

# FACT SHEET 2

## PRIMARY PREVENTION OF VIOLENCE: RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES

### WHAT DOES PRIMARY PREVENTION MEAN?

Primary prevention refers to a public health approach that targets whole populations and/or high-risk groups with the aim of preventing violence *before* it occurs.<sup>i</sup>

Traditionally, efforts to prevent violence against women have been secondary (early intervention) and tertiary (an intervention implemented after violence has occurred) in nature.

Whilst it is essential that women experiencing violence are supported, addressing violence in its early stages, or after it has been perpetrated, maintains women's overall risk of violence and its negative health outcomes.

Primary prevention attempts to change the culture that allows violence against women to occur in the first instance.

### WHAT INITIATIVES HAVE BEEN MOST EFFECTIVE?

Whilst the primary prevention of violence against women is gaining momentum in the wider Australian community, initiatives that specifically aim to prevent violence against immigrant and refugee women are still lacking in comparison.

Nevertheless, there are programs and projects conducted in cross-cultural settings internationally, which have contributed to culture change, and from which much could be learnt about good practice principles for violence prevention.

### HOW DO I GO ABOUT IMPLEMENTING THE STRATEGIES?

The strategies outlined here build on the good practice principles for culturally appropriate primary prevention efforts, specifically within immigrant and refugee communities.<sup>ii</sup>

It is important to remember that immigrant and refugee women are not a homogenous group. Whilst there are many similarities across this population, there is significant diversity in women's life stages and circumstances which make a difference to their exposure to situations in which violence is likely to occur.

### HOW DO I ENSURE CULTURAL APPROPRIATENESS AND RELEVANCY?

When developing and implementing violence prevention strategies, you should ensure that strategies take into account the specific and diverse situations of immigrant and refugee women, within the cultural, religious and socio-economic contexts of their lives.

In addition to English language proficiency, you will also need to consider the length of time a woman has lived in Australia and her migration status. For example, issues that are relevant for women from well-established communities will be different for newly-arrived women or for women who are on student or temporary visas.

## RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES FOR CULTURALLY-APPROPRIATE PRIMARY PREVENTION EFFORTS INCLUDE:

1. **Research, monitoring and evaluation** should comprehensively document the extent and dynamics of violence against women. Aim to conduct research within, rather than across, communities in order to provide a more accurate, consistent and reliable overview of women's experiences.
2. Recognition of the issue and the call to action requires the identification and support of leaders in government and influential and respected community leaders from a range of backgrounds. However, immigrant and refugee women and their representative groups and organisations need to be the instigators and be at the forefront of **advocacy** efforts.
3. **Community strengthening** initiatives such as leadership development programs with a specific focus on violence prevention are needed to support and enable community leaders to advocate for change.
4. **Communication and social marketing** tools such as community forums, electronic media, printed communication and multi-media campaigns have been used to increase immigrant and refugee community awareness across Australia about violence against women.
5. **Direct participation programs**, such as education and mentoring programs provide children, young people, men and women with the knowledge, skills and resources required to develop and maintain respectful relationships.
6. **Organisational and workforce development** involves building the capacity of workplaces and organisations to engage in violence prevention efforts and includes training, collaboration, and resourcing.
7. **Legislative and policy reform** should be broad-based and take into consideration laws and policies that both directly and indirectly reduce women's risk of violence.

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<sup>i</sup> VicHealth. 2007. *Preventing violence before it occurs: A framework and background paper to guide the primary prevention of violence against women in Victoria*. VicHealth: Carlton South. Available from <http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/~media/ProgramsandProjects/MentalHealthandWellBeing/DiscriminationandViolence/PreventingViolence/framework%20web.ashx>

<sup>ii</sup> For further information see Poljski C. 2011. *On Her Way: Primary prevention of violence against immigrant and refugee women in Australia*. MCWH: Melbourne. Chapter 3 provides detailed examples of good practice or promising initiatives.