local Government and Community Health to achieve this, for example, through promoting gender equity and respectful relationships, working with at-risk population groups, and providing support to women and children who are affected by violence.

- *They can develop partnerships and work collaboratively*

WHIN's regional strategy highlights the need for organisations across the region to work in partnership to prevent family violence/violence against women.²⁷ The VicHealth Framework identifies building partnerships and collaboration across sectors as important for addressing violence.²⁸ In addition to the partnerships that Local Government and Community Health can form with other key priority settings for prevention – such as media, sport and schools²⁹ – Local Government and Community Health can themselves become powerful prevention partners. MonashLink, a Community Health Service funded under the VicHealth *Generating Equality and Respect (GEAR)* funding, identifies their partnership with the City of Monash as a critical success factor in their combined efforts to prevent violence against women.

²³ VicHealth (2012). Preventing violence against women in the workplace (An evidence review: summary report)

²⁴ VicHealth (2007). Preventing violence before it occurs: A framework and background paper to guide the primary prevention of violence against women in Victoria

²⁵ VicHealth (2014). Australians' attitudes to violence against women. Findings from the 2013 National Community Attitudes towards Violence Against Women Survey (NCAS)

²⁶ VicHealth (2012). Preventing violence against women in the workplace (An evidence review: summary report)

²⁷ Women's Health In the North (2011). Building a respectful community - Preventing violence against women. A strategy for the Northern Metropolitan Region of Melbourne 2011-2016

²⁸ VicHealth (2007). Preventing violence before it occurs: A framework and background paper to guide the primary prevention of violence against women in Victoria

²⁹ *Ibid.*

7. NEPCP PVAW Collaborative partners – making a difference

As a catchment that has not received the Department of Justice *Challenge Family Violence* funding or VicHealth *Generating Equality and Respect (GEAR)* funding, NEPCP Preventing Violence Against Women partners are doing what they can within their current resources and this has been identified as a major limiting factor. There is recognition that much more can be done, and needs to be done.

Apart from Darebin City Council which has an internally funded full-time Preventing Violence Against Women Officer, NEPCP Local Government and Community Health partners are undertaking their prevention work with 0.2 or less Full Time Equivalent (FTE) employees to drive strategies and initiatives.

Despite this, the following examples highlight how NEPCP Preventing Violence Against Women Collaborative partners are making a difference within their current resources, and outlines their aspirations to take a more comprehensive approach. With further resourcing and funding, organisations like these can be stronger champions of change – driving change across their organisations and whole communities to transform violence-supportive cultures and communities into ones of equity and respect.

Nillumbik Shire Council – Understanding the True Nature of Family Violence Locally

Nillumbik Shire Council is taking the time to better understand the true nature of family violence locally. Despite having the lowest rate of reported family violence incidents (per 100,000) in the North West Metropolitan Region, the Local Government Area (LGA) has seen a 78% increase in incidents between 2010 and 2014, and has the highest rate when compared to other LGAs of similar socio-economic index in Melbourne. Recognising that family violence is heavily under-reported to police, the Council is also liaising with key services to gain a deeper understanding of the issue at a local level. Key findings from the data and consultations are being used to inform and engage decision makers within Council and raise their awareness and understanding. Despite limited resources to drive preventing family violence/violence against women strategies, positive developments have included a Dad's Playgroup which ran in 2014, a new Early Years Parenting program underpinned by gender equity and respectful relationship principles, and the re-establishment of the Banyule/Nillumbik Family Violence Network, co-convened with Banyule City Council. The Council also undertakes an annual White Ribbon Day activity, has a staff Family Violence Policy, including leave entitlements, and works collaboratively with its local Community Health Service, Nillumbik Health. Nillumbik Shire Council would like to see additional investment in the LGA, to enable them to build on the work currently underway, as well as strengthen an integrated approach to family violence prevention, early intervention and response across their community.

Banyule City Council – Working Across a Range of Levels

From staff training and induction to a focus on women with disabilities, Banyule City Council is working at a range of levels to address family violence/violence against women in their LGA. Staff capacity building has included training on identifying family violence, including with the Local Laws team, and sessions with Management to support the launch and implementation of a Workplace Family Violence policy. In partnership with the disability service sector, Council has run forums to upskill disability workers and engage and educate women with disabilities around violence against women. The Council is extending their prevention work to focus on the Leisure and Culture team, with WHIN's Gender Equity training to be delivered to staff in the coming months, to support them to apply a gender lens to policies and programs. An active White Ribbon Action Team has seen events and activities held annually, to reach staff and the wider community. To complement their Preventing Violence Against Women Action Plan, a whole-of-council Gender Equity Strategy and Advisory Group is being developed.

Darebin City Council – A Whole-of-Organisation Approach to Preventing Violence Against Women

Darebin City Council's whole-of-organisation approach is guided by their Preventing Violence Against Women Action plan 2012-15. Council's prevention initiatives are guided by an internally funded, full-time Preventing Violence Against Women Officer. The Action Plan works across a number of settings key to preventing violence before it occurs, in particular early years, the youth setting and workplaces - which is the focus of this case study. Working in this space since 2008, Darebin recognises that workplaces are a critical setting for creating culture change and preventing violence before it occurs. Building on from the establishment of a workplace family violence policy in 2010 and the inclusion of a family violence clause as part of their Enterprise Bargaining Agreement in 2013, Darebin is strengthening its leadership in preventing violence against women in the workplace. Workplaces are directly impacted by instances of domestic violence and play a key role in influencing the behaviour of individuals and groups. They can reinforce or challenge normative beliefs and can also model equitable and respectful gender relations, and therefore represent a site in which non-violent norms can be promoted. This program has supported the development of a family violence policy video that highlights the key objectives and supports of the policy for staff experiencing family violence, assessing community attitudes towards violence against women within their workforce, a partnership with No to Violence to develop workplace workshops and conversations that challenge sexism, identify bystander approaches and develop an understanding of the workplace as a setting for preventing men's violence against women.

Nillumbik Health – Activating Communities for Health

Nillumbik Health has commenced its preventing family violence/violence against women efforts, embarking on a whole-of-organisation approach, informed by a workplace, prevention and health service response perspective. Having their own house in order and being able to model good organisational policy and practice will enable Nillumbik Health to plan and deliver future community-based primary prevention initiatives from a position of integrity.

Guided by a strong partnership with Human Resources, the organisation is exploring a range of strategies and opportunities to look at Nillumbik Health as a workplace, and, more broadly, as a key community service provider. Recognising that leadership is crucial to prevention of family violence/violence against women initiatives, first steps include briefing and engaging key decision makers. The organisation will then gain a greater understanding of the skills, understanding and knowledge base of staff across the organisation, in relation to preventing family violence/violence against women. A broader assessment of organisational policies and practices aims to highlight their strengths and areas for improvement as they work towards becoming a more welcoming, inclusive and gender equitable organisation.

Banyule Community Health – Harnessing Community Knowledge and Strengths

Having a strong history of community mobilisation, Banyule Community Health recognises the power of a participatory and consultative process and drawing on community knowledge and strengths to achieve social change. In line with this, Banyule Community Health has worked to engage their staff and local community directly in violence prevention initiatives. The organisation currently has many initiatives that contribute to the prevention of violence against women, including, but not limited to, playgroups, men's shed, community garden and a community support group for women who have experienced violence. A multidisciplinary Working Group has recently been developed to sharpen the focus on prevention as a workplace, service provider and provider of community programs. To continue to reach the local community, Banyule Community Health is exploring opportunities such as social marketing and communications, engaging fathers through additional activities and groups and building on already established relationships with schools. As a workplace, the organisation is strengthening internal policies and practices, guided by WHIN's Preventing Violence Against Women Organisational Assessment Tool. Responding to family violence after it has occurred is also a key role of Banyule Community Health. Partnerships with specialist family violence services such as refuges and Child FIRST, and the co-location of a Berry Street worker at the West Heidelberg site, have supported an integrated and coordinated approach, providing 'wrap-around' support for clients affected by family violence.

Darebin Community Health – Working Across the Continuum

Darebin Community Health is committed to preventing family violence along the continuum of strategies – from responding to those affected by violence, to preventing violence before it occurs. Under its Integrated Health Promotion Plan – “Preventing Violence Against Women”, the organisation was the first community health service in the region to implement an organisational staff policy to support those experiencing family violence. More recently, with many staff involved in direct client service delivery, a key focus has been the development of a policy and procedure to support all staff to identify and respond to clients who may be experiencing family violence. Guided by management and its internal Preventing Violence Against Women Working Group, the policy and procedure is being implemented across the organisation using a range of communication methods and an all staff professional development training session. The organisation continues to facilitate therapeutic programs for women in Darebin impacted by family violence and has developed strong working relationships with partner agencies to support programs, including for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

In addition, the organisation actively promotes important events such as Week Without Violence, International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, International Women’s Day and significant days within the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence. Darebin Community Health would like to do more primary and secondary prevention work, such as exploring strategies to promote bystander action, supporting male champions, and initiatives focusing on its work with kindergartens.

8. An untapped resource - recommendations for enhancing Local Government & Community Health’s prevention work

The NEPCP’s recommendations to support Local Government and Community Health to play a greater role in preventing family violence/violence against women and fulfil their potential are two-fold:

- 1. Better resourcing and funding to enable Local Government and Community Health to take an evidence-based approach to preventing family violence/violence against women, implementing a coordinated series of strategies and actions targeted at multiple levels of influence, and across multiple settings.**

Currently, NEPCP Local Government and Community Health partners have limited resources to dedicate to the prevention of family violence/violence against women. Apart from Darebin City Council which has an internally funded full-time Preventing Violence Against Women Officer, NEPCP Local Government and Community Health partners are undertaking their prevention work with 0.2 or less Full Time Equivalent (FTE) employees to drive strategies and initiatives.

Better resourcing could involve funding a dedicated Preventing Violence Against Women position within each organisation to drive cultural change across whole organisations and communities. This has been a critical success factor of other complex social change programs within Local Government, such as Localities Embracing and Accepting Diversity (LEAD), a VicHealth funded place-based program to promote cultural diversity and reduce race-based discrimination within two Victorian LGAs, City of Whittlesea and Greater Shepparton City Council.

The University of Melbourne’s evaluation findings from LEAD are transferable to the prevention of family violence/violence against women. The evaluation found having a dedicated program coordinator employed within Council was a critical success factor, being an essential component for developing a cohesive program, engaging the whole organisation and maintaining the momentum throughout the implementation process.³⁰

³⁰ VicHealth (2014). Localities Embracing and Accepting Diversity (LEAD) program: summary report

2. Consolidating and strengthening the current statewide, regional and local partnerships and structures that support Local Government and Community Health to undertake evidence-based preventing family violence/violence against women strategies, such as the Municipal Association of Victoria, Women's Health Services, such as Women's Health In the North, and PCPs, such as the North East Primary Care Partnership.

It is essential that we build on the base that already exists.

- Statewide level

Funded through successive State Governments, the Municipal Association of Victoria 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 Association has been successful in providing advocacy, building capacity, promoting local government's role and supporting councils. Resourcing the Municipal Association of Victoria in an advisory capacity to coordinate and inform sector efforts and partner with the state government and other key stakeholders would support local government's role and capability to prevent family violence/violence against women.

- Regional level

Capacity to lead regional work in a large, complex and growing region like the Northern Metropolitan Region requires dedicated funding and resourcing and a 'back bone' organisation to lead the approach. WHIN's knowledge, expertise and existing infrastructure and partnerships make the organisation well-placed to continue leading and coordinating preventing violence against women work across the region. Its *Building a Respectful Community* regional strategy, which has been endorsed by fifty organisations, provides the framework, context and evidence-based actions to guide primary prevention work in the region. Importantly, WHIN's regional approach puts a focus on the role of Local Government and Community Health organisations in prevention.

- Local level

PCPs, as a flexible and robust platform for partnership work in Victoria, have been identified as well-placed to foster local partnerships for a whole-of-community response to preventing violence against women.³¹ Their catchment-wide collaboration draws on the expertise of different member agencies.³² Specifically, the NEPCP supports its preventing violence against women partners to plan, implement and evaluate their prevention strategies. This local approach, concentrating on a smaller number of partners at a catchment level, complements WHIN's regional approach and enables more intensive support to be provided. In this way, the NEPCP is supporting the regional strategy to be translated into local action. With further resourcing, the NEPCP would be able to engage and support more of its partners from a broader range of sectors to undertake preventing violence against women initiatives.

³¹ Women's Health In the North (2011). *Building a respectful community - Preventing violence against women. A strategy for the Northern Metropolitan Region of Melbourne 2011-2016*

³² *Ibid.*

9. Conclusion

The evidence shows that Local Government and Community Health are in a unique position to be able to develop primary prevention strategies tailored to their local contexts and communities, engaging individuals, families, organisations and communities to create cultural change.^{33 34}

Strong collaborative partnerships are already in place at a state, regional and local level, supporting Local Government and Community Health to play an active role in preventing violence against women. There are opportunities to consolidate and strengthen this approach and build on this existing partnership platform.

NEPCP partners are currently making a difference through their work, with a strong focus on creating non-violent and gender equitable organisations, but have aspirations to do more. With more resourcing and funding, Local Government and Community Health could realise their full potential and take a more comprehensive and multifaceted approach to prevent family violence/violence against women and become stronger champions of change. This would produce the greatest impact in the short and longer term.

³³ VicHealth (2007). Preventing violence before it occurs: A framework and background paper to guide the primary prevention of violence against women in Victoria

³⁴ Municipal Association of Victoria. Councils preventing violence against women Info Sheets