

# IMPROVING OUR APPROACH TO COMMUNITY-LED PREVENTION



## LESSONS FROM THE CONNECTING COMMUNITIES PROGRAM

This resource has been developed as part of the *Connecting Communities* program, a partnership between the Multicultural Centre for Women's Health (MCWH) and Safe and Equal to support the learning and professional development needs of the Connecting Communities network, a group of organisations working with multicultural and faith-based communities to prevent violence against women in Victoria since 2022, funded through the Victorian Government's *Supporting Multicultural Communities to Prevent Family Violence Program*.

To achieve a shared vision of a world free from violence, primary prevention involves working to change attitudes across the whole population, through a range of programs and initiatives delivered across communities, groups and settings.

Implementing prevention initiatives in a way that is community-led and centres the voices and lived experiences of community members is essential when working with multicultural and faith-based communities.

This guide has been designed for primary prevention practitioners working in community-led initiatives in multicultural and faith-based settings. It has been developed to improve understanding and practice of community-led prevention and outline key considerations for intersectional prevention practice involving multicultural and faith-based communities.

## WHY TAKE AN INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH TO PRIMARY PREVENTION WORK?

Intersectionality is a way of seeing or analysing the dynamics of power and social inequality in our society. It involves recognising that inequalities are never the result of any single distinct factor (such as race, gender or class) but result from the interaction of different social locations, power relations and experiences. An intersectional approach involves taking deliberate action to correct or challenge these power imbalances, and "address systemic inequality in general, rather than focussing on categories of discrimination".<sup>1</sup>

In the context of primary prevention, an intersectional approach helps us to understand how to be more effective at preventing violence against women, through challenging racism and other forms of discrimination such as ableism, homophobia and transphobia, that also affect women.

## PROVEN AND PROMISING TECHNIQUES

The Connecting Communities network is made up of organisations designing and delivering a range of primary prevention activities with multicultural and faith communities across Victoria using a range of techniques that are proven or show promise in preventing violence against women at the grass-roots or community level including; direct participation programs; communication strategies and social marketing to challenge gendered and racialised stereotypes; and recruiting community champions to advocating for transforming systems and structures to promote gender equality and prevent violence against women (for more information on these, please see MCWH's *Intersectionality Matters*).

<sup>1</sup> Hankivsky, O. (2014). *Intersectionality 101*. The Institute for Intersectionality Research & Policy. Simon Fraser University.



## BUILDING A COMMUNITY-LED APPROACH INTO PROGRAM DESIGN

Any initiatives working directly with multicultural and faith communities must involve or be led by organisations that specialise in working with and for these communities. In addition, primary prevention initiatives of any sort must aim to reach the whole of the population, which includes multicultural and faith communities (whether they are identified as the focus or not).

Taking the time to involve, consult and collaborate with the community you are working with will help you figure out which techniques are the best fit. Connecting Communities members consistently shared that:

- Intersectionality in practice means examining the forms of systemic social, political and economic discrimination and disadvantage that intersect with gender inequality, and working towards social and structural change by supporting and advocating for policies and practices that promote women’s leadership.
- There is no ‘one-size-fits-all’ strategy or standard checklist to follow (because a key part of an intersectional approach is that we cannot make assumptions or token gestures) but taking a community-led approach will help you figure out which techniques are best suited to the community you’re working with.
- Engaging with community as early as possible will help you design prevention activities with the community in mind in the first instance, while saving time and resources in the longer-term.



## COMMUNITY-LED PREVENTION PRACTICE – KEY LESSONS

The following key learnings have been synthesised from discussions with the Connecting Communities network on ways to build intersectionality into prevention practice with communities. We have also drawn on the existing evidence base (see reading list at the end of this guide).

### Reflect on and acknowledge your own position

Reflexivity is an important skill as it helps us to think about and critique the power and privilege that operates in the spaces we work. This includes thinking through your own power and privilege, that of your organisation, and that of the members of the community you are working with, and considering ways you can balance power dynamics in your prevention work. Once you have identified these opportunities, it is essential you put them into action.

### Implement methods of balancing power

Remember that while *“your project has deliverables, the community doesn’t”*.<sup>3</sup> Balancing power dynamics in community-led prevention is about sharing decision-making, and valuing and respecting the time and expertise of community members. This can be done by:

- Properly remunerating participants for their time, work, and commitment
- Being transparent and realistic about what you are seeking or expecting from community members, including time commitments
- Listening to and acting upon community consultation
- Allowing flexible timelines to enable proper community consultation
- Showing an ongoing commitment by communicating and celebrating the outcomes of your prevention project or program with community members

### Remember that multicultural communities are as diverse as any community

Applying an intersectional lens to working with multicultural and faith-based communities helps us understand the varied lived experiences and ways of being within these communities. Meaningful consultation with the community or communities you are working with will help you to identify groups within that community who you may want to engage in order to develop more effective programs and activities. Be specific about the focus of your project or work, and communicate clearly what it can deliver, and what it cannot.

2 Connecting Communities guest speaker (Intersectionality in Practice workshop, February 2023).

## Pay attention to inequalities within communities and bring marginalised people into the centre of your program planning and design

When designing and implementing prevention initiatives with communities, ensure that all members can engage equitably and benefit mutually. Inequality and privilege exist within and across communities in ways that can impact people's relationships, experiences and perspectives.

Because prevention work is about preventing gendered violence, gendered inequality must be a central focus of our work. Keep in mind that gendered inequality interacts and intersects with multiple other forms of discrimination (such as racism, ageism, ableism, homophobia and transphobia). In the context of working with communities, pay attention not just to gendered power imbalances and inequalities but also to intersecting forms of discrimination at play.

Paying attention to inequalities within communities and making deliberate decisions to centre the voices and lived experience of marginalised people in program planning and design will help to identify imbalances or oversights in your current prevention initiatives as well as increase inclusion and accessibility.

For example, you may notice some community members may be hesitant to speak out during community consultation if community leaders are present. It can help to ask community members separately what would enable their full participation in a way that is culturally safe, then act on their advice.

Some suggestions from Connecting Communities organisations include:

- Conducting separate consultations with some groups (e.g., men and women, young people, as appropriate)
- Tailoring the method of consultation (for some groups workshops may work best, individual interviews or surveys may work better for others)
- Ensuring that community advisory committees (or something similar) include a mix of people to more accurately represent and reflect the community itself, and that all members of the group are encouraged to speak openly

**“Intersectional prevention does not have a checklist. I can't tell you what to do when working with different cultures. Instead, go into community and ask what will work for them in their context.”<sup>4</sup>**

## Invest time and allocate resources at the planning stages of your project or program to build trust with the community

Investing time and allocating resources from the outset has been highlighted by the Connecting Communities network as a particularly important enabler of effective community-led prevention. As funding and resources may be limited for many organisations, it is necessary to build in additional time, funding, resources and flexibility into your project or program planning from the initial stages to build trust, rapport and connections.

This can be done through meaningful consultation, engaging with community as early as possible, taking the time to find out who the community leaders are, who else should be 'at the table' and the best ways to reach out and communicate with them.

As prevention practitioners, our responsibility is to the communities we work with, not the other way around. It is important to remember that there is a wealth of wisdom and expertise in multicultural and faith-based communities, and they know best about the most appropriate strategies for engaging communities and developing primary prevention activities.

Taking a community-led approach will help you put intersectional theory into practice by centring that wisdom and involving community in decision-making – resulting in prevention programs that are culturally relevant, resonant and more likely to be effective and sustainable.



## FURTHER READING

-  Hankivsky, O. (2014). *Intersectionality 101*. The Institute for Intersectionality Research & Policy. Simon Fraser University.
-  Multicultural Centre for Women's Health. (2017). *Intersectionality Matters: A guide to engaging immigrant and refugee communities to prevent violence against women*. Melbourne
-  Multicultural Centre for Women's Health. (2020). *Challenging Myths about Culture and Violence in Migrant and Refugee Communities*. Melbourne
-  Our Watch. (2021). *Change the Story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women in Australia* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed). Melbourne.
-  Safe and Equal. (2023). *Safe and Equal's Commitment to Intersectionality in Primary Prevention*. Melbourne.

## ABOUT THE CONNECTING COMMUNITIES BRIEF GUIDES

The *Connecting Communities* network have expressed a need for short, concise and practical resources in topics relevant to their primary prevention work. The *Connecting Communities* brief guides have been developed to meet this need, and the content in these guides have been informed by learnings shared from the network, as well as the existing evidence base. While these brief guides do not go into in-depth detail (we recommend referring to the reading list for more detailed information), we hope that they provide a useful point of reference not just for the network but for the broader prevention sector working with multicultural and faith-based communities.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF TRADITIONAL OWNERS

### Acknowledgement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

Safe and Equal and Multicultural Centre for Women's Health are based on Wurundjeri Country. We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the traditional and ongoing custodians of the lands on which we live and work and we pay respects to Elders past and present. We acknowledge that sovereignty has never been ceded and recognise First Nations peoples' rights to self-determination and continuing connections to land, waters and community.



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