



# Engaging Men in the Prevention of Gender- Based Violence:

A Community of Practice that  
Supports the Work and the Workers

November 2023

## Acknowledgements



Women’s Health In the North acknowledges Victorian Aboriginal people as the Traditional Owners of the land on which we provide our services – the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people of the Kulin nation – and pay our respect to their Elders past, present and future. WHIN acknowledges that Aboriginal sovereignty was never given up and that we stand on stolen land.

We are committed to Aboriginal self-determination and to supporting Treaty and truth-telling processes. We recognise the ongoing leadership role of the Aboriginal community on gender equality and the health, safety and wellbeing of women and gender diverse people. As First Peoples, Aboriginal Victorians are best placed to determine a culturally appropriate path to these in their communities.

## Contributors

Monique Keel, City of Whittlesea, is the primary author of this publication with support from Emily Sporik, Women’s Health In the North. Thank you to all the ‘Engaging Men in the Prevention of Gender-Based Violence Community of Practice’ members for your input to this guide and continued generosity in collective learning to support the prevention of gender-based violence in the northern metropolitan region (NMR).



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## Introduction

The 'Engaging Men in the Prevention of Gender-Based Violence (PGBV) Community of Practice (CoP)' was formed in December 2022 after the close of the '[Modelling Respect and Equality](#)' program in the City of Whittlesea, which left participants wanting more opportunities for focused discussions about engaging men and boys in the prevention of gender-based violence.

The second edition of [Change the Story](#) emphasises the importance of addressing masculinities and engaging men in the prevention of violence against women<sup>1</sup>, with resources such as [the Men in Focus Practice Guide](#) to support this work.

The CoP provides members with an opportunity to discuss theory and practice, and unpack their experiences, both the good and the bad. Many PGBV practitioners work in relative isolation and seldom have colleagues with whom they can talk to about the challenges and resistance that they face in their work to bring about cultural and systemic change. The CoP is a safe space for this discussion and enables deeper conversations with trusted peers and allies about practice as they continue to build evidence about what 'effective practice' looks like.

*"There is a lot to learn. This work is hard. This work is deep and complex. There's not one 'key' learning, but lots of little nuggets of gold that you walk away with each week."*

- CoP member

Involving men and boys across the community in the different settings in which we work, live and play is necessary to end violence and brings its own unique challenge. Some of the items which have been discussed during the CoP include:

- What does accountability to women look like in practice when people of all genders work together and whose role is it to monitor this?
- What language works best in different contexts and remains true to our values and to the evidence? E.g., patriarchy / un/healthy masculinities / allyship.

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<sup>1</sup> *Change the Story* is based on evidence for the *prevention of violence against women*, whilst WHIN and the [Building Respectful Community](#) partnership focuses on the *prevention of gender-based violence* which refers to harmful acts directed at an individual or a group of individuals based on their gender.

<sup>2</sup> Quotes from CoP members are taken from an evaluation survey of the CoP

- How do we avoid unintentionally reinforcing inequality and disrespect when engaging men in this work?
- How can we respond to resistance and ensure sustainability of working with men in PGBV?

## What Makes the Community of Practice a Success?

**Membership and experience.** The CoP was established for practitioners “keen to deepen their learning and reflection on primary prevention of men’s violence against women”. Participants include people from a range of sectors across the Northern Metropolitan Region, some with years of experience in engaging men in PGBV, and some emerging practitioners and contributors. Experience of all types is valued, both lived, academic or work-based, and this breadth of knowledge and expertise has led to rich conversations. Membership of the CoP was capped at 15 members and membership closed to build relationships between members and support development of the group dynamic.

**Respect.** The group guidelines acknowledge the value in difference and make reference to ‘sharing the space through self-monitoring and engaging in reflective practice about men’s power and privilege and its potential impact on interactions within the group’. Accountability to women occurs, for example, when men acknowledge when they themselves have spoken for long periods and leave the floor open for women.

*‘As a man in the sector and doing the work and often talk all day, it is also good to be quiet and listen.’*

- CoP member

The CoP practices [calling in](#), rather than calling out, to create a compassionate space for listening, understanding, offering new information, and correcting assumptions. As one participant said, ‘we have our blind side covered’.

The CoP embrace the [Chatham House](#) rules:

When a meeting, or part thereof, is held under the Chatham House Rule, participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> [www.chathamhouse.org/about-us/chatham-house-rule](http://www.chathamhouse.org/about-us/chatham-house-rule)

*‘Challenging ideas rather than people means we are safe to put forward ideas that are not fully fleshed out or might be out of left field – and also to be inarticulate.’*

*‘A really important feature of this CoP is the respect shown for each other and the varied experience and work of the members, the collaboration and knowledge sharing, resulting in learning through fleshing out ideas and having trusted folks help to bring a thought to something you can try.’*

*“When someone (me) has a challenge, everyone can add something from their own work or experience, and whether this is different or the same, it is respected.”*

- CoP members

We have reached this place of safety through articulating our ground rules and discussing what each member wanted from the CoP at the outset, and then ongoing monitoring of these agreements and objectives by participants and facilitators.

*‘This CoP is a psychologically safe space where I can express my thoughts and not be judged or corrected but gently guided.’*

- CoP member

**Focus.** Success of the CoP also lies in its organic format which includes a relatively open agenda and enough time (90 minutes minimum) to talk in depth about current issues and experiences allowing deeper thinking about practice and theory. As the CoP is not tied to a particular project’s deliverables, the agenda is guided by what members are most interested in, including the discussion about emerging topics and new resources. Having enough time is critical to allowing the depth of conversation required, and contrasts with meetings that are mostly task oriented.

## Recommendations for similar CoPs

- Have a clear purpose and intentional invitation to people with a similar interest.
- Develop a Terms of reference outlining objectives, roles and expectations.
- Give time to let trust build among members of the CoP.
- Have a small group and keep it small (under 15 members and a closed group so that trust can remain once established)
- Practice those trusting conversations that involve vulnerability and acknowledging that we don’t know everything.

- Invite men in and share the principles for allyship from [Working Together With Men Model 2.0](#)<sup>4</sup>. Discuss the principles with the acknowledgement that we are all socialised in the patriarchy so everyone might need a gentle reminder that we are part of these systems.

## What Have Participants Found Most Useful with the CoP?

*'Having sophisticated and nuanced conversations about practice, [especially] working with men/patriarchy/privilege etc.'*

*'Interacting with others who have an understanding of the bigger picture of why we are working on gender equality (i.e., prevention of gender-based violence) who can share the wins and frustrations.'*

*'Hearing from others about their experience working in this space. Sharing challenges within a knowledge base that understands the work and receiving ideas and support. Knowledge exchange. Exploration of ideas, theories, approaches.'*

*'Hearing what others are doing in the healthier masculinities space.'*

*'This COP provides a space for people who have a commitment to make much needed change by working together towards a common vision, which is for men to stop using violence against women, children and each other.'*

## About the CoP

'Engaging men and boys' is a guiding principle of the [Building a Respectful Community \(BRC\) Strategy 2022 - 2026](#) and identified by BRC partners as a priority area for collective action in the (BRC Action Plan (2022 – 2024)).

The 'Engaging Men in Preventing Gender-Based Violence Community of Practice' (CoP) is chaired by Women's Health In the North (WHIN) and the City of Whittlesea and meets every six to eight weeks in a hybrid format (i.e. the option to attend online or in person). The CoP uses basecamp as an online space to share relevant

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<sup>4</sup> Hewson-Munro, S. & McCook, S. (2023) *Working Together with Men 2.0*

resources, events and connect with other CoP members. The objectives of the CoP outlined in the Terms of Reference are:

1. Build and promote a community for connection, reflection and learning on primary prevention with focus on men and masculinities among participants.
2. Serve as a platform to share information and updates on new or existing publications, policy, programs, training, funding opportunities and events.
3. Serve as a network to collaborate, develop or test new ideas, models and approaches in primary prevention with focus on addressing masculinities and engaging men and boys, as well as dealing with backlash and resistance.

Members of the CoP include representatives from:

- Women's Health In the North
- City of Whittlesea
- Brotherhood of St Laurence
- DPV Health
- The Men's Project, Jesuit Social Services
- Melbourne Polytechnic
- Men's Circle Epping
- Merri Health
- Our Watch
- RED consulting
- Whittlesea Community Connections.

Whilst the group is closed to new members, we would be happy to discuss with you how you can set up your own CoP and share the resources we draw on. Please contact Emily Sporik ([emily.s@whin.org.au](mailto:emily.s@whin.org.au)) or Monique Keel ([monique.keel@whittlesea.vic.gov.au](mailto:monique.keel@whittlesea.vic.gov.au)) for further information.