



Preventing Violence Against Women and their Children

STRATEGY 2013-2016



Melton City Council acknowledges that the land it now occupies has a history that began with the Indigenous occupants, the Kulin Nation. Council pays its respects to the Kulin Nation people and their Elders and descendants past and present.

For further information see the Melton City Council website www.melton.vic.gov.au.
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Mayor's Foreword



I am pleased to present the Preventing Violence Against Women and their Children Strategy 2013-2016, in delivering our shared vision of creating a community that is safe, healthy and free from violence.

The Preventing Violence Against Women and Children identifies priority issues and community needs, outlining Council's direction for the next three years to respond to family violence. This strategy focuses on prevention, that is: preventing family violence from occurring in the first place.

Melton City Council is committed to work in partnership to prevent family violence and reduce its impact on our community. Council will continue to build its knowledge base, campaign for culture change, and advocate for those who often go unheard.

Melton City Council values the health and wellbeing of all residents, and promotes a community where all deserve to feel safe, secure and live a life free from violence; and children deserve a safe, healthy and happy childhood.

This strategy has been developed in consultation with key local community health and women's health service providers, neighbouring local government authorities and representatives of community agencies. The Melton Family Violence Network, with representatives from local community services and Victoria Police, has provided guidance for the development of this Plan.

On behalf of Melton City Council I would like to thank the many individuals and organisations that have had input into the development of this Preventing Violence Against Women and Children Strategy.

Council looks forward to continued partnerships and engaging our community as we protect and enhance the health and wellbeing in our City.

Cr Bob Turner
Mayor, Melton City Council

Strategy:

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Preventing Violence Against Women and their Children

2.1 Introduction

Violence against women and their children is a key social and health problems that significantly impacts the health and wellbeing of everyone in the community, and women and children in particular. The psychological, physical, economic, social impacts are serious, life-long and often profound for those who have experienced violence.

Violence is never acceptable and it is important to acknowledge that the vast majority of women impacted by violence experience this at the hands of their current or past intimate partner.

Nationwide, communities are impacted by unacceptably high rates of family violence. In Australia, violence against women affects one in three women over their lifetimesⁱ and UNICEF estimates that between 75,000 to 640,000 Australian children and young people are living with domestic violenceⁱⁱ.

Many children and young people witness violence in their homes, with one in four young people reportedly having witnessed an act of physical violence against their mother or step-motherⁱⁱⁱ.

The City of Melton has a total population of 124,096 (as of 30 September 2013) and a current annual growth rate is 4.7%. Melton City Council faces challenges to improve health and wellbeing in the community, given this rapid growth.

In 2013 Melton City Council furthered it's leadership approach to address violence against women and their children by identifying it as a health priority in the Municipal Public Health Plan 2013 – 2017. In 2010, Council identified family violence a key priority of the Community Safety Plan 2010-2014.

In 2013, Melton City Council has developed this Preventing Violence Against Women and their Children Strategy to build on this commitment to protect women and children from violence in our community.

Council has developed this strategy through a process of data analysis and community consultation. Council has worked hard to understand the priorities in addressing family violence in the community.

The consultation process undertaken in developing this strategy has engaged the local community and key local community service providers. Continued partnerships with local organisations and the wider community will be vital in implementing this integrated approach to reduce family violence in our community.



2.2 Definitions

| Term | Definition |
|------------------------|--|
| Family Violence | <p>Family violence refers to violence between family members as well as violence between intimate partners. This term covers a complexity of behaviours beyond that of direct physical violence.</p> <p>Within Victoria, family violence is defined as ‘any behaviour that is physically or sexually abusive, emotionally or psychologically abusive, economically abusive, threatening or coercive, or in any other way controls or dominates the family member and causes that family member to fear for his or her safety or wellbeing, or for the safety or wellbeing of another person.’^{iv}</p> |
| Violence Against Women | <p>Violence against women is ‘any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual and psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.’^v</p> |

2.3 The Impact of Violence Against Women and their Children

The economic cost of family violence is widely recognised. Violence against women costs the Australian economy \$13.1 billion annually.^{vi} Individually, the psychological, physical, economic, social impacts on victims are profound, sometimes life changing, and often lifelong. Unfortunately, in many instances, these impacts are also often felt by the next generation.

Intimate partner violence (domestic violence) is the leading cause of ill health and premature death in women aged 15-44 years in Victoria.^{vii} Women and children escaping domestic violence are the prevailing face of homelessness in Australia. Children of women escaping violence comprise two thirds of child clients of Supported Accommodation Assistance Program services.^{viii}



2.4 Policy Context

Preventing violence against women and their children presents a complex context for response. In **Appendix A** is a list of legislation, plans and strategies that guide work to reduce family violence in our communities.

2.5 Melton City Council's Role to Address Violence Against Women and their Children

Local governments play a key role in creating positive change in the health, wellbeing and safety of the community. Local governments also deliver a range of services to families, including youth and community centres and local infrastructure, and play a pivotal role in engaging vulnerable children and their families in those services.^{ix}

The City of Melton Preventing Violence Against Women and their Children Strategy 2013-2016 provides opportunity for Council to work in partnership with key local service providers to address family violence in the City. Informed by an integrated, evidence based approach; this strategy outlines a framework of key priorities to prevent of family violence at a local level.

Whilst traditionally this has not been seen as an essential component of Council services, increasingly local governments in Australia and internationally are considering the coordinating, facilitating and planning role they have in family violence prevention^x Melton City Council is proud to be a leading local government in working to prevent violence against women and their children.

Melton City Council's strategy to prevent family violence is built on the understanding that:

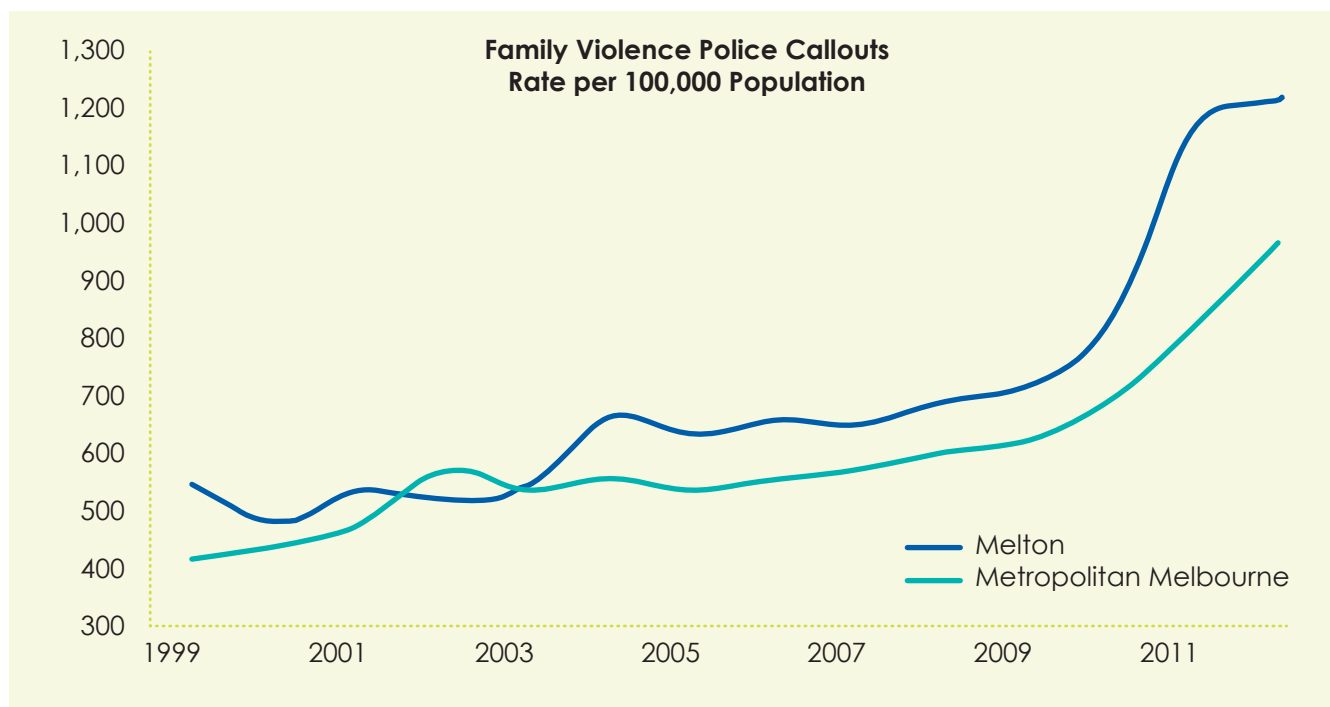
- Health and wellbeing is a right of all residents, where all deserve to feel safe, secure and live a life free from violence; and children deserve a safe, healthy and happy childhood.
- Violence against women and their children is a preventable health and wellbeing issue.
- Family violence in any form is not condoned in our community.
- It is recognised that women and children make up the majority of those who experience family violence.
- Working in partnership is key to creating a community that values the right to a safe childhood and home, gender equity, strong families and respectful relationships.
- Leadership is needed to raise community awareness, creating supportive environments, and fostering respectful attitudes and relationships.

2.6 Profile of Violence Against Women and their Children in the City of Melton

ABS statistics indicate that one (1) in three (3) women have experienced physical violence in Australia, and intimate partner violence is the leading contributor to death, disability and ill health in Victorian for women aged between fifteen (15) and forty four (44) years.^{xi}

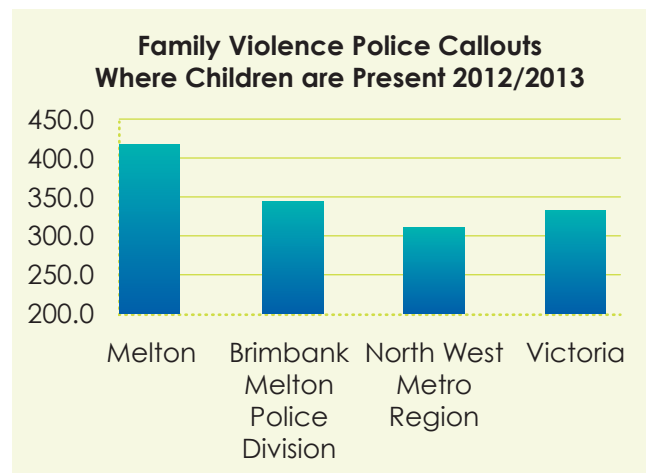
VicHealth found that the City of Melton residents are less prepared to intervene in a situation of family violence, 89.9% as compared to the Victorian average 93.1%.^{xii}

Within the municipality 1,112 reports of family violence were reported in 2011. This is an increase of 40% on reports made in 2010. Though it is encouraging that increased community awareness has contributed to an increase in reporting, the level of family violence in the community is of great concern.^{xiii}





Research demonstrates that across Australia one (1) in four (4) young people have witnessed violence against their mother or step mother. Police statistics show that in Melton there are more incidents of police attending family violence incidents where children are present as compared to other areas^{xiv}.



2.7 A Public Health Approach to Preventing Violence Against Women and their Children

Legislative reform and policy direction from Federal and State Government, recognise that as a society we need to shift our response to 'protecting women and children' from abuse and neglect, to promoting the safety and wellbeing of women and children by preventing violence before it occurs.

Leading researchers and practitioners nationally and internationally suggest that applying a public health model promises better outcomes for our children and young people, women and their families when addressing family violence.^{xv}

By employing this approach and strengthening activity through preventative efforts, Council aims to influence a change in attitudes and behaviour within the community. This Strategy aims to address the causes of violence against

women and their children to prevent violence from occurring in the first place.

A public health approach to preventing violence against women and their children recognises the impact of social, cultural, political and economic factors on health and wellbeing. The City of Melton acknowledges that health is not only the absence of disease; it is also about physical, social and mental wellbeing. The social determinants framework aims to prevent and reduce illness and address inequalities and disadvantage that exist within the community.

A gendered approach to health and wellbeing, acknowledges that women and men experience health differently. The data concerning violence shows that in order to improve health outcomes both effectively and equitably for all, a gender lens must be applied.



2.8 Addressing the Causes of Violence Against Women and their Children

The causes of violence against women are complex. There are often individual, community or societal explanations as to why such violence happens. The key determinants to the perpetration of violence against women are:

- The unequal distribution of power and resources between men and women;
- Adherence to rigidly defined gender roles; and
- Broader cultures of violence.

There are also a number of contributing factors such as:

- Witnessing or experiencing family violence as a child;
- Income, education and occupation;
- Weak social connections;
- Neighbourhood characteristics, such as service infrastructure, high unemployment rates, poverty and
- The unequal distribution of material resources.

Violence against anyone is unacceptable and while some men and boys are victims of family violence and sexual assault, women are overwhelmingly the victims of these forms of violence.^{xvi}

Though women and children of all ages, from all backgrounds and from all socio-economic groups are affected by violence, there are specific risk factors for some priority populations. A focus of this strategy is to identify opportunities to engage with priority populations where possible and appropriate:

- Children
- Young people
- Women and men
- Indigenous communities
- Culturally and linguistically diverse communities
- Rural communities
- Neighbourhoods affected by disadvantage
- Women with disabilities.



2.9 A Framework for Preventing Violence Against Women and their Children

The VicHealth Framework: *Preventing violence before it occurs (2007)* provides clear direction in applying a public health approach to addressing the causes of violence against women and their children.

This document is well regarded as national and international best practice in organisational change strategies to reduce violence against women, which will also reduce the demand on

tertiary responses to violence against women and children and a shift to early intervention, and then towards the primary prevention.

Adapted from the *VicHealth Framework: Preventing violence against women before it occurs (2007)* Melton City Council will deliver actions to reduce violence organised into three tiers.

| Type | Target Group | Purpose |
|--|---|---|
| Primary prevention: actions that respond to the determinants of violence against women including gender equity. | Whole community. All families. | Primary prevention strategies seek to prevent violence before it occurs. Interventions can be delivered to the whole population (universal) or to particular groups that are at higher risk of using or experiencing violence (targeted or selective). Strategies may not have a particular focus on violence against women, but may address its underlying causes. |
| Early intervention: actions that respond to the early signs of violence against women and aim to change behaviour of individuals or groups. | Women at risk of experiencing violence. | Early intervention (sometimes referred to as secondary prevention) is targeted at individuals and groups who exhibit early signs of perpetrating violent behaviour or of being subject to violence. To address risk factors, alleviate problems and prevent escalation, with a focus on early intervention. |
| Tertiary response: actions that respond after violence has occurred. | Women who have experienced violence. | Response involves providing support and treatment to women and children who are affected by violence or to men who use violence. |



2.10 Developing the Action Plan - Consultation

Melton City Council has undertaken a number of consultative activities to guide the development of this strategy. In May 2012, Council hosted a *Preventing Violence Against Women and Children Action Forum*. This forum engaged over sixty five local specialist service providers to seek their input and views on Council's future approach to addressing violence against women and children.

At the forum, two workshops were held with attendees to map existing services to address violence against women and children in the City; and to outline key priorities and opportunities for Council to undertake future prevention work. The key priorities to guide Council's future work included promoting respectful relationships at Council and within the community, particularly in school settings, and Council support for and participation in the White Ribbon Day campaign.

Following the Action Forum, a *Preventing Violence Against Women and Children Community Survey* was developed to provide the broader community an opportunity to comment on Council's future approach to addressing violence against women and children. The Melton City Council Preventing Child Abuse and Violence Towards Women Consultation provided information to the community about the development of the Preventing and Violence Against Women and their Children Strategy. Residents of Melton were surveyed as to their level of agreement with the proposed directions of the strategy. It was found that there is very strong community support for:

- Improving access to services for families who are struggling;
- Increasing social connections for all families;
- Promoting gender equity and respectful relationships within workplaces and schools.

2.11 Delivering the Plan

It is recognised that the task of promoting the safety and wellbeing of women and children through the prevention of violence sounds arduous and even unachievable. However with an ongoing commitment to influence lasting change, considerable gains are possible. The obligation to improve the lives and outcomes of our community cannot be waived.

The Preventing Violence Against Women and their Children Action Plan 2013-2016 provides a staged approach to achieving Council's vision for a violence free community, building on best practice and promoting a coordinated approach through engaging partners in a multi-agency approach towards prevention.

This strategy is guided by **four preventative strategies:**



The key actions of this strategy are organised under **seven themes for action**. These are based on the Preventative Actions of the *VicHealth Preventing Violence Against Women Framework (2007)*, an evidence base shown to be most effective in addressing violence against women:



2.12 Review and Reporting

At the conclusion of the first twelve months of the Action Plan a review will be undertaken to inform the development of an Annual Preventing Violence Against Women and their Children Prevention Achievements Report. This report will assess the progress of actions contained

within the plan. Central to this review will be the collection and analysis of data against the outputs and performance indicators identified in the three year Action Plan. This Achievements Report will be distributed to key stakeholders and reported to Council.



Endnotes

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- i Australian Bureau of Statistics (2006) Personal Safety Survey 2005. Commonwealth Government of Australia. Cat. no. 4906.0. Canberra: ABS
- ii Pinheiro P 2006. World report on violence against children. New York: UNICEF.
- iii National Crime Prevention (2001) Young Australians and Domestic Violence, No 195, Australian Institute of Criminology, Canberra, AIC.
- iv Family Violence Protection Act 2008 (Vic)
- v UN General Assembly, Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, 20 December 1993, A/RES/48/104.
- vi Access Economics 2004. The cost of domestic violence to the Australian economy. Canberra: Australian Government.
- vii VicHealth 2004, The health costs of violence: Measuring the burden of disease caused by intimate partner violence. A summary of findings, Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, Carlton.
- viii Macdonald A 2007. Women and children experiencing family violence are the face of homelessness. Parity 20(5): 21–22.
- ix Council of Australian Governments & Australia. Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs 2013, Protecting children is everyone's business National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020 : annual report to the Council of Australian Governments 2011-12, Dept. of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, [Canberra, A.C.T
- x Hayes (2006) Gender, Local Governance and Violence Prevention: Learning from International Good Practice to Develop a Victorian Model, 'Making the Links: Gender, Violence Prevention & Local Governance' project, Faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning, University of Melbourne.
- xi Australian Bureau of Statistics (2006) Personal Safety Survey 2005. Commonwealth Government of Australia. Cat. no. 4906.0. Canberra: ABS
- xii VicHealth (2011) VicHealth Indicators Survey. Available at vichealth.vic.gov.au. Viewed April 2013
- xiii Victorian Police Corporate Statistics 2013
- xiv Victorian Police Corporate Statistics 2013
- xv VicHealth (2007).
- xvi VicHealth (2007) Preventing violence before it occurs: A framework and background paper to guide the primary prevention of violence against women in Victoria, Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, Carlton.

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Appendix

4.1 National Policy Context

The *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022* (the National Plan) has a strong focus on prevention and is long term (12 years). The plan identifies building respectful relationships and working to increase gender equality to prevent violence from occurring in the first place. It has a focus on holding perpetrators accountable.

This plan responds to Australia's commitments to upholding the rights of women through the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Declaration to End Violence Against Women and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

4.2 State Policy Context

In October 2012, the Victorian Government launched *Victoria's Action Plan to Address Violence against Women and Children – Everyone has a responsibility to act*. The plan articulates the commitment to preventing violence, holding perpetrators to account for their actions and providing support to women and children who experience violence.

Prevention is at the core of the plan, with an emphasis on educating and engaging the community to positively change attitudes and behaviours. The plan supports vulnerable women, including women with disabilities and from culturally diverse communities.

The plan has a focus on early intervention to support women and children at risk of violence. This includes extending training and skills development for workers in health services. The plan also has new initiatives for men and boys who are at risk of being violent.

More response action will be taken to protect and empower women and children to rebuild their lives after experiencing violence, through initiatives such as expanded family violence counselling and case management and sexual assault counselling.

As the peak body for Victorian local government, the Municipal Association of Victoria pledged its support to Victorian councils to undertake work and to provide leadership on the prevention of violence against women through the *MAV Prevention of Violence Against Women Leadership Statement*.

The MAV commits to provide leadership in preventing violence against women through:

- Advocacy to other levels of government to increase the resources, legislation and influencing social norms for more equal relationships between men and women.
- Building capacity to understand the prevalence, seriousness and preventable nature of the problem and the roles that local government can play in addressing gender equity.
- Promoting local government's role, achievements and best practice in preventing violence against women to the sector and other levels of government.
- Supporting local councils in their community leadership roles by facilitating the provision of resources including advice, expertise, networks and policy support.

The Victorian Government *Indigenous Family Violence Primary Prevention Framework*, meets the commitment made to develop an Indigenous specific prevention framework for family violence identified in *Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families: Towards a safer future* for Indigenous families and communities Ten Year Plan. The framework is designed to support Aboriginal family violence primary prevention capacity building, effective, sustainable activities, and ownership and leadership within Aboriginal communities. The framework provides evidence of the range of community led initiatives that are contributing toward the prevention of family violence in Aboriginal communities in Victoria.

4.3 Regional Policy Context

In June, 2012, Melton City Council endorsed *Preventing Violence Together: Regional Action Plan to Prevent Violence Against Women*. *Preventing Violence Together* was designed as an enabling and coordinating action plan for all local councils and community health services in the western region. The objectives of Preventing Violence Together are to:

- Establish effective partnerships across government and non-government organisations and accountable leadership structures for sustainable prevention
- Build capacity and tools for organisational change and workforce development
- Strengthen community leadership to drive change to prevent violence against women
- Implement multiphase communications campaigns and programs, engage champions and undertake media advocacy to promote equity and non-violence
- Develop and strengthen systems and programs that build respectful relationships skills and influence social norms, attitudes and behaviours
- Undertake research, evaluation and monitoring of policy and programs
- Improve policy, regulation and legislation to embed violence prevention and gender equity.

4.4 Local Policy Context

Council continuously develops a range of corporate, planning, strategic and operational documents that outlines the goals and approaches for Council service delivery and community planning. Matters pertaining to this document do not operate in isolation, relying on collaborative action and partnership for an effective and efficient response.

As such this document has consulted with a variety of influential documents produced across Council and externally by other stakeholders. These documents are listed publicly on Melton City Council's website and may be downloaded. Our community can request a hard copy of any document at Melton City Council's Civic Centres.

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